The Search for Wholeness in J.M. Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country, Waiting for the Barbarians*, and *Disgrace*

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THE SEARCH FOR WHOLENESS IN J.M. COETZEE'S

IN THE HEART OF THE COUNTRY,

WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS, AND DISGRACE

Joanna Buboltz

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THE SEARCH FOR WHOLENESS IN J.M. COETZEE'S

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WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS, AND DISGRACE

Joanna Buboltz, M.A.

Grand Valley State University, 2009

Abstract: Literary critics of South African writer J.M. Coetzee's novels have examined multiple aspects of the writer's works, including his linguistic strategies, allegorical features, and depictions of native characters. This thesis attempts to fill a hole in the literary discussion by examining the identities of the main white characters of three of Coetzee's novels: In the Heart of the Country, Waiting for the Barbarians, and Disgrace. In these novels, all three protagonists are inherently incomplete because of their status as members of the hegemony, and all three struggle to redefine themselves through relationships with those their power group has oppressed. They fail in their self-actualization because of their inability to break away from their hegemonic past. These failures mean the characters are unable to redefine themselves and, thus, are unable to work toward reconciliation with the colonized individuals.
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Although many critics would argue that South African writer J.M. Coetzee is more concerned with narrative experimentation than with realistic historical representation, David Attwell, Coetzee’s most enthusiastic critic, argues that Coetzee’s novels represent a continuing narrative of colonialism (14). In the Heart of the Country (1977), Coetzee’s second novel, depicts colonizers occupying a foreign land. Unlike some of his novels, where the setting is ambiguous, this novel certainly takes place in South Africa, although the time is somewhat unclear because of possibly anachronistic “flying machines.” Regardless of when it is set, the colonial Afrikaners are firmly planted in their agrarian settlements and use the colonized individuals for paid labor. Magda is the frontier daughter and narrator, and after multiple fantastical killings of her father, she is left in charge of the house and the servants. In Waiting for the Barbarians (1980), Coetzee signals the beginning of decolonization, as supposed threats from the colonized become a fear in the minds of those in power. The geographical setting is deliberately unclear in this novel, placing importance on the universal struggle by those in power to remain in power. The unnamed Magistrate, the main character of the novel, is initially the highest colonial representative on a remote outpost of the Empire. Even though Attwell does not carry the theory of the continuing narrative much farther, it persists beyond these two novels. In Disgrace (1999), Coetzee shows a country—specifically South
Africa—where the colonizers have lost power. The formerly oppressed black South Africans have begun to assert themselves, and the now-former colonizers must face the task of fitting themselves into this new world. These members of the power group also have to cope with the idea of reconciliation in an often-violent atmosphere. The main character is a communications professor named David. After an affair with a student, he leaves his job in disgrace to move to the unforgiving rural country with his daughter Lucy.

If the theory of the continuing narrative of colonialism is valid, and I argue it is, then all of Coetzee’s main characters fundamentally represent the voice of the colonizer and the colonizer’s path through existence. For the purposes of this thesis, the meaning of colonizer agrees with Albert Memmi’s discussion of that power figure in his book, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. In it, Memmi, a colonized Tunisian himself, argues that any member of the hegemonic group benefits from the privileges of that group, regardless of social status or generational distance from the original colonizer. Speaking specifically about European colonizers, he writes, “From the time he lands or is born [in the colony], he finds himself in a factual position which is common to all Europeans living in a colony, a position which turns him into a colonizer” (17). While it is true that Memmi discusses the European oppressor specifically, his definition allows for a universalization of the term ‘colonizer.’ The term can signify any member of the hegemony. Using this explanation, then, this thesis argues that Coetzee’s main characters become representatives of the colonizing group, that they take on the universal quality of the colonizer—a beneficiary of the privileges of the group—regardless of how far removed they are from the original conquerors of the place. Other terms are used as well to
describe the members of this power group, including oppressors, rulers, and hegemony. While some might see all of these terms as potentially problematic because of the characters’ lack of direct involvement with the act of colonization, the terms are attempts to define Coetzee’s main characters just as they attempt to define themselves. The characters’ struggles in defining themselves become the readers’ struggles as well.

Coetzee’s main characters desire a break from all of these terms that ironically attempt to define them. They wish to define themselves as something different, to identify themselves outside of this power structure. All three characters experience an emptiness that they cannot explain. The texts suggest that this incompleteness is felt because of their positions as colonizers. The act of colonizing itself forces people in the oppressive group to treat the oppressed as unequal humans, which inevitably devalues the existence of the colonizers. Coetzee’s main characters struggle with this stunted existence. During their search for wholeness, the colonizers attempt to separate themselves from their colonizing legacy. A new identity cannot be fully realized by clinging to the ruler’s history. The characters attempt to define themselves outside of that history, and one way they try to gain identity is through their relationships with others, often colonized individuals. In the process they often examine the natives closely and try to solicit responses, but none comes, and the colonizers are left searching for truth and wholeness elsewhere. They struggle to find the truth in anything: themselves, others, relationships, and events, but the attempts are often futile. The one thing none of the characters makes an effort to achieve is true reconciliation with those they have oppressed—although David from Disgrace comes the closest—as many of their relationships turn into struggles for power and recognition. To be precise, the three main
characters of the novels—Magda, the Magistrate, and David—search to fill their emptiness and identify themselves as complete humans but ultimately fail because of their inability to reconcile with the colonized.

Coetzee's novels have spurred a great deal of criticism, and one might think that there is little room for another argument about identity. When Coetzee's critics do discuss identity, however, often it involves the identity of the colonized. When the discussion does veer into the realm of the colonizer, it usually does not explore the idea of his or her incompleteness, and it rarely links that concept with reconciliation. Many of the critics helpful to the discussion of the oppressor's exploration of identity and wholeness are postcolonialists, but some read the novels allegorically, and others read them as specifically about South Africa. The first group—those who read the novels allegorically—includes, notably, Teresa Dovey and Bill Ashcroft. These two critics take the novels out of the specific time and place of apartheid or post-apartheid South Africa to discuss the characters' actions and motives in the larger context of colonialism in general. Many of these critics invoke Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Jacques Lacan to discuss the roles of colonizer and colonized, and the identity issues that are associated with the relationship between them. Several of these critics also discuss the issues of torture and violence, not necessarily solely in South Africa, but as a human phenomenon, one that has consequences on the identities of the participants. The second group of critics, many of whom are also postcolonialists, place the novels in the context of South Africa. These writers' primary concerns are with Coetzee's depictions of South African race relations, the progress toward reconciliation, government involvement in the process, and how the novels fit into the context of South African writing and politics.
Most notable here is David Attwell, mentioned above. Troy Urquhart and Rosemary Jane Jolly are also significant. Of course many critics of Coetzee do not fit into either of these categories. Various critics analyze his linguistics, including Brian Macaskill. Feminist critics write about his depictions of female characters, and there seems to be a special group of writers that enjoys discussing his treatment of animals, especially, of course, in *Disgrace*. These arguments can also be helpful in the discussion of the colonizer’s sense of emptiness, though admittedly not as much as the postcolonial writers. Thus, although many critics mention in passing the colonizer’s search for identity and completeness, none of them explores the concept in great detail, so the argument warrants a close examination because of its importance in the process of reconciliation between the perpetrators of colonization and their victims.

I maintain that Coetzee explores the colonizer’s search for wholeness throughout the three novels, and my thesis works to prove that. The first chapter, entitled “‘A Hole Crying to be Whole’: *In the Heart of the Country*” focuses on that early novel, the first one of the colonial narrative. As mentioned above, this novel takes place during agrarian settlement when whites controlled the land and used non-whites for labor. Magda, the narrator, attempts to fit herself into the context of the frontier but finds that she does not belong to her father’s history, nor does she belong anywhere else. Throughout the novel, she negotiates her relationships with her father and the colonized servants, Hendrik and Klein-Anna. During her search for wholeness, her relationships often turn violent as they

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1 See Attwell’s *J.M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing*; Urquhart’s “Truth, Reconciliation, and the Restoration of the State: Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians*”; and Jolly’s *Colonization, Violence, and Narration in White South African Writing*.
2 See “Charting J.M. Coetzee’s Middle Voice: *In the Heart of the Country*” for a good example.
3 See Sue Kossew’s “Women’s Words: A Reading of J.M. Coetzee’s Women Narrators” for an example.
4 See Carrol Clarkson’s “‘Done Because We Are Too Many’: Ethics and Identity in J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*.”
become more about her need for recognition and control. In the relationship with her father, her main desire is to separate herself from the oppressive history that he represents, but she is unable to do so. She fails also in her desire for recognition, shown through her Hegelian relationships with the servants Hendrik and Klein-Anna. At the end of the novel, she is no closer to identifying herself as something other than a part of the hegemonic group. The second chapter, called “Something Staring Me in the Face’: Waiting for the Barbarians” continues to explore the colonial narrative. In this novel, the Magistrate is the representative colonizer on an outpost of the unnamed Empire. When higher officials from the Empire arrive and begin interrogating and torturing prisoners, the Magistrate begins to think about his role as the oppressor. Like Magda, he struggles to separate himself from his people’s legacy and create something new for himself. He searches desperately for the truth in the past with the hope that it will help him to define himself. His obsession with it, however, is his downfall, as it often intrudes in his attempt to develop a reciprocal relationship with a barbarian woman who was a prisoner of the Empire. Also an obstacle for the Magistrate is that, even though he wants to learn the truth, ironically he often hides from it. Additionally, though he has attempted the process of reconciliation with the “barbarians,” completing his identity is his motivation instead of anything higher. By the end of the novel, he has little understanding of the year that has passed. He has failed to find the truth for which he was searching and has not separated himself from the hegemony. The final chapter, “‘A New Footing, a New Start’: Disgrace,” focuses on the third novel in the narrative. The relationships among oppressor and oppressed remain complex, as in the first two novels. This novel takes place during decolonization with David, the main character, trying to become a whole
person again after his affair with a student and his forced resignation from his teaching position. The now-former colonizer and colonized are supposed to be in a stage of reconciliation in this novel, finding out the truth, forgiving, and moving on, but David does not fit into this new world; he remains attached to the old hegemonic identity, reluctant to participate in his new society. Through a series of events and relationships, he tries to create an identity for himself again and find peace with his position as oppressor. His daughter Lucy is set up as a contrast to him in that she is a willing participant in the reconciliation process. The text portrays her as an equal to the formerly colonized individuals. Even after the black South African men rape her and beat David, she does not want to risk the success of the healing process occurring between the races, so she does not pursue litigation against her attackers. David, on the other hand, cannot forgive the act even when this is what Lucy wants, and in his search for the truth, his relationship with Lucy deteriorates, and he questions even more his place in the framework of decolonization. One major difference exists between Magda, the Magistrate, and David. By the end of the novel, David does begin to see that he must let go of his past if he wishes to move forward. While he does not achieve reconciliation with the oppressed group, he starts to move in that direction, showing that progress is possible.

J.M. Coetzee shows in these novels main characters who are members of the privileged group, characters who are part of the history of oppression. In their failure to see the oppressed as complete humans, these characters who represent the idea of the colonizer have lost part of themselves, and they feel an emptiness they cannot explain. Now they struggle to separate themselves from their history and define themselves as something new in an effort to make themselves whole. Many oppressors cannot achieve
this completeness because of their dependence on history and tradition and their inability to accept the colonized as equals to themselves. Those who alter their identity will certainly be more successful in the reconciliation process. Though Coetzee’s characters do not succeed, they struggle in that direction, trying to break away from their oppressive legacy.
CHAPTER ONE

“A Hole Crying to be Whole”: In the Heart of the Country

In In the Heart of the Country, Coetzee’s earliest novel of the three I am discussing in this thesis, the main character, Magda, is an Afrikaner struggling to define herself in the context of a frontier home at the height of colonization in South Africa. She is not one of the original Boer colonizers. Her ancestors, rather, were the conquerors of the native people, but those ancestors have left her with the responsibility of continuing their representational oppression. She represents a people who have supplanted the native culture with a legacy and history of their own. Having grown up as a member of the group of established rulers, Magda should be comfortable in her role, but she is not. She shows she is not satisfied with her role in the history of her people through her constant feelings of emptiness and in her inability to identify herself. In this chapter I will argue that Magda sees herself as incomplete, as a hole to fill, and she attempts to fill that hole by looking for the truth in her existence. She does so through the attempted separation from her father and through her relationships with the servants. These relationships are efforts by Magda primarily to separate herself from her ancestors’ legacy and help her create her own identity, but also to work toward reconciliation with the colonized. The relationships often turn violent, however, because of Magda’s desire for control and her need for recognition from others. In addition, her incessant focus on herself and her ironic
false presentations of truth are detriments to her search for a new identity. The seemingly simple issue of fact becomes a complicated question in the novel because Magda tells and retells different versions of the same stories, implying that even she does not know what the truth is and showing a decaying state of mind. Rather than seeing her primarily as insane, however, I argue that her fabrications are a consequence of her incompleteness. They represent small pieces of her being instead of a complete story. Magda fails in all of these attempts to make herself whole, and by the end of the novel, she is left in much the same position as in the beginning, still a representative of the colonizers who is unable to separate herself from them and create her own identity.

Early on, the text depicts Magda’s emptiness and shows her desire to fill it, but her search for and ultimate distortion of the truth immediately work against that desire. As the representative colonizer, Magda should feel in control. She should feel she has power. She should know who she is and where she came from. In essence, she should feel that her established role completes her. Instead she feels empty and uneasy with her existence. She has been “a zero, null, a vacuum” (2); she is “incomplete, [she is] a being with a hole inside [her]” (9). She says, “I move through the world…as a hole, a hole with a body draped around it, the two spindly legs hanging loose at the bottom and the two bony arms flapping at the sides and the big head lolling on top. I am a hole crying to be whole” (41). She presents herself as a thing without substance and wishes to fill her void by discovering her own story, a “life story that will wash over [her] tranquilly as it does for other women” (8). Despite her position as the ruler, Magda knows she does not have her own story, so in writing it, she will find purpose; she will be complete. She begins to search for the truth because finding it will help her define herself and separate herself
from her father and ancestors. Currently, she sees herself as the daughter of her father, “his black eyes and [her] black eyes inherited from him.” She is a part of him and the colonizing legacy he represents; together they “chewed [their] way through time” (3). Magda emphasizes here that her identity stems from her father’s; they are of the same mold, despite her gender. She does not want this identity. Instead, she fights “against becoming one of the forgotten ones of history” (3). Her inability to see or tell the truth accurately, however, holds her back from defining her identity and filling the void of this missing identity.

At the beginning of the novel Magda juxtaposes the images of her incompleteness with her fabrications of truth. It is obvious that she wants to define herself, and she looks to her past to do so. She contemplates searching “old trunks” hoping to “find evidence of a credible past: ornamental fans, lockets and cameos...daguerreotypes perhaps” (38). She says, “I grope around inside my head for the mouth of the tunnel that will lead me back in time and memory past images of myself younger and younger, fresher and fresher, through youth and childhood back to my mother’s knee and my origins” (37). These laments show Magda’s unhappiness with her identity and her desire to alter it. A look back might show her origin, and her words are certainly deliberate, but she is insincere in her drive. From the very beginning she creates mistruths, showing she does not wholly want the truth about anything. When her father and his new wife approach the house in their wedding carriage, Magda cannot give much detail “unless [she begins] to embroider” (1), to fill in the gaps of the scene. She does not want to share details that do not actually occur, yet she then proceeds to set up her telling as a fictional story, as she explains that she, her father, and his wife are the antagonists of the story. More important
than this small detail are the numerous versions of stories she tells, leaving the reader clueless about what truly occurs in her life. How can she search for the truth when she constantly adds to the mire of untruths? And if she cannot tell the truth accurately about even this supposedly simple story of her father and his bride, she cannot possibly fill in the holes of her being with a credible story that will identify her as something different from her colonizing ancestors.

