

J.M. Coetzee's *Dusklands*: The Meaning of Suffering

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Summary

With strong reference to the theoretical work of Gilles Deleuze, Antonin Artaud, and Friedrich Nietzsche, this article aims to understand J.M. Coetzee's *Dusklands* ([1974]1998) as a novel of relations. From the reader's initial difficulty in trying to reconcile the seemingly divergent constitutive narratives to its exploration of the (failed) relationships between subject and object, Self and Other, and the corporeality of the body and the incorporeality of the mind, *Dusklands* demands that the reader pay close attention to the sets of associations and connections that it establishes. And it is in this context that this article argues that *Dusklands* presents the narratives of two men who begin to experience the failure of such fundamental relationships: as they begin to uncontrollably oscillate between the ontological states of the known-subject and the incomprehensible-Other. Under such conditions, an analysis of the relationship between the body and the "event" of pain that circulates upon it reveals that this complex state of affairs is highly detrimental to the integrity of the philosophical principles of the Enlightenment that underscored the structural imperatives of European colonial discourse. Indeed, it seems certain that without the guarantee of a conceptual Other with which to construct world reality, the claim to "truth" maintained by scientific rationality begins to stutter.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel beoog om J.M. Coetzee se *Dusklands* ([1974]1998) te verstaan as 'n roman van relasies. Dit steun sterk op verwysings na die teoretiese werk van Gilles Deleuze, Antonin Artaud en Friedrich Nietzsche. Van die probleme wat die leser aanvanklik ondervind om die oënskynlik uiteenlopende samestellende (konstitutiewe) narratiewe te versoen, tot by sy verkenning van die (mislukte) verhoudings tussen subjek en objek, Self en Ander, die lyflikheid van die liggaam en die onlyflikheid van die gees, eis *Dusklands* van die leser om noukeurig aandag te gee aan die stelle assosiasies en verbintenisse wat gestig word. Binne hierdie konteks word in hierdie artikel aangevoer dat *Dusklands* die narratiewe aanbied van twee mans wat die ontoereikendheid van sulke fundamentele relasies begin beleef terwyl hulle onbeheerbaar begin ossileer tussen twee ontologiese state: dié van die kenbare/bekende-subjek en die onkenbare-Ander. In sulke omstandighede bring 'n ontleding van die verhouding tussen die liggaam en die "gebeurtenis" van pyn wat daarin/daarop sirkuleer aan die lig dat hierdie komplekse gegewe uiters nadelig inwerk op die integriteit van die filosofiese beginsels van die Verligting wat die strukturele imperatiewe van die Europese koloniale diskoers versterk het. Dit lyk inderdaad asof dit onafwendbaar is dat die aanspraak op "waarheid" wat deur wetenskaplike rasionaliteit in stand gehou word, sal begin verkrummel indien daar geen waarborg is van 'n konseptuele Ander waarmee 'n wêreldwerklikheid

gekonstrueer kan word nie.

The father cannot be a benign father until his sons have knelt before his wand. The plotting of the sons against the father must cease. They must kneel with hearts bathed in obedience. When the sons know obedience they will be able to sleep.

(Coetzee 1998: 26-27)

J.M. Coetzee's *Dusklands* is comprised of two major narratives: the narrative of Eugene Dawn, twentieth-century mythographer and contributor to an American Department of Defense commissioned report on the potential successes of various propaganda techniques in the theatre of Vietnam; and the narrative of Jacobus Coetzee, an eighteenth-century explorer and elephant hunter. However, it is the impression of disparity given by the contrasting geographical locations, eras, and characters of these two narratives that have led some to propose that *Dusklands* is best read as two novellas rather than a single novel. Yet, I want to demonstrate in this paper that how one chooses to read *Dusklands* – as either a single novel or two novellas – impacts greatly on the integrity of the discussions of colonialism and imperialism that can be drawn from the text. I want to suggest that Coetzee has crafted *Dusklands* as a single novel, and that the complex composition of the novel witnessed in the difficult conceptual relationship between the narrative of Eugene Dawn and the narrative of Jacobus Coetzee is a relationship that Coetzee wants the reader to consider most seriously. For, this complex relationship between the constitutive narratives of *Dusklands* informs the other relationships that present themselves in the text.

Certainly, *Dusklands* is a novel of relations. Eugene Dawn poses the imperial encounter between America and Vietnam in terms of the conceptual relationship between subject and object, Self and Other, the corporeality of the body and the incorporeality of the mind. Similarly, Jacobus Coetzee exposes the relationships of domination that exist between the Boer, the Hottentot, and the Bushman in the colonial encounter of eighteenth-century South Africa. As such, both narratives are articulations of the economy of power found in the timeless metaphorical relationship of the father and son. Indeed, given the eternal wax and wane of the operation of power one can begin to chart some well-recognised patterns of power in *Dusklands*. From Dawn's realisation that their "nightmare was that since whatever we reached for slipped like smoke through our fingers, we did not exist" (Coetzee 1998: 17), to Jacobus's fear that "not only my sojourn among the Namaqua but all my life might be a dream ... a universe of which I the Dreamer was sole inhabitant" (p. 78), relationships in Coetzee's novel

seem to take shape in order to act as a means of self-determination. The claim, then, is simple: to know oneself one need only recognise what one is not.