The real truth is that Magda is conflicted within herself about what she really wants out of life. The role of power figure and condition of stasis apply to Magda, and they leave her with the incessant feeling of emptiness and purposelessness. Thus, she tries to offset this dullness with creativity. Her creative endeavor becomes a way for her to identify herself, to separate herself from her ancestors. She is often melodramatic, wishing to create artwork as manifestations of her emotions and to live out fantasies. After the first fantastical killing of her father, she muses about why she has not left the farm and gone to the city, asking whether the farm is perhaps a better place for her to “immerse [herself] in a landscape of symbol where simple passions can spin and fume around their own centres in limitless space, in endless time, working out their own forms of damnation” (12). The many prepositional phrases here create a dreamy and wandering feel, showing Magda is searching for a center. In her romanticized view, she thinks the answer to her existence is hidden from her in symbol, and she enjoys being that symbol of the oppressor’s daughter, else she would leave. She enjoys wallowing in self-pity. Wondering if the city is capable of creating this type of living symbol, she decides that maybe an artist could imagine this type of place, but she is “not a painter.” Magda ultimately falls on the side of the pragmatist. In her position of power, she must be the
practical one who is always in control. For a master there is no time to create and play because he or she is too busy supervising the servants and trying to maintain control. While it seems that Magda is an exception to this statement, after her father is dead, she spends her time managing the house and the servants. True to her colonizer’s identity, she is not an artist. She is merely utilitarian. Her next entry begins with the practical, “I ask myself: What am I going to do with the bodies?” (13). The text often contains a juxtaposition such as this to show Magda’s dueling sides because they represent the practical ruler she wants to eliminate and the emerging new identity she wants to cultivate.

In her duality, Magda is trying to kill her colonizer’s identity and fill in the space with her own. The most obvious way she does this is through the fantastical killing of her father—on multiple occasions. By killing him, she attempts to eliminate his history and define herself differently in her time, but her overpowering desire for titillating conflict intrudes on this more important purpose. As discussed above, she looks to the past and her origins to discover her identity. Now she works to destroy the identity of her past by eliminating the part of her that is her father. She alludes to this idea of replacement throughout the novel. Upon cleaning up the first murder scene, she likens the mess to a “bloody afterbirth,” saying that until it is gone, “there can be no new life for me” (15). Out of the murder of her father, she is reborn into something other than an oppressor. She will be able to create a new body for herself, one that is whole and blank. Her father’s body is quite literally wiped away along with his symbolism of the oppressor, and in this way, Magda tries to control his existence. She feels similar after the second murder fantasy. Magda does not seem to understand completely her desire to replace her father,
offering this explanation for her repeated actions instead: “through the agency of conflict with my father I hope to lift myself out of the endless middle of meditation on unattached existence into a true agon with crisis and resolution” (62). She calls it simple conflict instead of full elimination and thinks that the excitement of conflict will ground her existence. Magda must have conflict to advance her sense of being, and killing her father is one of the only ways to create that new self. Again, if she is able to eliminate him from her life, she can replace his history with her own new being. The fact that there are multiple versions of the patricide works to reinforce Magda’s desire to replace him and the colonizing identity he represents. If she keeps trying to kill him, the idea is that she will be successful. But what the killings really show is that she will never be successful in replacing her father or killing the legacy of colonization that suffocates her identity. She tries many times but her father—the colonizer—always returns.

Magda wishes to break away from what her father represents, but even in the important burial scene, she cannot separate herself from the hegemonic group. Just as she wanted to clean up the mess of the murder, she wants now as well to control his physical being and remove him from her sight and memory. If she is in control of his existence, she can command a part of herself, but she finds she does not have power over him. The weight and stiffness of her father’s body force her to climb into the grave first and pull him in after her. On one level, she is being practical, for she has already tried putting him in from above, but symbolically colonization continues to weigh heavily on her. It is a weight that she drags around throughout her life, and now it is almost suffocating her. She cannot physically or emotionally separate herself from it. At one point in the process, “[t]he mouth of the hole is blocked, I am in pitch blackness” (93). Suffocation is not only
a symbolic possibility but a real one as well, as her father’s body blocks the hole to the outside. Magda’s previous references to herself as a hole echo here, too. If she is the hole in this case, it is her mouth that is blocked because she becomes silent in her endeavor to remake herself. For this moment, she is there to die with her father, to be another sacrifice to the empire, lost to history. She does get out, though, and this separation from her father is a small step in her forward progress; she is able to breathe “free air” (93). Any elation she possibly feels, however, quickly subsides when she thinks it a pity that she can name no constellations in the dark sky but the Southern Cross. Also, and more important, she is unable to finish the job of the burial. She might be able to heave the body in after her and climb out from under it, but she cannot cover it up with dirt. She cannot bury her past. She will beg Hendrik to bury her past as she asks him to fill in the hole and mark it, showing she can never break free of her father’s legacy. Indeed she cannot, for her father eventually returns. Even in one of his final appearances in the novel, Magda continues her attempt to control his existence in an attempt to identify hers. She carries him out to the porch, which is reminiscent of his burial. Now “he has retreated far, far into himself” and she picks him up “without difficulty, a manikin of dry bones held together by cobwebs, so neat that I could fold him up and pack him away in a suitcase” (136). The difference between this scene and the burial scene is that, here, her father’s body is light. This time, unlike in the burial scene, it is not a struggle for her to carry it. Magda worked especially hard to rid herself of his body and his legacy during the burial, but now she seems to have accepted her place as colonizer, and the task of shouldering the body, and the legacy, is not challenging anymore. She mentions the ease with which she could store him away in a suitcase, but the truth that she tells us is that
she brings him out into the light, “so that he can once again face out over the old acres” (136). She also takes care of him, feeding him and putting him to bed. She becomes his literal caretaker and the figurative caretaker of what he represents. Simply said, Magda perpetuates the history of the colonizers, a history that she has tried repeatedly to defeat. One of her ultimate failures is that the killing of her father is never successful, so her replacement of him and what he represents never occurs even after multiple attempts. Her quest to find the truth about herself and her attempt to define herself as fundamentally different from her people’s past are never fulfilled through her murderous fantasies.

In addition to her fantastical killings, the relationships with the servants also act as a vehicle in Magda’s search for identity and completeness, but they create another failure. When the servant Hendrik first appears with his wife, the scene is a recapitulation of the scene with Magda’s father and his wife, implying that Hendrik is a replacement authority figure for Magda’s father or someone whom Magda fears, despite his inferior position in the colonial society. Because of the repetition of the scene, Magda and Hendrik are set up as adversaries, as she and her father are. Essentially, Magda cannot kill her father, so she must create a different adversary for the sake of defeating her colonial boredom, but more importantly to cut the ties to her oppressive past. This time, her opponent is in the form of a servant, and we enter into a more profound dynamic. Magda and her father are of the same mold; in killing him, she kills a part of herself, but the relationship that exists between her and Hendrik is outside of herself. It is a relationship like Hegel describes in his master-slave dialectic. Instead of looking inward at herself and seeing her father’s history there, she must look outward this time to identify herself. In looking outward, however, her purpose is to gain recognition from Hendrik. Hegel wrote that as a being
seeks self-consciousness he or she must find an opponent to dominate, and "it is only through staking one’s life that freedom is won" (114). In the theory, Magda can achieve self-consciousness if she controls Hendrik. If she succeeds, she gains recognition from him and self-definition. She will attempt to dominate him, similar to her desire to control her father, because of her fear that he is controlling her and breaking apart her being, causing her to be unrecognizable and insignificant.

The text shows these fears in Magda’s reaction to the servants’ first appearances; it is then that she begins to segment herself in pieces. In one instance, after talking about Hendrik’s bride and realizing she has never been to their hometown, Magda sees herself as “simply a ghost or a vapour floating at the intersection of a certain latitude and a certain longitude, suspended here by an unimaginable tribunal until a certain act is committed” (17). Magda observes the servants and strangely they remind her of her incompleteness, that she is an inexact being belonging to no exact place and time. Their mere presence has made her call her identity into question because with their presence and full existence, they force her to define herself as ‘not Other.’ Despite working to throw off this mantle, she must define herself as colonizer, or Hegel’s master figure. The irony of course is that it is the black servants who hold an inferior place in society and have been taught to see themselves as inferior. They should be the people Magda sees as incomplete, and she does to some extent as it will be discussed later, but in typical oppressor fashion, she focuses more on her own emptiness than theirs. In another instance, remembering Hendrik’s job interview with her father, she laments the ease with which the conversation between them flowed and wishes her “life were like that, question and answer, word and echo, instead of the torment of And next?” (20-21). She says easy
dialogue is one of the benefits of being a man, and womanhood has not granted her that luxury. Really, though, she is envious not of their manhood but of the reciprocating relationship the two men have. The men seem to recognize each other for their roles, and they seem comfortable in their Hegelian model, at least in Magda’s eyes. Magda’s jealousy of this dynamic will haunt her later when she wants that type of conversation with Klein-Anna but cannot have it. For now, her jealousy of Hendrik makes her see herself in pieces and fear that she is unrecognizable in her roles as woman and colonizer.

After this memory of Hendrik and her father, she realizes, “Even decades of mutton and pumpkin and potatoes have failed to coax from me the jowls, the bust, the hips of a true country foodwife, have achieved no more than to send my meagre buttocks sagging down the backs of my legs” (21). The recognition her father and Hendrik have for each other makes her realize her incompleteness as a being. She wants to kill off the part of her that is the oppressor, so she does not want to play the role of her father, except that as Hendrik’s adversary, she needs to play the role of master. Again, just as Magda struggles between creating a new identity for herself and continuing to be the practical ruler, she struggles here too between her established position as colonizer and her desire to break away from it. The result, if she sides with her father, is that she will decidedly lose any emerging identity she might have, but she also loses herself if she fails to defeat Hendrik. Thus, she continues the attempts to kill her father and control Hendrik because these acts will lead to the control of her own existence.

Magda’s feelings of incompleteness when she compares herself to the servants cause her to tighten control of them and search for recognition from them. We can see much of that domination in Magda’s language. Even if she desires separation from her
ancestors, she easily falls into the role of the hegemonic figure when describing or associating with the servants. Magda often uses dramatic language when describing herself or her father, but when describing Hendrik, especially in the early passages of the novel, she uses impersonal, distant language. One numbered entry begins simply with his name and goes on to list factual information about him. “Hendrik…He has his own vegetable patch. He is clothed in my father’s good castoffs. He makes shoes for himself from skins that he cures and tans….His grave is marked out for him in the graveyard” (23-24). From a woman who goes into intimate detail about the bleeding bodies of her father and his wife, this description is decidedly sterile and detached. Even many of the sentences have a passive-voice construction. As the representative colonizer, if she sticks to strict factual information, she does not have to think of him as an equal human being with emotions of his own. He is there only for his work, and that is how she recognizes him. She admits, “I know nothing of Hendrik.” Their gazes at each other “have remained kindly, incurious, remote….Hendrik is a man who works on the farm. He is nothing but a tall, straight-shouldered brown man with high cheekbones and slanting eyes who crosses the yard with a swift tireless walk I cannot imitate, the legs swiveled from the hip rather than bent at the knee” (24-25). Again, the language here is detached, mechanical. She describes his physicality and his actions, but not with the passion with which she describes herself or her father. Hendrik is nothing to Magda, nothing more than a worker even though he has been on the farm for a long period of time. If he is a simple worker instead of an equal human being, she will not hesitate to command him. In fact, the worker image requires Magda to command Hendrik because that is his role in the master-servant dialectic, and her emotionless descriptions of him reinforce her role as the master. It
comes as no surprise later when she aggressively commands him to help her with her father. “I pick up the broom and ram the bristles into his face. He stumbles from the bed shielding himself with his arms. I thrust and thrust’’ (66). Though she wishes to replace her father and not carry on his history, unfortunately, that is essentially what she does as she takes his role of master in her relationship with Hendrik.

Magda’s relationship with the servant women is not any more intimate, despite their closer proximity working in the kitchen. However, her relationship with the younger Anna especially creates a new dimension as it becomes more about speech than simple observation as it is with Hendrik. In using speech, Magda seeks voiced recognition from the Other. In Teresa Dovey’s reading of the novel as a Lacanian allegory, in which she says Coetzee’s text shows Magda’s failure to create an identity for herself through his mode of discourse (19-20), Dovey states that Coetzee’s novels “exploit the Lacanian definition of the function of language as being ‘not to inform but to evoke,’ with the subject seeking, via speech, ‘the response of the other,’ an ‘I’ which requires the response of a ‘You’ in order to achieve identity” (19). This “I” is Magda, but according to Coetzee, she “lack[s] the stature to transform [the] “It” into a “You,” to so to speak, create a society in which reciprocity exists; and therefore condemn[s] [herself] to desperate gestures towards establishing intimacy’” (qtd. in Attwell 67). Attwell argues that Magda’s “desperate gestures” are her attempts to speak to the people in the flying machines, but they begin earlier with her desire for intimacy with the women. With both of the women being named Anna, Magda prefixes their names with “Klein” and “On” to distinguish them from each other. By naming them, she symbolically puts her stamp of authority on them and establishes her position as ruler over them. When Magda speaks to
either of them, it is as a master speaks to a servant, nothing intimate. When she does
attempt intimacy with Klein-Anna, the young woman remains fearful and will not call
Magda anything but Miss Magda. As a woman who wants to confirm her existence,
Magda needs Klein-Anna to acknowledge her existence, but the servant refuses to
become a “You” even though Magda has given her a name, therefore trying to confirm
the young woman as something other than “It.” Magda lies with her one evening, but she
leaves feeling rejected, saying, “I am doing my best in this unfamiliar world of touch”
(103). While this can be seen as an attempt at solidarity and reconciliation, the scene is
peppered with statements of authority, undercutting any softness. Magda treats Klein-
Anna as a small child instead of an equal human being. She kisses her on the forehead;
she teaches her how to say her mistress’ name. She even interrogates Klein-Anna about
the relationship between her and Magda’s father, questioning the young woman as if she
is a prisoner. In these exchanges, Magda hopes for a response from Klein-Anna so that
she can gain recognition. Lacan argues the concept this way: “What constitutes me as a
subject is my question. In order to be recognized by the other, I proffer what was only in
view of what will be. In order to find him, I call him by a name that he must assume or
refuse in order to answer me” (84). If Klein-Anna refuses to reciprocate Magda’s
conversation, Magda does not exist, and indeed the servant does not respond. The result
is that Magda is unable to create a new identity for herself through her relationship with
Klein-Anna.

When interrogation does not work, Magda tries other methods at moving her
relationship with the young woman forward; she fails to achieve recognition in these also.
Reflecting on their time working together in the kitchen, she says, “I am resolved to ask
fewer questions and to chatter more, so that she will grow accustomed to the declarative mode" (110). Magda believes switching to a mode of communication that involves declarative exchanges rather than questions and answers would show Klein-Anna that she is treating her as an equal. Neither type of exchange will work with Klein-Anna, however, because the servant refuses to recognize her. Again, although this statement can be seen as an attempt at reconciliation—equality between the two women because of its softening resolve—it is undermined by Magda’s treatment of Klein-Anna as a child not capable of understanding her intentions or the assumption that Klein-Anna is not accustomed to normal reciprocating conversation. Later Magda admits, “I have no skill in speech, I know no anecdotes, no gossip, I have lived all my life alone, I have no experience to draw on, my speech is sometimes mere babble, sometimes I see myself as a boring child babbling to her, learning a human tongue, certainly, in the course of babbling, but slowly, too slowly, and at too great a cost” (113). Interestingly, Magda sees herself as the child in the relationship, despite her authoritative position and her treatment of the young woman. Also, she focuses entirely on herself, barely thinking of Klein-Anna’s feelings, and she does not gain any sense of being from the attempt. Earlier, in her descriptions of Hendrik, Magda was able to control Hendrik’s image and make the reader see him only as a worker. She is able to create images easily, but now when she must speak aloud and attempt to create a society for herself, she has no control. Her voice has retreated, becoming ineffective. Bill Ashcroft, in a discussion of the novel as an allegory, argues that Magda “becomes the sign of a culture that is stranded on the edge of the past and the future, separated from history and ultimately from conventional sanity” (110). He says that Magda cannot reach a full identity because she cannot create a
language that works in her setting. “Magda, the epitome of the settler colonial caught at
the interface of Empire and wilderness, . . . of being and not being, must invent a language
out of which a new reality can emerge. . . . She must invent this language because the
language of her father, the colonial language, is out of place here even when describing,
or perhaps particularly describing, her most private feelings” to Klein-Anna (112). In
other words, Magda does not have the words capable of creating something new in
herself or achieving reconciliation. Instead, she feels incomplete in this discussion with
Anna. Just as she sometimes sees Hendrik as an authority figure like her father, Magda
ironically sees herself on unequal footing with her servant, this time as a child incapable
of real communication with another. The result is that she falls back on asking Klein-
Anna questions again, which only feels like an interrogation. She confesses, “There has
been no transfiguration [in the relationship]. What I long for, whatever it is, does not
come” (114). She is back to where she started in the relationship, making no progress on
self-identification. Magda writes that she does not know what she longs for. She seems to
desire a relationship where she can exchange conversation freely with another human
being. She longs to define herself with a true separation from her father’s history and the
creation of a new identity for herself outside of that history, but the achievement of all of
these goals depends on her capability of reconciling with the servants. It is through them
that she will form a new society for herself. So far, however, her relationships with them
are mainly about control. Because of conflicts within herself, Magda cannot find her
identity in the relationship with her servants. Furthermore, if she desires a reconciliation
with them and a move forward, these exchanges between herself and Klein-Anna do not
help. These incidents are simply Magda’s attempts to feel significant through Klein-Anna’s recognition of her.

When Magda turns back to Hendrik in an attempt to achieve recognition from him, her efforts ironically continue to emphasize her position as oppressor because she turns to violence. Their relationship, sexual and otherwise, is weighted down with struggles for power from both of them. Hendrik wants the money he is owed. Magda wants recognition. Neither wins, and Magda is no closer in the end to finding her true identity. She remains a shell of a being. Even before the rape scenes, Magda fantasizes about Hendrik, complicating their master-servant relationship. During these sexual fantasies, she often turns him into a predator, more animal-like than human. Again, she does not see him as a full human being, but instead as a being with instinctual animal needs. This view is harmful to any sort of reconciliation process. Imagining him visiting her one night, Magda takes on his voice, thinking, “Should I be the one to do it...to climb through the window one night and lie with her and make a woman of her and slip away before dawn?...Would I have to hold her mouth shut? Would she not be as tight and dry and unrelenting to the last as leather?” (86). Because Magda cannot make her servants reciprocate language, she must imagine the language herself. This inherently suggests a lack of reciprocity because it is only a monologue instead of a dialogue between herself and Hendrik. She cannot even imagine what true recognition of herself by another would resemble. Instead, Magda turns the reciprocal nature of sexual intercourse into a violent act, one that involves power and control. She indicates that she desires action and violence for the purpose of something exciting in her life, and this desire comes to fruition when Hendrik eventually comes to her and we hear many different versions of
what happens, all violent. It is clear from her words that Magda does not enjoy what happens during the rape, but she continues to retell it as if she is trying to become accustomed to the act and to the sensations associated with it. By the last telling, though she says she is not curious, she asks herself many questions about the experience: “What is this man trying to find in me? Will he try again when he wakes up? What deeper invasion and possession does he plot in his sleep? That one day all his bony frame shall lie packed inside me, his skull inside my skull, his limbs along my limbs, the rest of him crammed into my belly? What will he leave me of myself?” (108). A couple of recurring themes crop up here. The first is familiar, the idea that Magda is incomplete, that she is an empty hole because of her inability to identify herself. Now the relationship with her servant has threatened to take away even more of her agency. She is afraid he will steal all that is left of her and turn her body into a shell, which leads to the other image in this scene. Magda pictures Hendrik being able to crawl inside her, replacing all that she is, part by part. Her words are tedious as they describe the action of him getting into her body. The process is not quick but long and agonizing. As a character, Magda wants to remain in control of herself and wants to define herself independently. At the same time, she wants Hendrik to see her as something other than the colonizer, but from her descriptions, we see he does not; he sees her as something to beat, a ruler against whom he must become violent.

All of these fears that develop through her relationships with Hendrik and Klein-Anna—feelings of insignificance and inferiority—force Magda to voice who she is with as much force as she can, but with little effect. In her final confrontation with Hendrik, this time about the men who came asking about Magda’s father, she assures him that she
would not turn him in to the authorities for killing her father, that she would take any blame for it. Obviously because of her position as oppressor, he does not believe her. Her monologue is worth noting at some length. She tells him:

I am not simply one of the whites, I am I! I am I, not a people. Why have I to pay for other people’s sins? You know how I live here on the farm, totally outside human society, almost outside humanity!...What more do I have to do before you will believe I am telling the truth? Can’t you see that you and Anna are the only people in the world I am attached to? What more do you want? Must I weep? Must I kneel? Are you waiting for the white woman to kneel to you? Are you waiting for me to become your white slave? (118)

She asserts her separation from her father’s legacy. She says she represents herself and not her colonizing people, and surprisingly she claims her attachment to Hendrik and Anna, a final grasping at a feeling of significance from them. According to Albert Memmi, however, it is not enough for the colonizer to declare his or her distance from the colonizing group. He or she must be loved by the colonized (37). Love from the colonized is necessary for the colonizer’s self-consciousness. Despite what Magda desires, then, she has not been able to escape her role as colonizer because Hendrik refuses to recognize her as anything other than ruler. Even though she declares her attachment to Hendrik and Anna, it is primarily sexual with Hendrik and parental with Anna and does not represent meaningful relationships to the servants. Her questions to Hendrik at the end of the passage finally show an understanding of what he does want. Though Hendrik remains voiceless here, too—reciprocal speech would mean an acknowledgement of Magda’s existence—his actions say that he does wish to replace the whites and wants control of them. The sexual relationship means little to him; it never turns intimate. He refuses to identify Magda by talking to her about it, instead remaining silent, and he does not kiss her or smile at her. He remains on the farm only with the hope
of receiving his pay. At one point, Hendrik puts on some of Magda’s father’s finest
clothes and stands high above her, “putting his hands on his hips and thrusting his chest
out” (97), symbolizing his replacement of her father. Again, he refuses to speak to
Magda, instead speaking in his own language to his wife only. Furthermore, Hendrik now
seems to embody the past that Magda tries to escape, because of his representation of her
father, and the present which she cannot define clearly because he remains her adversary.
Frantz Fanon, in discussing the consciousness of the colonized individual, says that once
he or she has discovered his or her equality to the colonizers, the next step is to replace
them. He writes, adopting the voice of a colonized individual, “If...my life is worth as
much as the colonist’s, his look can no longer strike fear into me or nail me to the spot
and his voice can no longer petrify me. I am no longer uneasy in his presence. In reality,
to hell with him” (10). The colonized has “decided to take [the colonizer’s] place” (9).
Following this reality, Hendrik takes the place of his former ruler. In this scenario,
Magda has no place. She is no longer the ruler because she has lost any control she had
over Hendrik; a ruler cannot define him/herself without the ruled. She also is not the
servant, given the simple fact that she will be the one who stays on the land, and Hendrik
will leave. Indeed, he does leave, and Magda does not even remember precisely when
during her monologue that he did so. She is left asking herself questions about what
could have been possible between herself and the servants. She wonders after all, “is this
desert of fire and ice a purgatory we must pass through on the way to a land of milk and
honey?” (119). Keeping with her fatalistic view that she and the servants are meant to be
there carrying out this twisted fairy tale, Magda does not see that her attempted
relationships with Hendrik and Anna could not lead to reconciliation or personal growth.
After Hendrik and Anna leave, Magda makes one more attempt at gaining recognition and identity, this time from the men in the flying machines, but this too fails. They represent her final chance at becoming something fully human, something different from oppressor. She says, “It is my commerce with the voices that has kept me from becoming a beast” (125). At first she simply listens to the voices. This listening turns into attempted communication when she begins to shout. Finally she writes messages to them with rocks. Each level of communication represents a move toward a more permanent existence but also a higher level of desperation as she tries to gain recognition and completion in any way she can. If Magda is successful in proclaiming her identity by making her voice heard, she will defeat the tradition of colonization because she will represent something different, at least in her mind. She will finally be useful and prolific. She will be the median, for she never wanted to be “master or slave, neither parent nor child, but the bridge between, so that in [her] the contraries should be reconciled!” (133). Brian Macaskill, in an essay where he discusses how Coetzee uses a “middle voice”—writing with reference to the self—to respond to his time and place, argues that in this passage, “Magda expresses...her hope of being a middle voice, her desire to write herself into a new existence, to escape the ‘old locutions’ that have forced her to veer to and from the ‘master-talk’ between mistress and servants and alternate attempts at intimate chatter with Anna and Hendrik” (76). Magda wants to create a new being for herself, one that can give her purpose, but because the men in the flying machines—or the servants for that matter—never recognize her, she does not fully exist. Therefore, her role in the reconciliation between master and servant, colonizer and colonized, is sadly not possible.
Jean-Paul Sartre, in his preface to Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, discusses the effects of colonization on the colonizers. He wonders if, when colonizers are “powerless to crush the ‘native,’ violence turns inward, bottles itself up deep inside us, and seeks an outlet” (lxii). Magda is this colonizer. Unable to create a new identity for herself, she aggressively searches for one through the desperate relationships with her father and the servants. But these relationships are struggles for power and control, especially on Magda’s part, and they turn violent. The result is that she is unable to accomplish her goals of self-definition, purposefulness, and reconciliation. At the end of the novel she says she will either “die an enigma with a full soul or...die emptied of [her] secrets” (138). In the first scenario, she remains unrecognized; in the second, she remains incomplete. Either way, she cannot fully exist. The text, then, seems to be saying that Magda, in the role of the colonizer, is fundamentally incomplete because she is defined through recognition from others, and if the others refuse to participate in the relationship, she cannot exist. And if she cannot fully exist, what she represents—the universal colonizer—cannot fully exist. Furthermore, the text shows that Magda is never able to break away from her identity as colonizer despite her fantasies of this possibility.
Coetzee’s Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* continues Magda’s efforts to fill her emptiness with a new identity for herself. As we saw in the previous chapter, Magda tries throughout the novel to separate herself from her colonial past by killing her father. She also attempts to gain completion through recognition from and reconciliation with the servants Hendrik and Klein-Anna. In these efforts to complete her existence, she fails because of her inability to tell the truth and her turn to control and violence. In her final attempt at wholeness, when she speaks to the people in the flying machines, she is also unsuccessful. They are mechanically non-responsive to her pleas. Magda remains a part of the colonizing group at the end of the novel, and we are left with the message that the colonizer is fundamentally incomplete because he or she has a desire to break away from the past but is incapable of doing so. The text shows an oppressor who desires a break from her legacy but one who struggles to define herself as anything but a continuation of that legacy.

The Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* finds himself in much the same position as Magda, but he too fails repeatedly. The main character is in a similar situation to Magda; he is the representative of the hegemony on a remote outpost of the unnamed Empire. Now, however, the time period in the process of colonization is later. The time
and place are deliberately unclear, but we know that the novel anticipates decolonization, a time when the oppressed threaten to revolt, or so the rulers believe. The rulers’ belief, regardless of whether it is a false presumption or not, creates the catalyst for the conflict. When higher representatives from the Empire arrive and begin interrogating and torturing barbarian prisoners, they disrupt the Magistrate’s peaceful routine, and these events force him to join in the struggle against the assumed enemy outside. In the process, he begins to think about his own role in the Empire and must face the truth that he is one of the oppressors. This self-reflection and self-identification becomes difficult for him, to say the least, but he attempts to confront them through his relationships with the Empire and the barbarian woman, and in his search for truth in the past. Like Magda, the Magistrate does not see himself as complete and projects that image of incompleteness onto everything around him. These projections often come out as unclear images, especially in the Magistrate’s dreams. Also like Magda, he never answers his questions about himself and his place in society. At the end of the novel, the Magistrate is essentially in the same position he was before the representatives from the Empire arrived; he continues to serve as a pawn for the Empire while wishing to exist outside of it. The Magistrate is never successful in his search because he is too inculcated with the history of the Empire and is especially obsessed with finding the truth about the past that he, like Magda, is unable to separate himself from that past and create a new existence for himself. Another failure comes because he does not recognize the colonized as complete human beings, but rather in pieces. Because of this narrow view, he, again like Magda, cannot receive recognition from others, so he cannot fully exist. Therefore, he is never able to stage a successful
rebellion against the Empire for the oppressed or himself, and he is unable to take the next step toward reconciliation.

The Magistrate tells us that before the arrival of Colonel Joll at the beginning of the novel, he could “sleep with a tranquil heart knowing that with a nudge here and a touch there the world would stay steady on its course” (9). The outpost he manages is peaceful and dull, and the Magistrate confesses that he likes it that way. He says he is content to live out his days in that condition. His observations and actions, however, project an emptiness and a longing for something more. The Magistrate gives the impression that the arrival of the first prisoners with Colonel Joll sparks his feelings of incompleteness, but we learn that even before their arrival he spent one particular evening “waiting for spirits from the byways of history to speak to him” (16). He looks for answers beyond the literal, implying that he is unhappy with his current situation. Thus, he develops a fixation on finding the truth about the past, and this fixation accounts for his first failure in identifying himself as a rebel against the Empire. He cannot break away from the history of colonization if he saturates himself with it. He explores the past in a couple of different ways other than in his relationship with the barbarian woman, which will be discussed later. One way is through his archaeological digs in the ruins outside of town. This activity is a favorite hobby of his, and he spends countless hours poring over the remains of the old settlement, thinking that he will find answers to questions about the past. He acknowledges, however, that these ruins were probably not a barbarian settlement, so by digging in the historically familiar place, he is reaffirming his own history, that of a colonizer. The only possible answers he can gain by digging are about a conquering past much like his own, so this excavation is futile in achieving separation.
from his role as oppressor. If anything, it will work to solidify his place by creating a
unity with other colonizers. He imagines another possible settlement under the excavated
one and creates his forgotten magisterial counterpart, saying, “when I stand on the floor
of the courthouse, if that is what it is, I stand over the head of a magistrate like myself,
another grey-haired servant of Empire” (15-16). When he could be projecting any
imagined history onto this place, he chooses to stamp the place with the colonizer’s
history. He is incomplete and uncomfortable in his role in the Empire, but he is not
solving that problem by studying the oppressor’s past and uniting himself to it.