But, this paper argues that the relationships presented in *Dusklands* compromise the integrity of this logic of self-determination. For it seems Coetzee's novel encourages the reader to consider these relationships existing in the singular individual. The ramification of this unique conceptualisation of the Self is highly significant to the imperial and colonial projects of the West. Clearly, the imperial powers of the West must be able to differentiate themselves from the conceptual Other in order to truly dominate and control territories and peoples. As Hélène Cixous makes clear in her critique of History:

everything throughout the centuries depends on the distinction between the Selfsame, the ownself ... and that which limits it ... the "other". What is the "Other"? If it is truly the "other", there is nothing to say; it cannot be theorized. The "other" escapes me. It is elsewhere, outside: absolutely other ... the reduction of a "person" to a "nobody" to the position of "other" – the inexorable plot of racism. There has to be some "other" – no master without a slave, no economico-political power without exploitation.

(Cixous in Cixous & Clément 1986: 70-71)

However, it seems Coetzee wants the reader to consider what happens when this reliable dialectic begins to fail. What if the Other cannot be located outside of the individual? What if there is no external Other with which to define the Self? Under such conditions, I want to argue that *Dusklands* presents the narratives of two men who begin to experience themselves uncontrollably oscillating between the ontological states of the known-subject and the incomprehensible-Other: the Self perceived as a continuum of possible states and written as the subject-as-event. Moreover, I want to suggest that the consequence of this complex state of affairs is highly detrimental to the integrity of the philosophical principles of the Enlightenment that underwrote the structural imperatives of European colonial discourse. Indeed, it seems certain that without the guarantee of a conceptual Other with which to construct world reality, the claim to "truth" maintained by scientific rationality begins to stutter.

It is in the face of this compromised access to the truth of the real that the determining structures of subjectification are deployed most vigorously through imperial and colonial discourse. For example, under the entry of "victor" in his Department of Defense report, Dawn writes of the necessity to crush native insurrection in Vietnam. It is a call for a state of total domination based on both interpretations of the term subjectification. Firstly, it is a call for an irresistible violence to be meted out upon the body

of the Vietnamese population in order to pacify every kind of resistance; and, secondly, it is a call to condition the Vietnamese body by bringing it into the American/Western “family” of the selfsame: to transform the incomprehensible *Other* into the known value of *Subject* by means of identification through representation to become “the sons” of the imperial father. However, my final point is that while such calls recognise the essential quality of the physical body in the processes of subjectification, the suffering that results from the violence meted out upon the subjectified body serves only to compromise further the veracity and authority of imperial/colonial discourse.

Husserl writes, the Enlightenment promised

a superior survey of the world ... unfettered by myth and the whole tradition: universal knowledge, absolutely free from prejudice, of the world and man, ultimately recognising in the world its inherent reason and teleology and its highest principle, God.

(Husserl 1970: 7)

Thus the aim of the Enlightenment, as Husserl understood, was never to replace myth and tradition blindly, but rather to build knowledge out of independent enquiry and criticism that contested such an intuitive knowledge on every level (Husserl 1970: 8). At the root of such independent enquiry was the singular principle of *reason*, which Kant claimed to be the “faculty ... of deducing the particular from the general” (Kant quoted in Horkheimer & Adorno 1972: 81). Given this ability to organise the world, reason became a totalising methodological imperative that assumed the condition of a “true and genuine value” in and of itself. As such, with the growth of structures that professed to generate knowledge of the world, the object of inquiry, which is to say the meaning of the real world, became confused with the very methodologies employed to understand it. Therefore, while structural methodologies claimed access to the truth of the world through objective enquiry, truth through subjective induction became a problematic and subversive claim. Certainly, any insistence on the value of subjective experience could only have corrupted the “objective” methodological imperative of reason, which not only operated without such recourse to “human experience” but also by actively mistrusting the world of the senses. As Nietzsche writes, man “was advised to draw in his senses, turtle fashion, to cease all intercourse with earthly things” (Nietzsche 1954a: 581). In such a manner, the growth of rationality signalled the death of the value of subjective experience, and ultimately promised the death of the body in favour of an extension in the value of the ideational.

Importantly, then, Dawn's continued privileging of the ideational above the physical body becomes an echo of the privileging witnessed in Descartes. In the opening paragraph of Coetzee's narrative Dawn proclaims, "I am a thinker, a creative person, one not without value to the world" (Coetzee 1998: 1). But, just as Dawn writes from inside history in order to problematise it (Attwell 1993), so he privileges the ideational in order to share in Husserl's project to reveal the constructed and negative condition of the naturalised, unquestioned belief in the value of scientific rationalism. In fact, just as Husserl argues that science can only master the infinity of its subject through the infinities of method, and can only master the infinities of method "by means of a technical thought and activity which are empty of meaning" (Husserl 1970: 51), Dawn evokes scientific knowledge only to state that its value is diminished because of an inability to conceptualise the "true meaning" of its deployment:

PROP-12 is a soil poison, a dramatic poison which ... washed into the soil, attacks the bonds in dark silicates and deposits a topskin of gray ashy grit. Why have we discontinued PROP-12? Why did we use it only on the lands of resettled communities? Until we reveal to ourselves and revel in the true meaning of our acts we will go on suffering the double penalty of guilt and ineffectualness.