The Magistrate does not see that he is strengthening his ties to the hegemony.
Instead, he sees himself discovering truths about the oppressed from long ago by trying to
decipher the writing on the found poplar pieces. Again, this is a way to continue the
actions of the powerful and keep himself in that group. If the site is a forgotten colonial
settlement, most likely the poplar pieces were collected or stolen from the native people.\footnote{Troy Urquhart and Michael Valdez Moses also consider the poplar slips to be “barbarian” texts.}
By taking them from the site, the Magistrate continues the colonizers’ work. During one
dig, when he found pieces of poplar wood, he took them home, “cleared the floor of [his]
office and laid them out,. . . thinking that what [he] had hitherto taken to be characters in a
syllabary might in fact be elements of a picture whose outline would leap at [him] if [he]
struck on the right arrangement: a map of the land of the barbarians in olden times, or a
representation of a lost pantheon” (16). He even tried to read them in a mirror, thinking
that would show him the answer for which he has been searching. He speaks as if the
findings would allow him to experience a sudden epiphany, what Brian May might call a
“transformative visionary experience” (394). May argues that the human body in
Coetzee’s writing often causes these transcendental experiences. Though May discusses
the Magistrate’s relationships with women in this context, the experience with the poplar slips is similar. The Magistrate believes there is an easy answer to all questions about the past and that it will simply come to him if he studies relentlessly. His failure here is that he does not take the necessary steps of talking to individuals to learn the truth of history. His search for this past, positioned at the beginning of the novel, introduces him as the oppressor, the powerful figure that utilizes every facet of the conquered land. Even though different colonizers conquered this place long ago, he continues their conquering by tearing up the land to learn more about the place, its people, and the people they conquered. While it could be argued that he is working independently of the Empire, and therefore not a representative of them, he is indeed the highest representative of them because of his position as Magistrate. He even solicits the help of petty thieves and misbehaving soldiers, showing his authority. As the highest-ranking member of the Empire in town, he leads the charge in using the settlement as his playground. So although it seems as if the Magistrate is identifying himself with the natives of the land by trying to understand their messages, he is really strengthening his position as ruler of them by continuing the practices of colonization: exploiting and marking up the land.

Later in the novel when Colonel Joll asks the Magistrate to interpret the writing on the slips, he develops an imaginative narrative for the natives; again it looks as if he is identifying with the oppressed, but he remains on the side of the Empire. While David Attwell acknowledges that “the Magistrate’s interpretation of the slips is a momentary but significant rejection of the authority of Joll and of the tradition of Empire” (78), the Magistrate creates a problem bigger than his gain. He speaks for the natives, showing control over them by taking away their voices, replacing them with his own thoughts and
representing his own motives. In Edward Said’s seminal work *Orientalism*, Said argues that the Orient is essentially a creation of the West. The West characterizes the Orient as exotic and romantic, and therefore invents the images of it. Europeans come to own the images because they have created them. Thus, they own the place and it ceases to be a real place for the people who live there. They can no longer define themselves because they have been defined from the outside. Said writes, “To have such knowledge of such a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it” (32). Though Said does not discuss the non-European world outside of the Orient, one could certainly make similar statements about the West’s creation of Africa. By defining the non-White world, the West comes to control those places and the voices that inhabit them. This is what the Magistrate does when he declares his knowledge of the native writing; he puts his mark on the place and removes the voices from it. Though it is obvious from the intimate nature of his fabrications that he feels he offers the current colonized individuals help by telling their stories of torture and grief, his replacement of their voices with his own does nothing to further the purpose of reconciliation, and, in fact, it does not tell the truth as the colonized people see it, only as the Magistrate sees it. Troy Urquhart extends this discussion in an article about how Coetzee’s novel exposes the difficulties of the goals of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC was established in the post-apartheid era with the goal of helping the country move beyond the atrocities of the past, certainly a noble goal, but also flawed, Urquhart contends. He correctly

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6 This concept of the voiceless oppressed comes from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?” In this influential piece, Spivak argues that when those in power speak for the oppressed, the oppressors advance their own agenda, and the oppressed are silenced.
acknowledges that Coetzee’s novel predates the work of the commission. However, he maintains that the text “anticipates and challenges the TRC’s conflation of the quest for truth with the quest for justice.” He argues that the governing power in South Africa manipulates the voices of the oppressed to protect its own interests (paragraph 2). He writes, “In attempting to speak for the barbarians, what the Magistrate achieves is not reparation but penance, not justice but justification of his own complicity in the atrocities of Empire” (paragraph 10). The idea here is that the Magistrate does not create the stories for the purpose of giving voice to the native people, nor does he tell their stories to show his separation from Colonel Joll. Instead, he manufactures the stories in order to alleviate his own guilt at having ignored the torture. In doing so, he remains an integral part of the state, unable to achieve his desired escape from it.

The Magistrate is incapable of creating a new identity for himself through the exploration of the hegemonic group’s past in the excavated site, so he next searches for separation from the Empire in his interactions with the prisoners. If he can begin to repair the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed, he can begin to create a new existence for himself outside of his people’s identity. Again, however, his identification with the Empire impairs his pursuit. Though the Magistrate distances himself from Colonel Joll and implies he is put off by the man’s “cryptic silences” and the “paltry theatrical mystery of dark shields hiding healthy eyes” (4), he identifies with him at the same time. He wants to create a good impression for this important member of the Third Bureau of the Empire. When he introduces Joll to the first two prisoners, he gives the impression that he is indifferent to the truth of the prisoners’ story of not being involved in the atrocities.

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7 Sam Durrant similarly discusses the relationship between Coetzee’s work and that of the TRC. He argues that Coetzee’s novels “offer a way of working through a collective history” (24), a goal not unlike that of the TRC.
in a raid, telling Joll, "I do not know. Perhaps they are telling the truth" (3). From the Magistrate’s work with the excavation, we know that he often looks beyond what is in front of him to learn what he cannot see. He does the same thing here by implying that he believes there is more to the prisoners’ story than the old man tells. He repeats his belief to Joll: "Perhaps [their story] is the truth" (4). Granted, much of what he says to Joll is posturing as he tries to walk the line between the looser allowances of the frontier and the stricter rules of the capital. Still, he remains on the side of the Empire as shown by his desire to impress Joll. His fixation with finding the truth also puts him on the side of the Empire and intrudes in his genuine effort to plead for the prisoners. Urquhart argues that, like the TRC, the Magistrate wants to learn the truth in order to protect himself more than to help the victims of oppression. One of the aims of the TRC is to give voice to the victims of apartheid. The problem, however, as Urquhart contends, drawing from Gayatri Spivak, is that "the truly oppressed cannot speak for themselves," so it is only through the creation of their stories by the oppressors that their voices can be heard (paragraph 8). As we know, the Magistrate later in the novel attempts to speak for the colonized when he interprets the poplar slips, and at the beginning of the novel, he wants the prisoners’ story heard, at least to some degree. With these first two prisoners, he questions them about who beat them. He focuses on the condition of their bodies, as if answers about how they got their wounds will provide the truth about why they are there. To him, the statement of truth is the end to the conflict. He tells the old man, "[Joll’s] work is to find out the truth. That is all he does. He finds out the truth" (3). There is finality in truth because the Magistrate is certain that when the old man tells the truth, all will be settled. Joll will leave, and everything will return to normal. Though the Magistrate pleads on behalf of
the old man and boy, suggesting that he wants to mitigate the situation, his adoption of
the Empire’s idea of truth-getting undermines any conscionable effort he puts forth and
keeps him on the side of the oppressor.

Also undermining his effort at reconciliation with the oppressed is his refusal to
hear the truth once he is faced with it, creating a particular irony since he is heavily
invested in learning it for his own goal of completing himself. This refusal to recognize
the suffering of the colonized also implies that they are not equal to him. When he knows
Joll is torturing the prisoners, he says, “At every moment...as I go about my business I
am aware of what might be happening, and my ear is even tuned to the pitch of human
pain. But the granary is a massive building with heavy doors and tiny windows” (5). The
building creates a distance between him and the prisoners, so he feels he does not have to
get involved in their predicament. By ignoring their cries, he denies the truth even though
he searches extraordinarily hard for it in other places. He pushes against the truth he
seeks because facing it would be a firm declaration of the part he has played in the
oppression. At this point, it is easier to shut himself away, ignore the truth of the torture,
and hope that when Joll leaves, the outpost will return to its normal state of peace. As he
ignores the torture, however, the Magistrate suggests that the victims are less valuable
than his own people; they are easily shut out, and he remains comfortable. Ottilia Veres,
in discussing the recurrence of gazing in the novel argues, “the Magistrate hides in the
‘comfort’ of invisibility eyeing the barbarians and, at the same time, objectifying them as
animals” (240). The Magistrate describes the prisoners’ “strange gabbling, their vast
appetites, their animal shamelessness, their volatile tempers” (19). Veres continues: “He
uses his gaze as a medium of control over them” (240), thereby likening himself to other
members of the Empire. This gaze is reminiscent of Magda from In the Heart of the Country and her cold descriptions of Hendrik as a body and nothing more. While it is true that the Magistrate has progressed from the mentality of Magda, who rarely laments the situation of the oppressed, he often runs from the truth instead of working toward reconciliation. He says he believes “in peace, perhaps even peace at any price” (14), but peace and reconciliation are two different concepts. Peace can exist when the Magistrate closes his ears to torture. If he does not hear it, it does not exist for him. Reconciliation takes work on his part, and he is not prepared for it.

When Joll brings in the fisherfolk, the situation of the prisoners and their torture worsens, as it now includes many more people than just the old man and boy from before. Still, the Magistrate avoids becoming involved even though he knows that these are nomadic people who are not a threat to the Empire. Instead, he “flee[s] for refuge to the farthest corner of [his] apartment” when he hears the baby cry and cough (20). He talks about how the baby’s cries cause him great shame, “the greatest indifference to annihilation. I know somewhat too much; and from this knowledge, once one has been infected, there seems to be no recovering” (21). The cries should trigger a sense of humanity and action in him, for he says he has been infected with the shame. But he continues to go about his business without interfering. He goes on ignoring the fisherfolk and the prisoners until Joll leaves. It is then that he visits the prisoners and instructs his men to clean their area. He wants everything sanitized and erased, unwritten; he wants “‘everything as it was before’” (24) in the hope that he can forget all that has happened. So while he might feel empathy for the colonized people, he does not work to reconcile with them, only to hide what happened to them. The cover-up amounts to a denial on his
part that anything happened, somewhat like the TRC, as discussed earlier, which attempted to forget the crimes of the perpetrators of apartheid for the sake of forgiveness and progress. More important, however, is the denial by the Magistrate that he even played a part in the torture through his complacency and his role as colonizer.

This desire to search for the truth but flee from it when it faces him is magnified in the Magistrate’s interrogation and probing of the barbarian woman. Now that the physical torture of the prisoners is over, the Magistrate turns back to the victim and wants to know the truth. Paradoxically, it is easier for him to face the truth knowing that he does not actually have to face it now that the whole truth is part of the past. His motivation for the probe of the woman is that her completeness is intertwined with his. The Magistrate feels he needs to know what happened to the woman as she was being held prisoner, but he cannot remember her before he met her, and this is a problem that gnaws at him. Trying to conjure an early memory of her, he thinks, “On that day [when she was brought in] she was still unmarked; but I must believe she was unmarked as I must believe she was once a child....Strain as I will, my first image remains of the kneeling beggar-girl” (33). The fact that he cannot remember her arrival frustrates him. If he can remember her before the soldiers scarred her, then he can believe the truth that she was once whole and was made incomplete. If he cannot remember her as she once was, then she is never whole to him. He needs her to be whole because he has a hole in his memory where she should be. She represents part of the truth he is missing which will make him complete. Essentially, the creation of his wholeness depends on hers. This need is the reason he questions her incessantly even though he hears no response, for, he says, “I try to look into myself but see only a vortex and at the heart of the vortex oblivion” (47). He must
continue his investigation if he wants to succeed in his self-identification. So he does, asking the woman to describe where she was sitting when the prisoners were in the yard near the barracks. She tells him, and “a faint sense of the presence of the girl, an aura, begins to emerge. Now! I urge myself: now I will open my eyes and she will be there!...In the dim light I make out her shape beside me. With a rush of feeling I stretch out to touch her hair, her face. There is no answering life. It is like caressing an urn or a ball, something which is all surface” (48-49). Just as he thought answers about the past settlement at the excavation site would magically come to him by putting his ear to the ground (16), the language he uses here shows the same belief. He wants answers about the woman to appear suddenly because his own identity depends on it. Sudden answers would end her story, and he could move on. He would be able to fill his own emptiness because it is wrapped up in the complete image of her.

In addition to wanting to hear the woman’s story, he also wishes to make sense of the wounds that have been left on her body from the torture, but his scrutiny leads to his complete loss of her story. Trying to decipher his own desire, he says, “It has been growing more and more clear to me that until the marks on this girl’s body are deciphered and understood I cannot let go of her” (31). His story has become dependent on hers. He speaks of her scars as if they are the same as the poplar slips which were found in the ruins. Just as he rearranges the slips in order to find the truth about the place’s history from those writings, he searches for the truth of what happened to the girl in the physical evidence of her torture. He examines her scars closely, pores over them as if investigating her history. In an interview with Coetzee, David Attwell asks the author what the importance of the body is in his writing. Coetzee responds by saying the suffering body
possesses authority even though the victims are often voiceless. He argues, "it is not that one grants the authority of the suffering body: the suffering body takes this authority: that is its power. To use other words: its power is undeniable" (Doubling 248). Since his attempts at hearing the woman's story have failed, the Magistrate attempts to learn her history by examining her body. If he is successful, he can fill in the holes of her past and use her story to complete his own. He will learn the full truth of her story, and it will close the period of torture for him. Her body, however, is her power. She owns her scars as part of her narrative, and he cannot take them away through his examination of them nor through his washing of them. May confirms the power of her body. His exploration stems from Coetzee's own statement about "the body and its undeniable life" (qtd. in May 392), meaning we cannot overlook the importance of the physical body of the barbarian woman as an important part of her story. May argues that the main function of the body in the novel is that it allows for possible transcendent vision for the Magistrate. The Magistrate, May contends, possesses "a desire to transcend the body and its world of material and temporal things" in order to move into the realm of creativity (405, 394). This realm of creativity we can see as the Magistrate's creation of his new identity. However, the body of the woman, May continues, does not allow the Magistrate to transcend the experience because "the body of the barbarian...suggests...gross embodiment, a fall into the disgustingly material and temporal" (406). Her body keeps him closer to reality rather than allowing him a transcendent experience; he is unable to build a new context for himself. In other words, her body reminds him of the colonizer that he already embodies and does not permit him to escape being defined by it.

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8 May draws from discussions of surrealism and transcendentalism and the position of woman as the object of the male gaze within those areas.
The Magistrate cannot use the woman’s story to complete his own because he cannot decipher her body. Furthermore, he begins to realize his own insignificance to her, and it only confuses his sense of self and his desire to break from the Empire. Her partial blindness is of particular interest to him. Just as Magda in *In the Heart of the Country* needed recognition of her existence from Hendrik and Klein-Anna, the Magistrate literally needs the barbarian woman to see him in order for him to fully exist. If she does not recognize him, does not distinguish him as something different from her torturers, he cannot possibly separate himself from the Empire and identify himself as something righteous. As discussed above, her suffering body is her authority because she possesses her wounds and decides how much of their story is revealed. Here, her silence is also her authority. In Hegel’s master-slave dialectic, she is the slave figure, and in that role, she controls the Magistrate’s identity by deciding whether to recognize him or not, just as Hendrik and Klein-Anna could determine Magda’s existence based on their willingness to respond. If the barbarian woman refuses to acknowledge the Magistrate, he does not exist. Discussing the Magistrate’s ambiguous position in the Empire, one that constitutes both “imperial official and imperial outcast,” Bill Ashcroft argues that the Magistrate’s “obsession [with the woman] seems focused in his inability to completely fathom his motives in ‘rescuing’ her. And this, in turn, is a result of her impaired vision—he cannot form a clear impression of her nor remember her face since he himself does not appear to fully exist in her gaze” (104). His incompleteness, in other words, comes from her incompleteness, and if he can rescue her body, he can rescue himself as well.

After his intensely close examination of the woman’s body, the Magistrate finally realizes that she sees him in the same way she sees Joll, as another of her torturers. He
cannot separate himself from the Empire if one of its victims sees him as a vital part of it. When he looks into her eyes, he sees “the answer that has been waiting all the time offer itself to me in the image of a face masked by two black glassy insect eyes from which there comes no reciprocal gaze but only my doubled image cast back at me” (44). More than Magda, who does not understand why Hendrik shows no love for her, the Magistrate truly sees in this moment that he is the same to the woman as her torturers. The colonizer realizes the atrocities of his people and knows he must separate himself from them. He cries, “I must assert my distance from Colonel Joll! I will not suffer for his crimes!” (44).

The Magistrate’s touch might be lighter than Colonel Joll’s, but his intentions are, in part, the same, to define himself through his use and objectification of her body, for an oppressor cannot exist without those he oppresses. He later admits his probable regret that “[he] could not engrave [him]self on her as deeply” as her torturers (135). If he is able to find recognition from her, then he will achieve separation from the hegemony. Also, her story will be finished in his mind. Another case will be closed, thereby allowing him to go back to being the simple magistrate who is merely living out his last days on the lazy frontier.

It is during his realization of the barbarian woman’s indifference to him that the Magistrate begins to take her apart in his mind, a particular irony since he seems to be trying adamantly to see her as whole. This irony is similar to his desire for truth about the prisoners’ torture and his shying away from it simultaneously. In one washing scene, the Magistrate mentions the woman’s feet, legs, buttocks, thighs, arms, armpits, belly, breasts, hair, neck, and throat (30), all in one short paragraph. As he pretends to be putting her back together, healing her with his kind touch, he is really breaking down
even the undamaged parts of her body, fragmenting and damaging her further. He does not see her as whole. Because he deconstructs the woman, he is unable to see her as an equal. Also, while it is true that he envisions the woman as imperfect, she reflects an image of his own imperfect self, helping him to define himself as incomplete, just as she is. Conversely, he sees himself as incomplete and projects that incompleteness onto her. Consequently, he cannot reconcile with her or create a new identity for himself because his wholeness is tied to hers.

Elsewhere the Magistrate sees the woman as animal-like, comparing her to a fox cub (34), and using animal and insect imagery to describe parts of her body, further emphasizing his view of her as a fragmented body instead of an equal human being. He starts to “face the truth of what [he is] trying to do: to obliterate the girl” (47). Just as before, he cannot reconstruct her face in his mind, cannot picture her before her torture or even after at this point. He resents the duty he has created for himself to care for her, and instead of facing what has happened to her, completing her story, and reconciling with her, he goes to another woman. This act further pushes down the status of the native woman, making her more like a pet than a human being. He regards the native woman only “with a dry revulsion, [feeling] as if I had spent nights copulating with a dummy of straw and leather. What could I ever have seen in her?” (47). Even after he returns her to her people, a time when he could romanticize their relationship instead of lamenting his failures, he remembers her as incomplete. He “cannot remember certainly what she looks like. From her empty eyes there always seemed to be a haze spreading, a blankness that overtook all of her.” In not seeing her features, he sees her as incomplete. He concludes, “I am forgetting her, and forgetting her, I know, deliberately” (86). A deliberate
forgetting of her is his attempt to remove her completely from his mind and allow himself to return to his relative peace even though he was unable to complete her story. It also helps him to forget that he has not been successful in defining himself as something other than a member of the ruling group, so he must eliminate her from his mind. Still, her persistent obscurity in his mind prevents him from returning to his easy life and suggests that images do not disappear so easily even if they are removed from sight, like bloodstains from the floor. Images of her body, although vague, remain, and he cannot sever himself from them.

The text sets up the woman’s obscurity to parallel the obscurity of the Magistrate’s purpose. He rarely, if ever, sees clarity in his relationship with her or in his actions in general. His uncertainty in direction manifests itself in his dreams, and these dreams are yet another way the text reinforces the Magistrate’s position in the Empire. In many of the dreams, the Magistrate is looking for clarity in the children’s faces. On one level, his inability to see the faces is identical to his inability to see the truth of what is in front of him with the archaeological sites, the prisoners’ stories, and the woman’s torture. More profound, however, is that these dreams represent his desire for recognition, on the one hand from the colonized and a hope for reconciliation with them but his helplessness in doing so, and on the other hand from the colonizer in the form of Joll. In the first version of his recurring dream, he approaches a girl who is facing away from him and tries “to imagine the face between the petals of her peaked hood but cannot” (10). His failure to complete her face foreshadows the many times he will do the same thing with the woman. Collectively, his inability to complete faces seems to reflect his own identity. For example, in this version of the dream, he is aware of the girl, but he is also aware of
himself as an unrecognizable figure. The children, except for the hooded girl, ignore him as he approaches despite his “bulk;” they fail to acknowledge him because of his “shadowiness” (10). He sees himself as unclear and incomplete, showing his uncertainty in his identity. This dream also works to solidify his membership in the hegemony. It occurs while Joll is trying to learn the truth from the boy prisoner, which the Magistrate is likewise trying to learn. The truth, just as it is cloudy in his dream, is cloudy in reality because the boy is afraid to speak the truth. Furthermore, Joll has told the Magistrate that pain leads to truth, leaving him confused about how to learn the truth. Although the Magistrate does not believe this tenet, he continues to side with Joll in the search of the truth from the boy. The first recurrence of his dream goes farther to define his purpose, but is similar to the first dream in that he is still unable to find anything of substance in the children or in himself. This time he sees the face of the girl, but it “is blank, featureless; it is the face of an embryo or a tiny whale” (37). Again, all but the one child run away as he approaches, failing to recognize him. He offers a coin to the child in his dream with the hope that the child will accept his token. While this could be seen as a symbol of reconciliation, it could also be a symbol of the Empire because of its value to the colonizers. Either way, the Magistrate awakes before any action can occur. This dream occurs immediately after the Magistrate questions the soldiers about the barbarian woman’s torture. Arguably, we can see his care for her as an attempt at reconciliation, an offering to her like the coin in the dream, but her continual refusal to recognize him, discussed above, keeps him outside her world just as the child in his dream shuts him out by keeping her back toward him. Both the face in the dream and the one in reality are
eluding him; both are blurry, so he is unable to find answers from them about his purpose or place. Both figures work to keep him outside of their stories.

The Magistrate continues his search for purpose and self-identification in a subsequent dream. In the next version, the children look at him with "grave shining faces," but he is incapable of acknowledging them with a smile; neither can he speak to them. His "features are frozen, the smile will not come, there seems to be a sheet of ice covering my mouth...when I touch the glove to my face I feel nothing" (52-53). His own blankness and fragmentation echo that which he sees on the faces of the girl in his dream and the barbarian woman, only now it has been transferred to him more completely. Even when the hooded girl's face appears clearly to him, he is unable to respond to her. At first he is afraid "she will be a disappointment, that the face she will present to me will be obtuse, slick, like an internal organ not meant to live in the light. But no, she is herself, herself as I have never seen her" (53), complete with a smiling face and dark eyes. Ironically, the girl becomes a complete and satisfying figure in his dream. He, nevertheless, remains incomplete, suggested by his desire but inability to respond to her and, therefore, recognize her as a whole existence. If his dream parallels his reality, he should be able to complete the barbarian woman's face and her story. He should be able to see her as an equal, to transform her from the unresponsive Lacanian "It" to the "You" and, most important, see in her a reflection of his whole self. Again, his completion depends on hers. He claims success, for "[t]he dream has taken root" (53), and shortly after this version of the dream, he decides to take the woman back to her people. This act can be seen as a completion of her story. For once, the image is clear; he knows his purpose, and he is able to act on it. Certainly this act is his most noble effort at
reconciliation with the colonized, even though it makes little sense to him later and he deliberately tries to forget the woman, as discussed above. Despite these drawbacks, however, the act of returning the woman to her people is more effective and noble than his later and more demonstrative effort at reconciliation: his rebellion, which has little effect.

Taken all together, the process of his search for truth in the archaeological digs, the stories of the prisoners and the barbarian woman, and his dreams work to reaffirm his ties to the Empire even if he desires escape from it, and because of this position, his rebellion is unsuccessful. The conclusions he makes about the past and present natives do not create any validity for his revolt. While it is true that his views about them are complex and he quite often leaps back and forth between contempt and empathy for them, this impulsivity simply complicates his act against the Empire; it does not clarify anything. How can he see himself as separate from the oppressors when, at one point, he wonders if, “[i]t would be best if this obscure chapter in the history of the world were terminated at once, if these ugly people were obliterated from the face of the earth and we swore to make a new start” (24)? The implication is that he wishes the natives were wiped out and presents the Empire as the answer to the problem he is facing. Likewise, how can he see himself as a force for reconciliation when he continues to see the barbarian woman as incomplete? When he is with his “bird-woman,” he thinks of the barbarian woman, and he has “a vision of her closed eyes and closed face filming over with skin. Blank, like a fist beneath a black wig” (42). If he cannot see the colonized individuals as whole, he cannot stage a successful rebellion on their behalf. The motivation for his rebellion, then, does not seem to come from a desire for reconciliation.
with the native people. Even if this were his desire, success is doubtful because as a
member of the hegemonic power, he cannot speak for them. Just as he takes the voices of
the colonized when he interprets the poplar slips, he acts similarly during his rebellion as
he attempts to speak for the prisoners that the Empire tortures in front of the crowd.
Instead of his rebellion encompassing his desire for reconciliation, then, it comes from
his desire to position himself outside the torturous practices of the Empire in an effort to
define himself as something different from the colonizer.

Thus his rebellion becomes less about the colonized people and the tortured
prisoners and more about hiding from the truth, and separating himself from the Empire
and declaring his own identity. When Joll’s prisoners are brought in during the
Magistrate’s own imprisonment, the Magistrate once again wants to stop his ears and
close his eyes to their torture, negating the validity of his protest. Again, he wants to hide
from the truth that faces him. He wants to take himself away from the truth as it is
happening and out of a position to rebel. This time he offers the explanation that he does
not want the Empire’s tactics to poison his conscience. Ironically, he considers the act of
returning to his cell to be the protest, “a gesture to [him]self alone,” the gesture that
separates him from the bloodthirsty, barbaric colonizers, though he admits, “it will not
even be noticed.” He concludes, “I cannot save the prisoners, therefore let me save
myself” (104). Any effort at stopping the torture, then, is half-hearted because he knows
it will have no effect; it is much easier to lock himself away from the torture and act in
his own interest.

As a colonizer with a conscience, the Magistrate’s rightful place, he thinks, is
inside as a prisoner to the Empire. It is there that he would be able to separate himself
from his torturers because he could become another victim of the Empire, not unlike the oppressed. Sam Durrant writes about how this novel and others by Coetzee demonstrate true grief as a way of working toward reconciliation rather than presenting a factual account of the truth (24). In discussing the Magistrate’s own torture, Durrant argues, “the Magistrate seems almost willfully to submit himself to Colonel Joll, as if in order to understand the barbarian girl’s experience he must literally approximate it” (46). It is true that by identifying with the woman and others who were tortured, the Magistrate can show sympathy for them, but he does not use this insight to act on their behalf. Instead, he simply wants to escape the reality of the torture and hide in order to forget. The text is unclear about why the Magistrate returns to the agonizing scene of prisoner torture, but when he does he cannot voice all that he wants to. His protest is ineffective; “Words fail [him].” His final thought as guards haul him away is gratefulness that he is not blind from one of the blows (107). Interestingly enough, where moments before he identified with the woman, he is now separated from her because he retains his sight. Any identification and sympathy with her was short-lived. Again, even though the Empire tortures him, he remains a member of it because of his unlikeness to the woman. Back in the cell he realizes that his outburst meant nothing to the cause of reconciliation. Attwell calls the Magistrate’s protestations “inhibited, as if he struggles to voice them in a situation in which they appear out of place, perhaps bookish” (83). They had no effect on Colonel Joll, the soldiers, or his fellow townspeople. They meant nothing to those he was defending or ultimately even to himself. He questions:

Would I have dared to face the crowd to demand justice for these ridiculous barbarian prisoners with their backsides in the air? Justice: once that word is uttered, where will it all end? Easier to shout No! Easier to be beaten and made a martyr. Easier to lay my head on a block than to defend
the cause of justice for the barbarians: for where can that argument lead but to laying down our arms and opening the gates of the town to the people whose land we have raped? The old magistrate, defender of the rule of law, enemy in his own way of the State, assaulted and imprisoned, impregnably virtuous, is not without his own twinges of doubt. (108)

In what is his closest look at his conscience, the Magistrate decides that it is easier to shout than to actually take action in the form of justice. He wonders where the justice would end, perhaps picturing all of the perpetrators of the atrocities in jail cells, powerless. Although this novel predates the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it seems to predict fears of mass imprisonment and disempowerment of whites that the TRC must have had, fears that made the commission forgive the perpetrators of apartheid for the sake of moving forward instead of punishing them. If justice were rightly served, the perpetrators would lose their positions of power over the oppressed. Many would be in prison. The Magistrate admits that this prospect gives him doubts about whether he truly wants reconciliation. As a judge, he was in a position to defend justice for the barbarians before the arrival of Colonel Joll, but now he cowers from the responsibility. It is easier to stay away and allow the torture to occur. Eventually, Joll will leave and everything will return to normal, and the Magistrate will not be worse for it. Most important here is that he realizes he has not separated himself from the rulers at all. He is still the representative of the Empire; he remains a ruler himself, afraid to stand up for the prisoners and go against the tradition he has always known. Durrant somewhat releases the Magistrate from responsibility by saying that Coetzee’s novels, and implicitly his white characters, “bear witness to the tyranny of apartheid while remaining powerless to effect reconciliation” (24), but if the Magistrate is not the person to act as a catalyst for change in his outpost, no one is. In a way, much as
the South African TRC decides whose stories become the truths that will be told to future
generations, the Magistrate decides what the truth is on his outpost because it is
established under his rule. If he legislates truth, he can work toward reconciliation, but in
this close reflection of his beliefs, he runs from that concept in order to maintain power
for the state.

The Magistrate’s subsequent dream emphasizes this failure as he is once again
unable to speak to the girl who now offers him a loaf of bread, what Susan VanZanten
Gallagher calls a “peace offering” from the barbarian woman. In an article where
Gallagher discusses how Coetzee handles the depiction of torture in the novel, she
suggests that the Magistrate’s “self-recognition [of his similarity to Joll]…suggest[s] that
he may have found the right road after all” (284). But a second look reveals that the road
winds back to where he started. As in the previous dream, the girl acknowledges him, but
he cannot reciprocate; he is incapable of speaking and he wakes before he can embrace
her, proving that he has not altered his identity. Even his torture and public humiliation,
which Gallagher argues “have elevated his moral awareness not only of the Empire’s
barbarity but also of his own” (284), are simply a brief departure from his place in the
Empire, for he returns to his position, complete with trimmed beard and clean clothes
(145).