(Coetzee 1998: 29)

Indeed, it is this search for "true meaning" that stretches across both narratives of *Dusklands* and ultimately reduces to the singular activity of attempting to reclaim one's "own true being" from the limiting principles of rationality. Perhaps, it is Jacobus who offers the clearest articulation of this ontological search: "[W]hen the day comes you will find that whether I am alive or dead, whether I ever lived or was never born, has never been of real concern to me" (Coetzee 1998: 107). Putting the grandiosity of Jacobus's metaphysical conjectures aside for one moment, it is nevertheless just such introspection that requires both Dawn and Jacobus to question the self's presence to the self, in moments of self-analysis that is "not of *one's* self but of *the* self, of the soul" (Coetzee 1992: 244; my italics). So, while Dawn talks of the universal attempt of the West to determine itself in contrast to the Vietnamese Other, "we landed on the shores of Vietnam clutching our arms and pleading for someone to stand up without flinching to these probes of reality: if you will prove yourself, we shouted, you will prove us too" (Coetzee 1998: 17), Jacobus Coetzee reflects on his punitive raid on a Hottentot village as an act of self-determination – "through their deaths I, who after they had expelled me had wandered the desert like a pallid symbol, again asserted my reality" (p. 106). Both narratives demonstrate that the search for any kind of "true meaning" is predicated on the struggle

for existence and, as such, it is no coincidence that both narratives pivot around Dawn's ontological enquiry – "I have high hopes of finding whose fault I am" (p. 49). Of course, it is precisely this kind of self-analytical questioning that stands outside of the remit of scientific rationality, and it is precisely this kind of question that insists on the reassertion of subjective value in an excessively scientific world.

The reader begins the negotiation of such a reassertion of subjective value and truth in knowledge formation by widening the fault line acknowledged by Dawn – "I have high hopes of finding whose fault I am" (p. 49). The fault, or crack, that Dawn identifies seems to run between the tangible and intangible aspects of the two narratives. In an operation that reflects the "separation" of the corporeal and incorporeal orders of a Stoic world (Inwood & Gerson 1997), Coetzee cleaves the world of *Dusklands* in two along the fracture caused by the seemingly divergent geographical locations, eras, and characters of its two major constitutive narratives. On the one hand is the narrative of Eugene Dawn, prophet of the colonial enterprise:

I see things and have a duty toward history that cannot wait ... I sit in libraries and see things. I am in an honourable line of bookish men who have sat in libraries and had visions of great clarity. I name no names. You must listen. I speak with the voice of things to come.

(Coetzee 1998: 29)

And on the other hand is the narrative of Jacobus Coetzee, knight-errant of the colonial endeavour:

In a life without rules I could explode to the four corners of the universe. Doggedly I set one foot in front of the other A thin figment of my earlier fat self, I plodded on, searching diligently for food and drink, devouring the miles, rubbing my skin with the body fat of dead beasts against a sun which humoured me to pink and red but would not bring me to brown.

(Coetzee 1999: 99)

The distinction to be made, then, is between "he who preaches the Idea and he who crosses space" (Deleuze 1998: 115). Yet while this dualism exposes the monolithic character of colonialism as a fiction, the elucidation of such a distinction is not the final extension of the Stoic structure of *Dusklands*. Indeed, as with Stoic thought, the most significant aspect of this structure does not concern maintaining a strong duality between the corporeal and incorporeal orders of the world, but rather concerns the way in which these orders interact with each other on a fundamental level so that the world becomes discernible only in terms of the way in which it moves and changes (Boeri 2001) – an environment of *becoming*.

The Stoic world, then, is composed of two orders of reality: the corporeal and the incorporeal.¹ The corporeal order of the world is, perhaps, most easily thought of as those tangible structures of the world. Thus, the book, the house, and the human are alike in the sense that each is tangible. Indeed, as David Hahm notes, that every corporeal entity exists within the three physical dimensions of space belies its most distinctive aspect, its capacity to act or be acted upon (Hahm 1977). However, such exchange between corporeal objects only becomes significant once it is placed into the schema of Stoic orthodoxy. Marcelo Boeri writes:

[A]mong the ancient authors there was a wide acceptance that the Stoics were champions of the idea that the corporeal is the essential hallmark of the existent. According to the Stoic orthodoxy, something is actually real if it is corporeal.

(Boeri 2001: 726)

Boeri might also have recalled Arius Didymus here and noted in addition that only the “present” is existent (Inwood & Gerson 1997: 167). As such, two axioms present themselves in Stoic thought. Firstly, *only* bodies exist in space; and secondly, *only* the present exists in time. One can justly conclude, then, that bodies only exist in the present and the capacity of such bodies to act or to be acted upon can only occur in the present.