By the end of the narrative, the Magistrate can say only that his was an “eventful
year.” His external situation is largely unchanged. Colonel Joll has abandoned the frontier
and the town has returned to a state of relative peace, though it is more desperate for food
and other supplies. The townspeople are left to defend their land against largely unknown
outside enemies, just as before. As for the condition of the Magistrate’s conscience, he
understands the events of the year "no more...than a babe in arms." Nothing is clearer to him, and he concludes, "There has been something staring me in the face, and still I do not see it" (155). Still, for the most part, he ceases the search for truth and his new identity. He even vows to bury the poplar slips. His examination of them earlier brought no answers to him about his place in the Empire, and unlike the natives of the past that were able to record a part of themselves in writing, the Magistrate finds no way for himself to do the same. In the few times when he sits down to write "the annals of an imperial outpost or an account of how the people of that outpost spent their last year composing their souls as they waited for the barbarians," he simply romanticizes the "oasis" that they call home by writing about the "charm of life" there on the outpost. "We lived with nothing between us and the stars....This was paradise on earth" (154), he writes. He has failed in creating a new identity for himself, so he is unable to write a new history for the colonizer. According to Attwell, "What is staring him in the face is at one level simply his inability to produce significant closure, but at another level it is history itself, history as something brute, impenetrable, and ultimately unrepresentable, something that will not be possessed by his efforts to produce a historical discourse" (76-77). This inability to possess a history that is not the colonizer's is a reason the Magistrate fails in his pursuit. His exploration of the woman's scars also fails to produce any lasting answers for him. Her reciprocal gazes offer no way forward because she sees him on the whole as one of her torturers. The Magistrate is never able to move beyond seeing her in pieces, and since his completion depends on hers, he cannot recreate himself into anything separate from the oppressors. Though he moves closer than Magda to a reconciliation with the oppressed because of his return of the woman to her people and
because of his, albeit failed, rebellion, the main obstacles still impede his progress toward a new identity, so just as Magda does, the Magistrate too fails in his search.
CHAPTER THREE

“A New Footing, a New Start”: Disgrace

This thesis examines one more novel in which the main character has a chance to discover a wholeness for himself and break away from the oppressor’s identity. The character is David Lurie from the third novel in the postcolonial narrative, Disgrace. Like Magda and the Magistrate from In the Heart of the Country and Waiting for the Barbarians, respectively, David struggles to position himself in the context of what has now become a decolonized world. In the first chapter, we saw the failure of Magda’s attempts to separate herself from the colonizing history that she represents and make herself whole through her relationships with her father, the servants, and finally the people in the flying machines. She was unsuccessful in all of these areas primarily because of her turn to violence and her unreasonable desire to be recognized by the servants as something different than a ruler. Chapter Two continued the examination of the colonizer’s search for wholeness in Waiting for the Barbarians. Once again, we saw a protagonist who experiences emptiness because of his position as the representative colonizer. As a result of this emptiness, he searches for a new identity for himself through his relationships with the Empire, the prisoners, and the barbarian woman. He fails, however, because he is more concerned about learning the truth of the past than working toward reconciliation with the oppressed. Like Magda, the Magistrate also tries to
establish identity through recognition from the Other. Though he is more successful than Magda in beginning the process of reconciliation, the Magistrate does not make significant progress in separating himself from his history or in creating a new identity for himself. David, in *Disgrace*, continues Magda and the Magistrate’s efforts as he tries to fill his emptiness and create a new existence for himself in his world.

*Disgrace* takes place in the first decade of post-apartheid South Africa. The formerly colonized individuals have begun to assert themselves with regards to property and human rights, and they struggle against the hegemony’s power. David, a college professor, is not strictly a colonizer because he was born in the colony. However, according to Albert Memmi’s explanation, David represents the colonizer because of his affiliation with the oppressive group and the privileges he receives because of it. His unwillingness to change and his grip on the past also keep him on the side of the hegemonic power. He, like the two other protagonists, experiences an emptiness that he cannot explain. When he has an affair with one of his students, he is forced to resign from his position. He turns to his daughter Lucy for support and clarity, and it is on her farm that he begins to reflect on his identity. David works toward a new identity through a few different avenues. The first is through his relationship with his daughter Lucy, who is set up as a contrast to him in that she is a willing participant in the healing process occurring between the oppressors and the oppressed. She readily works for reconciliation with the victims of colonization, an effort David does not understand. Their relationship becomes one of power struggle as David, not unlike the Magistrate, begins to speak for Lucy and becomes obsessed with finding out the truth of what happened during an attack in which Lucy is gang raped by three black men. Instead of moving forward as his daughter
wishes, David holds on to the past and, therefore, fails to change himself fundamentally through their relationship. David also attempts to complete his identity through the writing of his opera about Lord Byron. His desire here is to create something significant, to leave something as his legacy. He is unsuccessful, however, and his creation becomes an aimless work with little value to his particular time and place; it is a work that holds on to the colonizing past instead of embracing the decolonized present. What David does not realize is that his particular time and place in history require an entirely different creation, and in the novel this new creation is represented in his daughter’s work and his unborn grandchild, symbols of the postcolonial future. He does not recognize that they are his legacy and a way for him to form a new identity. A final way David attempts to fill his emptiness is through his treatment of dogs at an animal clinic. His work with the animals is his most successful endeavor, as it helps him to realize the importance of love, and he learns how to let go of them. In the process he also learns to allow his daughter to move forward, which in turn allows him to begin to separate himself from his hegemonic past. While David certainly has more to accomplish in his search for completion, he becomes the most complete character of the three colonizing figures in the novels, in that he begins to understand that reconciliation between the victims and perpetrators of colonization is important not only for the identities of the colonized, but for the colonizers as well. He understands this lesson much more than Magda in *In the Heart of the Country* or the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Through David, Coetzee’s work finally offers readers a glimpse of hope for a possibly successful reconciliation between colonizers and those they once colonized.
Coetzee’s text establishes David’s feeling of emptiness from the very beginning of the narrative and continues the representation throughout, pushing David to fill that emptiness. David is introduced to us as a man who was once able to attract women but who is now ageing and becoming average; he is less passionate, a man who goes through the motions of every aspect of life. In short, he is declining in life. He wonders if he would perhaps be better off having himself castrated so he can focus on “the proper business of the old: preparing to die,” and, foreshadowing his later work with the dogs at the clinic, he says, after all, “they [castrate] animals every day, and animals survive well enough, if one ignores a certain residue of sadness” (9). Interestingly, he imagines himself as physically incomplete, but the castration would be simply a physical representation of his emotional condition, one in which he is preparing to die. This is his state of mind even before he begins his affair with his student, Melanie, and before the trouble that ensues because of the affair. Once the affair begins, it increases his feeling of incompleteness, as he remains unfulfilled. Even though the young woman seems to satisfy his needs and fill a void in his life—he says he feels “enriched” by the experience, in fact (56)—he leaves her apartment after one passionate romp with a feeling of “dejection” and “dullness,” so much that “he sits slumped at the wheel unable to move” (25). Ultimately, he does not get what he wants from Melanie. Later on, the attack in the novel saps even more of his identity. After it, “he feels his interest in the world draining from him drop by drop. It may take weeks, it may take months before he is bled dry, but he is bleeding. When that is finished, he will be like a fly-casing in a spiderweb, brittle to the touch, lighter than rice-chaff, ready to float away.” In fact, “he has begun to float to his end” (107). Understandably, the attack would shock his system, but it does more than
that. It fragments his being. It leaves him feeling like an empty shell. Like the imagined castration from earlier, here David imagines blood loss and an eventual floating away, maybe a pleasant thought, as it would allow him to escape all of the problems of his life and society. The prevailing image, however, is one of bloodletting leading to a physical and emotional emptiness. The image returns later after one of the many times David asks Lucy to talk about the attack. “Again the feeling washes over him: listlessness, indifference, but also weightlessness, as if he has been eaten away from inside and only the eroded shell of his heart remains” (156). Once more, his blood has been drained; his heart, the very life center, no longer functions. Nothing grounds him in reality anymore as he is left to simply float away and cease to exist.

These descriptions of emptiness connect David to the main characters of the earlier two novels, Magda and the Magistrate, respectively, and solidify his place as the representative colonizer. The feelings of dullness are reminiscent of the many descriptions of the Magistrate after his intimate moments with the barbarian woman, when the Magistrate senses he has sunk into oblivion. As in Waiting for the Barbarians, where the barbarian woman fails to fill the Magistrate’s emptiness, Melanie fails to fill the emptiness David experiences in Disgrace. David is then a continuation of the Magistrate, just as unfulfilled by his life as the former, and he must look for ways to fill his void. The images of empty shells of beings echo back to Magda’s descriptions of herself in In the Heart of the Country. She desires at one point to explore “the feel of [her] body sliding out of [her] and another body sliding in, limbs inside [her] limbs, mouth inside [her] mouth” (53). Just as she feels drained of identity from her life on the frontier and looks for fulfillment in her relationships with her father and the servants, so
too is David drained by his current life. David then is a continuation of both the
Magistrate and Magda, an ongoing representation of the colonizer. The difference is that
the time has changed, and it is even more necessary for this colonizer to break away from
his people’s identity and identify himself as something new if he wants to maintain
significance in the new world.

The first significant way in which David attempts to create a complete identity for
himself is through his relationship with Lucy; she offers him an initial escape from his
problems. While some would argue that David’s affair with Melanie is important in his
search for fulfillment, Melanie does not represent anything new in David’s life because of
her unfortunate status as a simple replacement for the prostitute Soraya. David’s
relationship with Melanie is a catalyst to the central action of the narrative, the attack
itself and all that ensues afterward. The affair offers David a reason to go searching for
refuge with Lucy, so it is important in that way, but since the affair is not something
David seeks out intentionally, the relationship does not work to alter his identity. His
relationship with Lucy does. When he resigns from his job, he leaves for Lucy’s quickly,
showing that he wants to forget his troubles, and he now desires something familiar. He
tells of no specific reason for going; he has not seen her in a year. It could be argued that
Lucy represents another woman to fill the hole that Melanie has left, but the text offers a
more likely reading. Lucy offers David something entirely different from Melanie or
Soraya or any of the others for that matter. He seems comforted by the fact that she is a
“solid countrywoman” (60); she provides him with something the others cannot: a
pastoral simplicity to iron out the complexities of his life. When he arrives, he hugs Lucy
and thinks, “what a nice welcome at the end of a long trip!” (59). There is relief in his
thoughts; this is a comfortable homecoming in a place that can give him the grounding he seeks after a difficult time. The language tells us that finding solid ground is the main reason he goes to Lucy’s, not filling a void left by a woman.

At first, there is only the normal strain between father and daughter, as they grow accustomed to living with each other. It does not hurt David’s desire for refuge, though what becomes apparent is their generational divide. The text sets them up as representatives of their respective generations, and this is harmful to David’s search for a complete existence because it pushes him farther out of the current society. Lucy is more characteristic of new South Africa and David of old. These initial characterizations set the tone for their stronger disagreements after the attack, but at the beginning, the differences are simple observations from David. He worries about Lucy being alone so far away from a community that can keep her safe. He marvels that “he and her mother, cityfolk, intellectuals, should have produced this throwback, this sturdy young settler. But perhaps it was not they who produced her: perhaps history had the larger share” (61).

Lucy clearly symbolizes a new existence, according to David, one in which whites and blacks are living in the same areas, working together successfully, and progressing toward reconciliation, and David sees himself outside of this new history. He sees his daughter as separate from himself, more a product of her time than a product of him.

During the time when they become reacquainted, before the attack, David acknowledges several times this generational gap between Lucy and himself. He is generally supportive of her lifestyle. In fact, he seems to be in awe sometimes of how comfortable she is away from the city, as in the observation that Lucy “talks easily about [farm] matters. A frontier farmer of the new breed. In the old days, cattle and maize. Today, dogs and
daffodils. The more things change the more they remain the same. History repeating itself, though in a more modest vein. Perhaps history has learned a lesson” (62). Moments such as this one offer a glimpse of David’s eventual openness to change; he sees history moving in the right direction, but these sentiments are casual thoughts that contrast his stubbornness to change that he routinely voices.

For now, David does not wish to adopt any part of his daughter’s lifestyle for himself. Instead, he is outspokenly closed to the idea of change. David says, in fact, that he “‘would prefer simply to be put against a wall and shot’” than to undergo an imposed alteration of character (66). He is talking specifically about his scandal back in Cape Town and the committee’s and his differing views of punishment, but on a larger scale, this sentiment shows his generally unyielding nature when it comes to the topic of change, even if it is change for the better. Later he says he will help with the animals at the clinic “‘as long as I don’t have to become a better person. I am not prepared to be reformed. I want to go on being myself’” (77). David fears the idea of becoming something better because it would mean leaving behind his old self and the ideas of the colonizing group that he represents. A new world would require him to alter the very fundamentals of his identity, no longer allowing him to know who he is. A decolonized society means David has to see the oppressed people as equal, and in this situation, he can no longer define himself by what he is not. If he sees the oppressed as equal to himself, he loses his current identity. He resists that loss. By accepting change, he would become more like the generation Lucy represents and less a representative of the former white rulers, and this is scary to the colonizer because it means a loss of power over his own sense of self. Lucy tells David he “‘shouldn’t be so unbending…It isn’t heroic to be
unbending'" (66). These conversations before the attack are lighthearted, but they set the stage for the intensified conflict that exists with them afterwards. The interchanges also work to present David as the representative of the unchangeable, hard-lined, former oppressors.

After the attack, the relationship between Lucy and David grows much more complicated, as David’s unyielding nature becomes a backdrop for his feelings of guilt and his obsession with finding the truth of what occurred. The text ties all of these issues together, and they prevent David from moving on with his life and creating a new identity. David is powerless during the attack and should not feel guilty about what happens to Lucy. He does, though, as is shown through his vision of Lucy asking him to save her (103). Later, he “watch[es] over his little girl, guarding her from harm, warding off the bad spirits” (104). Just as he establishes himself earlier as a part of the hegemonic group, David continues to fill that role. This time, his desire is to maintain control of his daughter’s wellbeing and prevent any emotional breakdown. He wants to protect her for a reason other than the fact that it is his role as a father. David does not want his little girl to change before his eyes because, ultimately, “[s]he becomes his second salvation, the bride of his youth reborn” (86). This is his desire for Lucy, not necessarily that she will be a carbon copy of himself, but will carry forward his ideas so they do not die. If she does not heal and return to her former self, she cannot carry on his history. Just as the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* needs to rescue the body of the woman in order to identify himself as whole, David needs to do the same with Lucy because she can carry on his legacy when he dies. If he cannot rescue her, his existence cannot continue. In the same way that the Magistrate’s wholeness depends on the woman’s, David’s existence
depends on his daughter’s. The guilt he experiences, then, stems from the natural feeling of not being able to save his daughter, but more complexly, it comes from the idea that if the rape alters Lucy’s existence, his chance at completing his own existence dies. He knows he cannot protect Lucy physically, so all he can do is try to protect her emotions, try to keep harmful thoughts away. If he can do this, he ensures that nothing changes, and he alleviates his own guilt and saves himself. He can put the attack behind them and return to normal. The rape is “Lucy’s secret” but it is “his disgrace” (109). Ultimately he is powerless in trying to heal her because Lucy is not a child anymore; like the Magistrate’s barbarian woman who controls her own story, Lucy steals control of her own existence from her father. His words no longer seem to help her. The result is that, just as the Magistrate is unable to rescue the woman and, consequently, is unable to rescue himself, David cannot rescue his existence because he cannot save Lucy.