Of course, such a description of corporeal objects that inhabit the strictly limited temporality of the present insists on a severe cleavage of every causal relationship. Logically, if a body cannot “escape” the binds of the present then something quite different must complete the chain of cause and effect. After all, what one is being asked to consider is a world in which “all bodies are causes – causes in relation to each other and for each other” (Deleuze 1990: 4); and that describes a world in which an object cannot be the *effect* of another object. What then of effects? Simply, within Stoic thought, effects describe the second order of the world: the incorporeal. Sextus Empiricus notes four kinds of such incorporeal entity: void, place, time, and *lekta* (“things said” or “sayables”) (Inwood & Gerson 1997: 166). While these incorporeal entities lack the qualities necessary to be classified as existent according to strict Stoic orthodoxy, each entity nevertheless qualifies as a “something”. Indeed, such incorporeal entities are considered to have a minimum condition of being, which places them in a strange

1. The following discussion of corporeal and incorporeal orders of the world simplifies much of the complexity of Stoic thought for the purposes of clarity. For an excellent introduction that covers some of the intricacies of Stoic thought see Brad Inwood and L.P. Gerson’s, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings* (1997).

position that cannot be described as either "real" or "unreal". Rather, one is encouraged to say that incorporeal entities "subsist" or "inhere" in reality.

As such, there is an intricate relationship between corporeal objects and incorporeals. Not only do incorporeal entities condition the spatial existence of corporeal objects (void and place), they also condition their temporal existence (time). Thus, it is the incorporeal factors of "before" and "after" that lead one to recognise that it is only through the temporal that one can establish a relation of causality and thereby distinguish between cause and effect. This is highly significant in terms of the Stoic perception of time. Describing just such a matter, Plutarch writes that "now" is not any part of the "present" but is rather divided between the "future" and the "past" (in Inwood & Gerson 1997: 166). So, one is introduced to a time that is doubled: firstly, in the sense that one must hold an account of time that describes only the living present of corporeal objects; and secondly, in the sense that one must hold an account of time that is infinitely divisible into past and future. Recounting this confusing state of affairs, Deleuze notes, "only the present exists in time and absorbs the past and the future. But only the past and future inhere in time and divide each present infinitely" (Deleuze 1990: 5). It is important to note that such a conceptualisation of time does not insist on a schism that instructs a strong dualism but rather arranges time in terms of a complementary function that operates simultaneously between the past, present and future.

Writing on the causal relationship between corporeal objects and incorporeals as proposed by Stoic orthodoxy, Émile Bréhier considers this complex conceptualisation of temporality in terms of the dynamic environment of becoming:

When the scalpel cuts the flesh, the first body [the incorporeal object, scalpel] produces upon the second [incorporeal object, flesh] not a new property but a new attribute, that of being cut. The *attribute* does not designate any real *quality*... it is, to the contrary, always expressed by the verb, which means that it is not a being, but a way of being This way of being finds itself somehow at the limit, at the surface of being, the nature of which it is not able to change: it is, in fact, neither active nor passive, for passivity would presuppose a corporeal nature which undergoes an action. It is purely and simply a result, or an effect which is not to be classified among beings

(Bréhier 1928: 11-13; my italics)

Bréhier goes on to invite the reader to conceptualise the distinction between bodies and incorporeals within the linguistic. The incorporeal event is identified as the verb, while the static structures of material bodies are best thought of as substantives or adjectives. However, hidden in this *event* of the verb is a dualism that instructs a certain paradox. Given that events

cannot occupy the present according to Stoic thought, one is encouraged to conclude that such events can only describe a way of being that inhabits the past or future (Inwood & Gerson 1997). As such, if one returns to Bréhier's example of a scalpel cutting flesh, the event of cutting does not express "a state of affairs" of a body located in the present but rather invokes that which has already been cut (past) and that which is yet to be cut (future). Thus, the moment in which a cut is made can only be described through the divergent temporalities of past and future. That is to say, the moment of cutting perpetually eludes the present (that which is happening) and becomes rested on two competing directions of logic: the *anterior* and the *posterior*. Of course, as Deleuze observes, "good sense ... affirms that in all things there is a determinable sense or direction (*sens*)" (Deleuze 1990: 1). Yet, the incorporeal event insists on the paradoxical affirmation of several directions of sense (logic) at the same time. Therefore, while the verbal event is infinitely divisible, it can only describe a present activity by invoking both the past and the future simultaneously.

This, then, becomes the simultaneity of a becoming that not only exposes the relevance of *Dusklands* to contemporary questions concerning neo-colonialism and imperialism but also reveals the significance of the complex chronological position of its narratives to the ontology of its protagonists. For, under these conditions language becomes schizophrenic – assuming both a comforting demeanour, at the hands of a formalised world built on the substantives and adjectives that Dawn turns to for psychological comfort whilst institutionalised (Coetzee 1998: 43), and a discomfiting demeanour that arrives at the hands of the continual challenge to transcend the limited formalisation of the world through the "unlimited becoming" of the verb – and begins to produce contradictory accounts of identity that oscillate between the corporeal and the incorporeal: between the fixed assignation of qualities and that which is always already transcended. The consequence of this schizophrenic understanding of identity is dramatic since the contradiction of the unlimited becoming announces the paradox of an *infinite identity*, where the fixed designation of a proper name demanded by the scientific rationality that underwrote European colonial discourse is perpetually contested within an irresolvable dialogue held between two divergent directions of sense: past and future; active and passive; cause and effect; too much and not enough (Deleuze 1990: 2-3). In the cases of Jacobus and Dawn, this paralysing dialogue is carried out in the Self.

Referring to the insurgents who plague America's military progress in Vietnam, Dawn writes:

If you are moved by the courage of those who have taken up arms, look into your heart: an honest eye will see that it is not your best self which is moved. The self which is moved is treacherous. It craves to kneel before the slave, to

wash the leper's sores. The dark self strives toward humiliation and turmoil, the bright self toward obedience and order. The dark self sickens the bright self with doubts and qualms. I know. It is his poison which is eating me.

(Coetzee 1998: 27)

There is a striking implication to this observation made by a failing mind. For in this moment it seems that Dawn understands that an element of the Other inheres in the multiplicity of his Self – it becomes the point at which Dawn recognises that the processes of subjectification are operating just as much upon his body as they are on the bodies of the Vietnamese. In being simultaneously Subject and Other to the processes of subjectification, Dawn begins to identify a split in the constitution of his Self: of Eugene Dawn-as-subject (“the bright self”) and Eugene Dawn-as-Other (“the dark self”). It is the negotiation of this impossible divergence that becomes the concern of *Dusklands*, for the negotiation and reconciliation of this *recognised* split between the Self-as-Other and the Self-as-subject promises some kind of end to the ontological questions that concern both Dawn and Jacobus. Nowhere is this better exemplified than in their pained bodies.

Sitting in the bowls of the “Harry S. Truman” library, quietly contemplating the creative intricacies of his introduction to the New Life project, Dawn's body is both silent and silenced in terms of narrative concern. Yet, the moment in which Dawn suffers pain, his focus is uncontrollably diverted to the condition of his body:

[M]y body betrays me. I read, my face starts to lose its life, a stabbing begins in my head, then, as I beat through gales of yawns to fix my weeping eyes on the page, my back begins to petrify in the scholar's hook. The ropes of muscle that spread from the spine curl in suckers around my neck, over my clavicles, under my armpits, across my chest. Tendrils creep down legs and arms. Clamped round my body this parasite starfish dies in rictus. Its tentacles grow brittle. I straighten my back and hear bands creak.

(Coetzee 1998: 7)

Similarly, Jacobus's philosophical musing on the metaphysical properties of the gun is framed by a description of his pained body:

I imagined the swelling in my buttock as a bulb shooting pustular roots into my fertile flesh. It had grown sensitive to pressure, but to gentle finger-stroking it still yielded a pleasant itch. Thus I was not quite alone.

(Coetzee 1998: 83)

It is such pain that encourages Dawn to wish true the Cartesian separation of the mind and body. He writes, “[M]y spirit should soar into the endless interior distances, but dragging it back, alas, is this tyrant body” (p. 32).

That he reflects on “*this* tyrant body”, however, exposes a very particular conception of the body, a conception that recognises the independent external reactions of the body. The body becomes an autonomous structure, an individuated creature, a “parasite starfish” (p. 7), acting independently of the mind that contemplates it. Under such conditions, the mind can only consider itself by first bearing witness to the autonomous actions of a body that expresses the affects of pain. That is to say, the pained body *precedes* the mind that interprets it.

In the context of Stoic thought, such a conception of the body is further complicated. Since Stoicism maintains that only bodies are existent, each account of the pained body becomes a description of the interruption of the ideational through the assertion of the corporeally real. As such, the pain that circulates upon the body affirms the difference *between* the corporeality of the real and the incorporeality of the idea, and thereby provides an access point to the ontological condition of an “own true being” that conditions both narratives of Dawn and Jacobus. With strong echoes of Artaud’s insistence that corporeal pain is the only means to insert sensation, and therefore sense, into existence (Finter 1997), the pain-event, much like Bréhier’s verbal event, signifies a moment of valued subjective experience that is to be welcomed upon its arrival. Thus, when Dawn is being subdued by the police in the Californian hotel room after stabbing his son, he comments: “[N]ow I am beginning to be hurt. Now someone is really beginning to hurt me. Amazing” (Coetzee 1998: 43). Similarly, Jacobus seeks the “reward” of self-assurance in pain: “I awoke the next morning ravenously hungry. The fever and weakness had gone, all that was left was the carbuncle. I tested it by gently pressing and was rewarded with an acute access of pain and a slow detumescence” (p. 86).

Given such an arrangement, the body is much more than a Cartesian machine piloted by the mind, and also more than an autonomous animal that acts independently of the mind. The body is itself “split”, so that what is ultimately described is a body within a body. Dawn writes:

I am unfortunately unable to carry on creative thought in the library. My creative spasm comes only in the early hours of the morning when the enemy in my body is too sleepy to throw up walls against the forays of my brain.