He must turn to something else in order to fill the emptiness he feels, which has grown even stronger since the attack. “Here he is losing himself day by day” (121). He turns to wanting to know the whole truth of what happened to Lucy during the attack, for, much like the Magistrate, the truth will give him the answers he needs to close this ugly chapter of his life and move on. While finding the truth gives David new purpose, a new way to fill his emptiness and create closure, at the same time it bonds him to the old ideas of the empire and further widens the gap between him and Lucy. Soon after the attack, Lucy says to him, “‘You tell what happened to you, I tell what happened to me’” (99). Though hers and her father’s stories are intertwined, Lucy realizes the importance of keeping their accounts separate. Through her insistence, she continues to usurp control from David, but she also continues her representation of the postcolonial world because
she understands that, as a victim, she should tell her own story. Lucy’s statement is symbolic. The perpetrators of colonization cannot accurately tell the truth nor even see it as the victims see it, and Lucy understands this. David does not; he wants the whole story told, not because it will help Lucy to heal, but because he wants retribution for the attack. His desire is ironic considering his lack of cooperation with the university committee when the members wanted him to tell his version of the story of his affair. The truth, it seems, is important only when it is he who is trying to discover it; that way he can be in control of the truth. As discussed in the previous chapter, one of the goals of the South African TRC was to expose the truth of the apartheid-era atrocities in order that both victims and perpetrators could work toward progress through restorative justice rather than punishment of the perpetrators. As Troy Urquhart argues, however, “one of the troubling assumptions of the TRC’s restorative justice [is]: the truly oppressed cannot speak for themselves” because, he argues, they lack a history of their own, and it is only through an interpreter that their stories can be heard (paragraphs 7, 8). What happens when the colonizing interpreter tells the story of the colonized, though, is that he or she manipulates the voices to protect the interests of the state (paragraph 2). Lucy seems to know about the possible manipulation of her story, so she controls it herself. What is particularly interesting is that the text reinforces David’s position as the ruler by portraying Lucy as the Other. This notion can be seen by looking at the parallels between David and the Magistrate and their treatment of Lucy and the native people, respectively. As discussed earlier, the Magistrate attempts to tell the stories of the native people from the writing on the poplar slips. Because he does not know the truth of what the writing says, he misrepresents the subaltern even if his intentions are genuinely good. Although
David respects Lucy's wish and will not tell her story to the police, he does implore her repeatedly to tell what happened to her, and he fills in the blanks of her motives for not telling. In this way, he indeed tells her story for her, making her the Other and him a continuation of the Magistrate. Trying to discern Lucy's motives for staying silent, he asks, "Do you hope you can expiate the crimes of the past by suffering in the present?" (112). At this point, he asks a question, leaving the possibility that he does not know the answer and genuinely wishes to hear her explanation. On another occasion, though, he insists he knows her motives, saying, "You want to make up for the wrongs of the past, but this is not the way to do it" (133). In this interrogation, he strikes another comparison to the Magistrate, this time in the latter's probing of the barbarian woman during his search for the truth of her torture. David has advanced some from the place of the Magistrate as he does not let his concern about Lucy consume him—he still pursues other interests—but he still will not respect Lucy's decision to let her control her circumstances, making him appear inflexible and set firmly in his ways and reaffirming his position as the hegemonic figure. And even though Lucy is not strictly the Other, she symbolizes the servant and David symbolizes the master in Hegel's dialectic. Lucy's refusal to tell her story is a failure to reciprocate in the relationship, leaving David unrecognizable in his existence.

Not only does he think that telling the truth will begin to solve his and Lucy's problems, but David thinks that if the rape is kept a secret, it will be a triumph for the violators. As a member of the power group, he struggles with the idea of his side losing control and the other side winning, but by refusing to listen to Lucy's wish to tell her own story, David is not able to create a new identity for himself. Refusing to change keeps
him cemented in the past. He imagines the attackers thinking the woman they raped is "too ashamed to tell, and they will chuckle luxuriously, recollecting their exploit. Is Lucy prepared to concede them that victory?" (110). According to David, Lucy loses even more of herself if she lets her attackers escape because they will have the satisfaction of reminiscing about the act; they will win the power struggle. He sees the conflict as one that of course affects his own family deeply, especially Lucy, but he also sees that this is a conflict being fought on a larger scale among the races, not just between himself and his daughter, and their attackers. Their personal attack is part of "a new world they live in" (117), a common occurrence in his mind. If he allows Lucy to move on without retribution, then he allows all formerly colonized people to gain power over him. His symbolic view of the attack comes to a head when he confronts Lucy once again about why she does not tell the police the entire story. Lucy replies, "as far as I am concerned, what happened to me is a purely private matter. In another time, in another place it might be held to be a public matter. But in this place, at this time, it is not" (112). Lucy understands that David and the generation he represents want to project every violent incident onto a larger stage, that they have the ability to turn the incident into a stereotypical one, one that would become an example of why things must not change. If the oppressed gain equality, the oppressors lose control. David says, "Vengeance is like a fire. The more it devours, the hungrier it gets" (112). He assumes that Lucy’s rapists were attempting to avenge all the wrongs that had been done to their people, and while this might be true, he is projecting his own theory onto them. In essence, he is again speaking for the victims of colonization. He tells Lucy that the act "was history speaking through them….A history of wrong. Think of it that way, if it helps. It may have seemed
personal, but it wasn’t. It came down from the ancestors’” (156). But this is the colonizer’s mentality and not Lucy’s. She understands that if the truth is told, if she continues to perpetuate stories of violence, it will hurt the process of reconciliation. Lucy Valerie Graham, in a comparison of Lucy’s rape and what she argues is David’s rape of Melanie, says Lucy’s story should be told at some point in the narrative structure because otherwise she is silenced, but she also acknowledges that Lucy’s “refusal to report the crime may represent a rather extreme refusal to play a part in a history of oppression” (439). To Lucy, this act was an isolated one, specific to her and not one that should be generalized to the larger population, for that placement in a larger context would position her as one of the oppressors. The fact that David wants her story told amounts to an exploitation for the purpose of retaining power over black South Africans, and he cannot possibly remain significant in his new world or define himself in this new context if he wants to hold on to the power of the hegemony.

While Lucy is confused about what exactly she wants to accomplish by keeping the truth to herself, the closest she comes to voicing her goal is when she tells David that the attackers have “marked” her, a concept David cannot understand. To David, marking Lucy means that her violators have won; they have marked her with their version of the truth, just as so many perpetrators of colonization did to their victims. Michael Valdez Moses argues in an article that the fundamental difference between a supposedly civilized people and a supposedly barbaric people is that the civilized people have a written history. He says that in Waiting for the Barbarians, “the barbarian Other generally appears in the novel as a blank slip onto which the Empire engraves itself; that is, the Empire gives itself form by writing on its subjects” (120). This is what the Empire does
to the barbarian woman in that novel, defines themselves by leaving their mark on her and owning her, and now Lucy’s attackers have done the same thing to her. She understands this action and is willing to accept it, whereas David—even though he also understands the implication—knows that it symbolizes a loss of power for him. Lucy continues on, saying, “what if that is the price one has to pay for staying on? Perhaps that is how they look at it; perhaps that is how I should look at it too. They see me as owing something’’ (158). Obviously, the process of reconciliation is a complicated one. It is not customary for Lucy to keep her rape a secret. Graham contends, “Lucy’s refusal to speak about her experience certainly does not empower her and means that her story belongs to her rapists” (442), but the text shows her as understanding a larger purpose in her silence, a price she has to pay for the goal of peace between the races. It is a price she seems willing to pay. So, in fact, she does concede the “victory” because she represents that larger purpose. She understands that, in order to achieve reconciliation, colonizers have to give up their power. David, tied to old thinking, sees the case in black and white. He wants everything out in the open so he can punish the criminals, get closure, and win the victory. It is that simple. What David fails to realize is that exposing the truth will not help Lucy to heal, especially if it contradicts her wishes. He has not accomplished anything in his interrogation of his daughter in his search for truth. What he has accomplished is that he has pushed the new purpose that she represents farther away from his ideas and has isolated himself even more. He has further declared his place as the representative colonizer, and he has failed to change his identity.

David’s relationship with his daughter has failed at this point because it has forced his ideas to move farther away from hers and solidified his position as a member
of the hegemony. A healed relationship with her would help him to fill the emptiness he possesses, thereby defining him as something new, but this does not happen because of his desire to find out the truth of the attack and control Lucy’s story. Consequently, David must continue his search for completion in a different area. He brings up the subject of his writing throughout the narrative, and though he neglects it during the time of the attack and immediately afterwards, he turns to it for refuge when he is not making progress with Lucy. He sees his conceived opera about the English poet Byron’s time in Italy as “just a hobby” (189), but eventually “[i]t consumes him night and day” (214). He knows it is much more than a way to fill his time. Because of its ties to his own predicament, his writing becomes a way for him to fill his emptiness. It gives him significance, he thinks. David’s opera about Byron is the equivalent of the Magistrate’s record of his time on the remote outpost of the Empire and Magda’s attempts at gaining recognition to help her define her life. Unfortunately, David’s attempts are not more fruitful than those of the other protagonists, as the writing only confirms for us what we already know of him: he is a part of the colonial past, and he is unwilling to change at this time despite his desire for something fulfilling in his life. Paradoxically, while he attempts to alter his identity by writing, the subject of the opera and his thoughts about it keep him firmly in his past.

David’s decision to write the opera stems from his fascination with Byron, but also his own connections to Byron’s ideals and his story; the connections, however, do not help David to move forward. In fact, his emptiness persists because of them. In the comparisons between David and Lord Byron, Coetzee’s novel utilizes Julia Kristeva’s idea of intertextuality to comment on David’s position as representative colonizer. The
concept says that writers unconsciously insert history, society, or other texts into their narratives, and therefore comment on their own societal contexts (Kristeva 39). The concept that influences Coetzee’s writing here is the use of Lord Byron and, more specifically, the figure of the Byronic hero. David displays many characteristics of the Byronic hero, the most important being isolation from society and dedication to his identity, characteristics David shows in his refusal to either inject himself into current society or better himself for the sake of wholeness. In his comprehensive study of the Byronic hero, Peter Thorslev argues that one of the images of the hero that influenced Byron’s writing is the Hero of Sensibility, characterized by, among other things, “prolonged, intense, and sometimes even morbid self-analysis, especially of his emotional states.” Many of this figure’s characteristics “stem from his peculiar psychic malady of Weltschmerz: the tension in his personality that results from the conflict of two contradictory drives, one toward total commitment, toward loss of self in a vision of absolutes, the other toward a skeptical and even aggressive assertion of self in a world which remains external and even alien” (141). The two sides of the conflict approximate David’s predicament in his decolonized world. Although his is not a world of absolutes, reconciliation between colonizer and colonized progresses toward an ideal. If David works toward this ideal, his Byronic hero tells him he will lose his identity. David does not fit the mold of the Hero of Sensibility exactly—Byronic heroes rarely fit the definition completely—but he certainly falls toward the latter side of this personal conflict, toward following his own nature and remaining isolated in his world.

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9 In the general definition, Weltschmerz refers to a depression one feels when comparing the ideal state of the world to its actual state. Definitions of the term that include references to the Romantic literary period discuss this concept in relation to a loss of personal freedom.
Even before he begins working on the opera, David presents the case for aggressive self-identification by invoking Byron. In comparing himself to the poet, he attempts justification for his somewhat illicit behavior and for his right to remain unchanged. The result, consequently, is that he does not alter his identity through working with Byron. Early on, before he even begins writing, he tells Melanie that Byron “went to Italy to escape a scandal” and that the English believed “the Italians were still in touch with their natures. Less hemmed in by convention, more passionate” (15).

Besides the obvious similarity between Byron and David, who will flee to the country to escape his scandal, another similarity emerges. David implies that Byron wanted to get back to his nature in Italy, an idea David often champions for himself in his desire to remain unaltered in his identity, despite his dissatisfaction with it. He reiterates the idea of ‘getting back to nature’ with Lucy. Trying to explain to Lucy why he embarked on the affair with Melanie, he relays the story of a neighbor’s dog—again, comparing himself to an animal, as he did before with the thought of whether or not he should be castrated—saying that the neighbors beat the dog every time he pursued a female. Using the dog as an example of why he cannot change, he says, “the poor dog had begun to hate its own nature” (90). Just as before when he says he would rather be put up against a wall and shot than be reformed, he sees his own scandal and Byron’s as acts of nature, a result of destiny rather than one of conscious choice. After all, during his affair with Melanie, David was a “servant of Eros,” not even in control of his own body and mind. Thus, writing about Byron helps David to maintain his nature, not alter his identity in any way. He identifies with Byron and the ideals the poet represents. David sees his work with
Byron as giving him purpose, a way for him to “see what he is worth” (121), but really it is merely keeping him connected with his own established identity, that of the ruler.

Because he cannot alter his identity through his comparisons with Byron, David must remain outside of his society. If he remains unchanged, he cannot fit into a decolonized society because he will continue to represent old thinking, that which agrees with Byron, who suggests that humans have little control over the way they act because they are products of nature and fate. David’s work with Byron might boost his esteem regarding his basic nature, but it pushes him further and further out of his society. Ironically, he says Byron “‘found himself conflated with his own poetic creations’” (31), which is what David does with the poet. When he presents Byron’s poem “Lara” to his class, he discusses the figure of Lucifer in the poem, and it is easy to see that both Byron and David meld themselves to that figure, a figure who is “‘exactly what he calls himself: a thing, that is, a monster...[I]t will not be possible to love him, not in the deeper, more human sense of the word. He will be condemned to solitude’” (34). This statement echoes back to the idea of maintaining one’s own nature for the purpose of preserving one’s self. Just as the neighbor’s dog cannot alter its nature, no one would expect Lucifer to alter his; David argues that he should not be forced to change either because any mandated change would unnaturally and fundamentally change his identity. The passage, however, also forces David to remain outside of his society. Like Lucifer, if David remains unchanged, a monster that is unrecognizable, he will be condemned to solitude. With David as the outcast, as the Byronic hero often is, he becomes nonexistent, and as it was discussed earlier, David wants his legacy to continue through Lucy. Therefore, he must remain relevant.
David does not want to disappear into nonexistence, so he must see his work through to an end. When he finally begins his work on the opera, however, "[a]ll he can grasp of it are fragments. The first words of the first act still resist him; the first notes remain as elusive as wisps of smoke. Sometimes he fears that the characters in the story...are beginning to fade away" (141). In an interesting irony, Byron's ideals, which were so clear to David before, are not allowing him to see his opera through to fruition. Byron, it seems, is not a useful muse. David identified with Byron's personal story and his work, but the poet's ideals are fading away. This suggests that even though David strongly exhibits the characteristics of the Byronic hero discussed above, these ideals lose relevance when he carries them into his work. With this failure, then, the text seems to be saying that the ideals of the Byronic hero—his attachment to his instinct and his position outside of society—are dangerous in a decolonized place. In David's world, the oppressors must be willing to adjust in order to achieve reconciliation, but David is unwilling to separate himself from his colonizer's identity to fit into the new society, though it is clear from his thoughts of slipping identity that he is missing something in his life. While it is true that David is able to retrieve the characters of his opera from the shadows and write a great deal of the work, at the end of the novel he realizes his failures in filling his emptiness and cementing his legacy. "Byron in Italy is going nowhere. There is no action, no development, just a long, halting cantilena hurled by Teresa into the empty air." This is David's creation which is supposed to identify him and represent his "triumphant [return] to society" (214). Again, his Byronic hero status is evident. He has been on the periphery of society, not only because of his disgrace in his profession, but also because of his position as colonizer. Here, he understands the ramifications of not
succeeding in his work. If he fails, he does not join society, and he ceases to exist because he will go unrecognized as a member. This is similar to his situation with Lucy. If he cannot rescue his daughter from the aftermath of her attack, his own legacy disappears. He understands the significance of his work, but it remains purposeless and empty. “It has become the kind of work a sleepwalker might write” (214). It will do nothing to help David to define himself in a new context.