(Coetzee 1998: 6)

Such a conception of the split body is important since it recalls Dawn’s fractured experience of the Self-as-subject *and* the Self-as-Other. As Deleuze notes, this recognition of the alterity of Self (in terms of both the bodily and the incorporeal) is most important because it allows the individual to “grasp herself as an event; and grasp the event actualised within her as another individual grafted onto her” (Deleuze 1990: 178). That

is to say, it is the moment in which the elements of Subject and Other stop designating individual, irreconcilable positions and become merely two elements in an inexhaustible continuum of possible personal states. So, in this reconceptualisation of the role of Subject and Other, the distance between the terms is no longer a distance to be “overcome”; it is rather a distance to be embraced as a positive characteristic of the relationship of the terms (Deleuze 1990: 172-176). As such, one is reminded of Rimbaud’s poetic formula, “*I is an other*” (Rimbaud 1975: 101; my italics). Much like Rimbaud’s account, the subject-as-event rests on the divergence between the Self, the Other, and the I that regards it. Such is the basis to the “infinite identity” of the subject.

Deleuze notes that Descartes’s dictum *cogito ergo sum* contains a certain conceptual problem. If an undetermined existence (“I am”) is only to be determined by a thinking substance (“a thing that thinks”), then “how can the determination apply to the undetermined if we cannot say under what form it is ‘determinable’?” (Deleuze 1998: 29). For Deleuze the only conclusion to be reached is that existence is determinable in time, which is to say *through* the “form” of time itself. Under the condition that the Self is a receptive, or passive, entity that can only experience change in time, the I becomes the active, logical-linguistic determination of existence, which asserts the Self only to the extent that it encourages the Self to “present to itself the activity of its *own* thought” (p. 29). As such, Deleuze observes that the Self and I are separated by the line of time, which relates them to each other only under the condition of this fundamental difference. With this in mind, individual existence can never be determined in terms of an activity or spontaneity of being but must always be expressed in terms of a passive Self. That is to say, the Self represents to itself the I of determination as an Other that affects it. This, of course, is precisely the basis to the “trick” that Dawn must play on himself in order to raise the courage to abscond with his son:

I had only to say to myself, enunciating the words clearly: “You will pack a bag. You will take your son’s hand and walk out of the house. You will cash a check. You will leave town.” Then I did these things.

(Coetzee 1998: 36)

Clearly, the self-as-subject is passive to the determining voice of the authoritative Other here. For Dawn, the trace of the Other follows the same line of the “voice of the father” that he identifies in his Department of Defense report (p. 24): an authoritative voice that has the potential to condition all bodily actions. In this environment, the schizophrenic condition of language extrapolated from Stoic thought is doubled, and Dawn experiences what should be impossible. Dawn becomes his own

father *and* son in a movement reminiscent of Artaud's declaration: "I, Antonin Artaud, am my son, my father, my mother, and myself" (Artaud 1965: 238). It is only under these strict conditions that Dawn embraces the moment of divergence in the constitution of his Self and in so doing necessarily recognises himself as an event that sits across genealogies and refuses to take a single, totalising identity. Thus Dawn writes without restraint, "I am a thinker" (Coetzee 1998: 1), "I am my old self" (p. 9), "I am a hero of resistance" (p. 27), "I am no trouble" (p. 45). As such, the forces that constitute Dawn's life pull in divergent directions, towards the past (as father) and towards the future (as son), in an activity that Dawn recognises as "an endless discourse of character, the self reading the self to the self in all infinity" (p. 38). From this position one need no longer wait, as Mallarmé suggests, for the end of an existence before one acknowledges "a life" (Mallarmé 1989). Understanding Dawn in terms of the subject-as-event ensures that his life is "torn open and kept open" for inspection (Smith 1998: xxix):

My mouth opens, I am aware, if that is awareness, of two cold parted slabs that must be lips, and of a hole that must be the mouth itself, and of a thing, the tongue Also, something which I usually think of as my consciousness is shooting backwards, at a geometrically accelerating pace, according to a certain formula, out of the back of my head, and I am not sure I will be able to stay with it.

(Coetzee 1998: 41-42)

Through the schizophrenic condition of autoscopia, Dawn is drawn outside of himself to witness the events of his own life unfurl in front of him, apart from him. The Stoic pain-event responds by laying bare the destruction of Dawn's Self in a literal act of self-destruction brought about by the precession of an infinite identity through over-determination and the collapse of reason. This is analogous to the bodily condition Deleuze sees as the inescapable final product of the logic of infinite identity: becoming-imperceptible (Deleuze 1999: 233-309). Yet, Dawn does not lose all connection to the real (disappear); his body and the pain-event that circulates upon his body give evidence of his condition of being. Ultimately, Dawn's ontological condition is premised on the suffering of his body, a suffering that Coetzee asserts "*takes* authority in the production of its own undeniable power" (Coetzee 1992: 248; my italics) to connect to the real without the mediating apparatuses demanded by "truth".

Such reclamation of subjective authority in the production of knowledge through the suffering of the body caused by the pain-event clearly compromises the claim to objective and universal truth made by scientific rationalism. However, it is important to note here that the objective

scientific rationality that lay at the base of Enlightenment investigation lay in tandem with the highly personal subjectifying structure of Christianity. With this conditioning apparatus that responds to both the corporeal and incorporeal orders of the world, the physical and the metaphysical, what the science of the day could not explain was found within the pages of Christian doctrine. Indeed, it is perhaps worth pausing here to reflect once again on Husserl's understanding of the Enlightenment:

a superior survey of the world ... unfettered by myth and the whole tradition: universal knowledge, absolutely free from prejudice, of the world and man, ultimately recognising in the world its inherent reason and teleology and its highest principle, God.

(Husserl 1970: 7)

Yet it is clear that Coetzee stages the physical site of the pained body as a counter to *all* the subjectifying and subjugating endeavours of the authoritative and authorising structures of European knowledge formation, including Christianity.

In an attempt at an act of self-determination, Jacobus Coetzee begins his narrative by stating the categorical difference between the "White man" of South Africa and the Hottentots. Jacobus writes that "the one gulf that divides us from the Hottentots is our Christianity We are Christians, a folk with a destiny. They become Christians too, but their Christianity is an empty word" (Coetzee 1998: 57). The insistence is that two kinds of Christianity are in operation in eighteenth-century South Africa: the "convenient" Christianity of the Hottentots and the "true" Christianity of White South Africans. For Jacobus, what marks the difference between these two Christianities is the belief in the promise of faith, the promise of a destiny drawn from an immortal soul that has been born and survives in the Christian teleology of Genesis, the Last Judgement, and the eternity of the Afterlife. But, in what way does the Christian pay for such promises? Nietzsche offers an intriguing response to the question: he does not. The Christian bears the consciousness of being in debt to God and, since the Christian soul is immortal, the debt is infinite and subsequently unpayable (Nietzsche 1967: 90). Indeed, as Deleuze observes, "the infinity of the debt and the immortality of existence each depend on the other, and together constitute 'the doctrine of judgement'" (Deleuze 1998: 126). That is to say, *every* Christian stands within the relationship between existence and infinity and is judged according to the infinity of his debt. For Nietzsche, as well as for D.H. Lawrence and Artaud, the charge at hand is that the authoritarian

structure of Christianity crystallises a new image of power, the power to stand in *judgement*.²

The doctrine of judgement is present in the Apocalypse and the Last Judgement. It is the manifestation of an ultimate power, a “justice”, which encompasses a will to condition every corporeal and incorporeal element of the world: a will to be the last word spoken, and a will to destroy all that hope to stand beyond its reach (Deleuze 1998: 39). It is the product of the machinations of the “architect-priest” (of Judas, John of Patmos, and Saint Paul), who constructs *and* presides over the meaning of a Christianity that is knowingly and actively confused with Christ. Deleuze asserts that the architect-priest is tyrannous, subjectifying the individual, turning the individual into a member of a “flock” through the assurance of an eternity that can only be promised by keeping “Christ on the cross, ceaselessly leading him back to it, making him rise from the dead” (p. 39) in a circularity of suffering. To judge or to be judged is to invoke such a condition of power, to invoke the relationship of dominance between the architect-priest and the flock, and thereby instruct the organisation of the bodies through which judgement itself acts.

However, it is certain that the subject-as-event, the Self understood as a continuum of both the known Subject and incomprehensible Other, stands beyond the reach of the “all-encompassing” will to power of judgement, since it is an unknowable structure. The subject-as-event necessarily resists the processes of subjectification and subjugation demanded by judgement by escaping every attempt to inscribe it with a totalising designation. But that is not to suggest that the subject-as-event escapes justice. By promoting a “structure” that cannot be determined since it offers an infinite amount of both convergent and divergent identities, the subject-as-event in its very resistance to judgement forms an alternative access point to justice. It connects to a justice that writes directly onto the body, *a system of cruelty* that ensures that bodies are marked by each other. In direct opposition to the doctrine of judgement, which sees all debts tallied in a divine book that quietly “condemns us to an endless servitude” (Deleuze 1998: 128), the system of cruelty is a writing of “blood and life” that necessarily returns value, authority and power to the operation of the pain-event that circulates upon the body.

2. The idea that Christianity exerted a negative force on the human subject is a persistent theme in Nietzsche’s works. Perhaps Nietzsche’s most abrasive critique of Christianity is to be found in his *The Antichrist*. For D.H. Lawrence’s discussion on the operation of power of Christian doctrine see his *Apocalypse* (1982) especially p. 27. Artaud’s thoughts on Christianity are perhaps made clearest in his *To Have Done with the Judgement of God* in *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings* (Sontag 1976).

Conceptualised by Nietzsche and examined by Artaud in his "Theatre of Cruelty", the system of cruelty necessarily goes beyond the confines of a mere representation of violence, and tends towards the "genesis of creation" itself (Finter 1997: 16). Certainly, Artaud's "Theatre of Cruelty" finds a double expression in *Dusklands*: the theatre of the Vietnam War, which marks the boundary to the territory of massacred bodies; and Jacobus's theatre of punishment that conditions his return to the Hottentot village as a violent "performance" that goes beyond representation since it is a clear act of altering those around him bodily. (Such is the genesis of creation.) Indeed, Jacobus's actions reveal the dual aspect of punishment as proposed by Nietzsche:

[W]e must distinguish two things: first, the relatively *enduring* aspect, the custom, the act, the "drama", a certain strict succession of procedures; on the other hand, the fluid aspect, the meaning, the aim, the expectation which attends the execution of these procedures.