David now believes he has nothing of significance to leave behind because his work does not fit into a postcolonial society. He hopes to offer a “single authentic note of immortal longing” (214), but does not really expect anyone to recognize it, and he might be right. No one in his time and place will see his work as remarkable. His work marks him as a member of the hegemony because Lord Byron’s attachment with one’s own nature epitomizes a Western history. Western society has touted the idea that Europeans are inherently civilized and non-Europeans inherently savage, each group following its own nature. This idea is decidedly antiquated, and rightly so, in a postcolonial society. Likewise, the Byronic hero’s characteristic of remaining outside of society for the purpose of preserving identity does not work in the postcolonial world. It is a clinging to the old idea of one’s nature. The Byronic hero must alter his existence in order to remain relevant, just as colonizers must alter their identity to fit into the new society where they are no longer superior to those they colonized. The Byronic hero, therefore, loses relevance if he refuses to adapt, and if David clings to this ideal, he will lose his chance at a new identity and his place in his new society. Thorslev writes that when the Hero of Sensibility passes through the Romantic tradition and “survives into the Victorian age...he survives only as a solitary and sensitive sufferer: with the loss of his titanic
passions, his pride, and his certainty of self-identity, he loses also his status as hero” (187). Strangely, this is the ideal for which David should strive. It is a natural progression; he must lose his certainty of self-identity so he can make himself relevant in his society. True, he will lose his ‘hero’ status, but it will be for the sake of equality between the races. The colonial period had a place for Romantic heroes, but they are part of the past. Even David realizes Western culture’s insignificance when he sees three boys watching him playing his banjo and singing. From his perspective, he wonders, “How can he ever explain to them, to their parents, to D Village, what Teresa and her lover have done to deserve being brought back to this world?” (212). He knows these characters hold no relevance to his current world.

If his work loses significance, so does David, but what he is truly leaving behind—his daughter and her representation of postcolonialism—is much more significant, though he does not realize it. When he first arrives at Lucy’s farm, David acknowledges his legacy when he thinks of Lucy. He sees her as “[a] solid woman, embedded in her new life. Good! If this is to be what he leaves behind—this daughter, this woman—then he does not have to be ashamed” (62). Like the admiration he privately showed for Lucy and her knowledge of farm life, he shows a pride here for his daughter and, consequently, the future because of her representation of it. Just as quickly, though, he dismisses the sentiment as he tells Lucy the reason he wants to write the opera, saying, “‘One wants to leave something behind. Or at least a man wants to leave something behind’” (63). He dismisses fatherhood as more “abstract” than motherhood, essentially detaching himself from his legacy of his daughter and the ideas of decolonization Lucy represents. Again, he marks himself as a representative of the
hegemony. When Lucy announces that she is pregnant, David pushes further against the future as he hints that she should terminate the pregnancy. He shows himself unwilling to accept the child because of how it was conceived, but more important, he shows again that he rejects the change that the baby would symbolize, a move toward uniting the races. What better way to combat racism than to blur the line between black and white? Instead of seeing the promise of the reconciliation that the child symbolizes, though, David sees his bloodline running out, “like water dribbling into the earth…[E]verything is changed, utterly changed!” (199), a thought David cannot tolerate because it would mean he could not identify himself as a whole being. Just as his obsession with finding the truth leads to his deteriorating relationship with Lucy, his attachment to the past and his unwillingness to change lead to David seeing himself as unable to make his mark on society. He is left in the Byronic hero position of alienation from his society. All of these character flaws continue to reinforce his position as the representative colonizer. Furthermore, they work against his desire for wholeness.

With his turbulent relationship with Lucy and his aimless opera, David has one final chance to create a new existence for himself, this time in the animal clinic with his care of the sick and unwanted dogs. This endeavor produces David’s greatest achievement in his search of self and represents his best effort at leaving behind his oppressor’s identity for one that can position him in his unique time and place. His work with the dogs teaches him how to love and let go, allowing his hold on Lucy and the past to loosen, but he takes a while to get there. As we have seen, David is consistently resistant to bettering himself, but there have been subtle indications that he would eventually see the necessity of it: his admiration for Lucy’s comfort in country life and
his acknowledgement at one point that she would be a good symbol of his legacy. His
Byron opera works against him as it forces him to strengthen his hold on his identity, and
the attack, understandably, causes him to lose sight of his purpose, but his work with
animals refocuses him and provides the final push toward understanding the importance
of reconciliation.

At first his view of animal welfare and its workers is consistent with his stubborn
attitude. He seems to see in the caregivers an ulterior motive, saying that they ""'are a bit
like Christians of a certain kind. Everyone is so cheerful and well-intentioned that after a
while you itch to go off and do some raping and pillaging. Or to kick a cat’’ (73). He is
unsympathetic toward animals and animal care workers, to say the least. His reaction is
not simply indifference, but it carries a message of violence, notable considering that
raping and pillaging are what happen to him and Lucy later. He scorns the practice of
caring so much for animals because he thinks people could do better things with their
time, whereas Lucy sees the care of animals as a way to foster peace, a way ""'[t]o share
some of our human privilege with the beasts. I don’t want to come back in another
existence as a dog or a pig and have to live as dogs or pigs live under us’’” (74). David
doubts that anyone can work for peace and be successful, so his narrow view is that these
workers do this out of fear of retribution in a next life. It is a bit unfair to compare Lucy
or Bev’s work with the dogs as symbolic of the reconciliation process between
perpetrators and victims of colonization because, as Jane Poyner argues, it “could be
construed as inappropriate.” In her study of the allegorical features of Disgrace, however,
she concludes that in the novel, “rather than conflating human rights abuses with the
maltreatment of animals, Coetzee compares their suffering” (73). This notion is similar to
what Coetzee expresses in his metafictional story *The Lives of Animals*, delivered as a paper at Princeton University. In it, the main character, Elizabeth Costello, delivers a speech in which she compares the human rights abuses during World War II to factory farm animal treatment during our time, a seemingly absurd idea, but one for which she makes a strong case because she “suggests that animals and humans have the common bond of ‘beings’” (Poyner 73). One line of logic Elizabeth uses to argue this stems from the belief that humans have more rights because of the ability to reason, putting humans closer than animals to God’s likeness. Elizabeth Costello questions, then, the rights of humans who have differing levels of reasoning. Is the highly intelligent human “‘closer to God because his mind...[is] at one...with the being of reason?’” (24). Instead of differing rights among beings, therefore, she concludes “that there is a sense of community between all species, and that if we can conceptualize death,...we can imagine ourselves as animals” (Poyner 73). Thus, Lucy and Bev’s care of animals can be seen as working toward peace and easing the suffering of those who have been oppressed, much the way one would work toward reconciliation. Furthermore, if David can learn to imagine the suffering of animals, he can understand the suffering of victims of colonization and begin to separate himself from his past. During his introduction to Bev’s work, though, David does not see it this way, so he remains closed to the prospect of peace.

Fairly quickly, however, David begins to identify with the dogs and other animals no one wants, helping him to learn sympathy and internalize their suffering. He asks Bev if, unlike the animals she euthanizes, she still has a use for him after finding out about his state of disgrace (85). Just as he identified earlier with Byron’s ostracized Lucifer, David implies now that he is unwanted, and this feeling begins to give him insight into the
feelings of the animals. His insight turns into sympathy when, inexplicably to him, he wants to save the two sheep Petrus has bought for slaughtering. At first the bleating of the sheep only aggravates him (123), but then they become a way for David to define his purpose. He does not understand why “[a] bond seems to have come into existence between himself and the two Persians,” but just as the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* looks for answers in the poplar slips, the woman’s scars, and his dreams, David looks for answers from these sheep. “He stands before them, under the sun, waiting for the buzz in his mind to settle, waiting for a sign” (126). His care of them clears his mind and gives him purpose, unlike his search for the truth of Lucy’s rape or his work on the opera, which do not fulfill him at all. While waiting for the sign, he thinks of Bev’s care of animals and questions his own ability to relate to them. He wonders, “How does she get it right, this communion with animals? Some trick he does not have” (126). In Bev, David recognizes a quality he now wants. Up to this point, he has rejected the idea of change, but these sheep and the thought of Bev’s care of animals make him think that change is necessary if he wants to fit into his daughter’s world. His care for the animals separates him from the hegemony. As a practice, colonizers not only conquered people and land in Africa, but also, according to Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin in an article discussing Europeans’ impact on Africa’s people and their environment, were the cause of “casual or systematic slaughter of indigenous animals, and the introduction of European crops and livestock…thereby damaging established ecosystems, reducing soil fertility, or even, as in the case of the Sahara, resulting in desertification” (1). If this practice is the established tradition, then David is stepping out of his own history to work toward reestablishing a respect for animals and their
relationship to human society. Again, he does not comprehend his emotions about the sheep, but he knows there is some meaning in them. He continues to question the necessity of personal growth and the idea of going against one’s nature, an idea that was so important to him in his thinking about Byron. He wonders, “Do I have to change?...Do I have to become like Bev Shaw?” (126). But shortly after this resistance, he tells Lucy of his desire to stay away from Petrus’s party, where the sheep will be served, showing he has begun to change, to contemplate the plight of other beings. He is now thinking of the care of suffering things and seeing purpose in it.

If David can begin to see purpose in his care of animals, if he can begin to fill in his feelings of emptiness, then he can start to release his hold on Lucy and the past, and, in the process, break away from his identity with the oppressive group. These are tall orders, but they are what he begins working toward in the final pages of the novel when he forms a bond with an unwanted dog. In an article that discusses how David comes to see himself as an integral part of the co-existence between humans and animals, Carrol Clarkson talks about David’s opera in relation to this particular dog. David acknowledges that his work will never be heard, but he hopes, as discussed earlier, that “a single authentic note of immortal longing” will ring out (214). Clarkson argues that this “single note, for a fleeting moment, seems on the brink of tapping into a unity of all physical existence,” and she notes, quoting the text, “‘the dog sits up, cocks its head, listens. When he hums Teresa’s line…the dog smacks its lips and seems on the point of singing too, or howling’” (84). David has bonded his existence to the existence of the dog. He comes to the realization that his work with Bryon is no longer significant unless he can infuse a part of his new identity into it. His final thought on the opera has him wondering if he
could “bring a dog into the piece, allow it to loose its own lament to the heavens between the strophes of lovelorn Teresa’s?” (215). The sympathy the dog teaches David finds its way into the makeup of a new identity. This dog loves him and gives him purpose; it is more than love, in fact because “the dog would die for him, he knows” (215). The meticulous care David has shown in taking the animals to the incinerator and now the love from this particular dog have given him purpose and have allowed him to separate himself from his past. They have also given him perspective on Lucy and the new thinking she represents. After establishing David’s sympathy for animals, Coetzee juxtaposes the scene with David’s new view of Lucy, showing the effect of his work with the dogs on other aspects of his life. Just as the dog squeezed its way into the Byron opera, David’s sympathy for animals permits him to see Lucy differently as well. She is now:

solid in her existence, more solid than he has ever been. With luck she will last a long time, long beyond him. When he is dead she will, with luck, still be here doing her ordinary tasks among the flowerbeds. And from within her will have issued another existence, that with luck will be just as solid, just as long-lasting. So it will go on, a line of existences in which his share, his gift, will grow inexorably less and less, till it may as well be forgotten. (217)

He knows that the colonizer’s ideas that he represents will symbolically die with him, and Lucy’s practices of healing will last. In David, the text, thus, suggests an acknowledgement of the failings of old thinking, recognition that ideas of oppression, racism, and guilt will someday be forgotten, as the bloodlines of colonizers fade away or are united with African bloodlines. David feels these accomplishments will only happen “with luck.” He still does not see that equality is accomplished through hard work and care. David is not cured, but from his fear of change and his obsession with the past, he
has made great progress, much more so than Magda from *In the Heart of the Country* or the Magistrate from *Waiting for the Barbarians*. When killing the animals, David does not think of ulterior motives for helping them; “he no longer has difficulty in calling [his attention to them] by its proper name: love” (219). He has learned to begin working for peace, and in his surrendering of the dog with which he has formed a bond, he shows he has also let go of Lucy. He will now allow her to live her own life. David accepts her silence. He is prepared for “a new footing, a new start” (218), with his daughter, but also with his postcolonial world. He acknowledges her representation of a postcolonial society. All of these successes prove that he has begun to break away from his hegemonic identity and has created a new purpose for himself, one that involves love for other living beings and hope for a peaceful future.
CONCLUSION

In his 1987 Jerusalem Prize acceptance speech, J.M. Coetzee wrote:

The masters, in South Africa, form a closed hereditary caste. Everyone born with a white skin is born into the caste. Since there is no way of escaping the skin you are born with (can the leopard change its spots?), you cannot resign from the caste. You can imagine resigning, you can perform a symbolic resignation, but, short of shaking the dust of the country off your feet, there is no way of actually doing it. (Doubling 96)

Coetzee continues, discussing the “unfreedom” of the master caste because of the master’s dependence on the slave. He concludes that the failure of the master caste is its inability to love. White South Africans might talk about love, but until they are able to accept black South Africans as equal human beings who possess the right of equal freedom, their words about love are meaningless (97). He also shares this observation: “The deformed and stunted relations between human beings that were created under colonialism and exacerbated under what is loosely called apartheid have their psychic representation in a deformed and stunted inner life” (98).

This deformed and stunted inner life describes Coetzee’s main characters in the three novels discussed here. Their existence in the oppressive group makes them incomplete, and despite what Coetzee says about how they are unable to break out of their white skin and separate themselves from their past, his texts show these characters trying to do just that. Separating themselves from their master caste is the only way they can fully define themselves, but they cannot achieve separation without accepting the
oppressed as equal and whole. According to Memmi, the colonizers must love the colonized and receive love in return. None of the main characters in the novels reaches this point. Magda’s relationships with her father and the servants embody violence and power rather than love. She never gains separation from her father or equality and friendship with the servants. She remains attached to the legacy of her people despite her desire to escape it. The Magistrate, while he does not turn to violence, uses his relationship with the woman to promote his own healing rather than hers or theirs together. His rebellion against the Empire proves futile, and he continues working as an integral part of the oppressive group. David makes the most progress, as he is able to some degree to let go of his past. Though he does not achieve reconciliation with the oppressed, he begins the process when he finds love within himself for the animals and acceptance of his daughter’s decisions and his future grandchild. Coetzee delivered his speech quoted above when colonization in South Africa was still a reality, but he wrote Disgrace when the country was attempting to bury its ugly past and move on. David represents what is possible in a decolonized place. He has not been able to shed his white skin, but he becomes more accepting of the idea of equality between perpetrator and victim and more willing to change. In the colonial narrative of Coetzee’s novels, then, the texts suggest that even though colonizers are fundamentally incomplete because of their inability to define themselves as anything other than master, if they can work toward reconciliation with the colonized, they can begin to separate themselves from their past and possibly, eventually, begin to create a new identity for themselves. The key, it seems, is to achieve peace with others to achieve peace within themselves.
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