(Nietzsche 1954b: 452-453)

Jacobus's punitive return to the Hottentot village certainly includes the element of Nietzsche's "drama". Jacobus recalls: "[W]e descended on their camp at dawn, the hour recommended by the classic writers on warfare" (Coetzee 1998: 100). But the *meaning* of such a procedure extends beyond a simple act of self-assertion. Jacobus frames his anticipated action of punishment with a homage paid to the judgement of God:

We do not require of God that he be good, I told them, all we ask is that he never forget us. Those of us who may momentarily doubt that we are included in the great system of dividends and penalties may take comfort in Our Lord's observation on the fall of the sparrow: the sparrow is cheap but he is not forgotten. As explorer of the wilderness I have always thought myself an evangelist and endeavoured to bring to the heathen the gospel of the sparrow, which falls but falls with design. There are acts of justice, I tell them (I told them), and acts of injustice, and all bear their place in the economy of the whole. Have faith, be comforted, like the sparrow you are not forgotten.

(Coetzee 1998: 101)

Such meaning generated by Jacobus's return to divine judgement, if one follows Nietzsche, is at first sight better than no meaning at all: a return to the comfortable assurance of a father's authority that necessarily relinquishes the "Enlightened" subject from responsibility. Indeed, Nietzsche states that "man ... does not negate suffering as such: he *wants* it, even seeks it out, provided someone shows him some *meaning* in it, some *wherefore* of suffering" (Nietzsche 1954b: 453). Jacobus's referral of the

meaning of his actions to the certainty of God's judgement is just such a motion towards offering an answer to the "wherefore of suffering":

All are guilty, without exception. I include the Hottentots. Who knows for what unimaginable crimes of the spirit they died, through me? God's judgement is just, irreprehensible, and incomprehensible. His mercy pays no heed to merit.

(Coetzee 1998: 106)

But such referral of meaning seems to lead to a more profound kind of suffering than a simple rejection of meaning can cause. Jacobus continues: "[W]ill I suffer? I too am frightened of death" (p. 106). These doubts point towards the cost of erecting rather than experiencing meaning: the cost of drawing on some structure (Christianity) that is other to the Self. According to Nietzsche, the cost is a suffering that is more poisonous to the individual than any dive into narcissism since it must gnaw at life itself. That is to say, in the moment Jacobus refers the meaning of his own actions to the divine judgement of God, he is relinquished from the responsibility of conducting his own life. He is thrown into a void that is only given shape by the "architect-priests" of Enlightenment thinking who rely on structures of subjectification in order to condition the world-reality proposed by scientific rationalism. So, Jacobus experiences a suffering that fills the "undifferentiated plenum, which is after all nothing but the void dressed up as being" (p. 101), with a hatred "against everything human ... against everything animal, everything material ... [a disgust] with reason itself" (Nietzsche 1954b: 454). Jacobus pleads in vain, "God, I want to be alone" (p. 96).

Importantly, however, at the same time such suffering begins to circulate on the body, the value of subjective experience is revitalised. That is to say, the very suffering meted out by the structures of subjectification in order to condition the individual compromises the value of its own operation. Nowhere is this more clearly shown than in the emotionally charged analogy Jacobus draws at the conclusion of his punitive raid on the Hottentot village between the mercy killing of a wounded bird and the killing of Plaatje, one of his ex-servants. While the association between bird and human is more than questionable, nonetheless the analogy invokes all of the complexity allied to Jacobus's complicit position as both agent and opponent of the colonial endeavour, both Subject and Other, as "nothing but an occasion" (p. 91):

I fired and lowered my gun. Plaatje was still standing. "Fall, damn you!" I said ... As a child one is taught how to dispose of wounded birds. One takes the bird by the neck between index and middle fingers, with the head in one's palm. Then one flings the bird downward But if one is squeamish and uses

too little force the bird persists in life, its neck flayed, its trachea crushed. The thin red necks of such birds always awoke compassion and distaste in me. I revolted from repeating the snap So I would stand there cuddling the expiring creature in my hands, venting upon it the tears of my pity for all the helpless suffering things, until it passed away Such was the emotion reawakened in me by him whose passage from this world I had so unkindly botched but who was on his way "Courage", I said, "we admire you."
(Coetzee 1998: 104-105)

Thus, in the "compassion" and "distaste" that arrives at the literal hands of Jacobus, Coetzee offers a response to the question of what happens when the reliable extemporaneous dialectic of the Self and Other begins to fail. Meaning becomes the artefact of a subjective experience that cannot be dominated by objective claims to truth since the value of such subjective experience resides beyond the judgement of another. The effect of this revitalisation of the Self is a world more complex, more nuanced and ambiguous than any world that can be described by the principles of scientific rationalism. Perhaps this is why Jacobus concludes his narrative by stating: "I have other things to think about" (p. 107).

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