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THE ALIEN INSIDER

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In the “Lordship and Bondage” section of *The Phenomenology of Mind*, Hegel writes: “Self-consciousness is primarily simple existence for self, self-identity by exclusion of every other from itself. It takes its essential nature and absolute object to be Ego; and in this immediacy, in this bare fact of its self-existence, it is individual. That which for it is other stands as unessential object, as object with the impress and character of negation” (Hegel 231). A little later, he classifies this duality of the subject and the other in the celebrated model of the master-slave—“The one is independent, and its essential nature is to be for itself; the other is dependent, and its essence is life or existence for another. The former is the Master, or Lord, the latter the Bondsman” (234).

Like many other strands of the project of Enlightenment Reason, the construction of the Subject in terms of its dialectic with the other has been fundamental to the complicity of discourse and power, the detection of which has been central to much twentieth century literary and cultural theory. This discussion has been widely prevalent in existentialist philosophy, as in *Being and Nothingness* by Sartre, where the terms are used to define the process of identity-formation. More significant to the application of theories of subject formation to the detection of the workings of discourse and power in postcolonial literatures are Freudian and post Freudian analyses of the formation of subjectivity, predominantly in the work of Jacques Lacan. Especially significant are the parallels between Lacan’s “other” and its efforts to construct its identity through the mirror stage with the colonized “other,” the process of whose identity formation is contingent on the gaze of the imperial “Other” or the subjective centre of the Empire which in turn corresponds to Lacan’s “grand-autre”. This is the dialectic of identity formation, termed “othering” by Gayatri Spivak that is central to the discourse concerning coloniality/post-coloniality.

As has been often observed by many of its commentators,

J.M. Coetzee's fiction tempts the reader to read endless variations of this subject-other dialectic in it. Coetzee's location with respect to the established canons of Western literature, of course, may be the genesis of such readings (as for instance discussed by Derek Attridge in "Oppressive Silence"), but what excites their further possibilities is the clear play of the motifs of power and subjectivity (and subsequently of ethics, in the mutual relationships and obligations of such conflicting subjectivities) in almost all of his novels. Once again, originating in the colonial and postcolonial milieus of such novels, the *raison d'être* of such readings is constituted by, not only the explicit motifs of historical power struggle between the colonizer and the colonized, the classes of differential privilege, racial and gender groups, but by almost abstracted versions of the dialectic of conflicting subjectivities carried out even when the explicit historical/topical paraphernalia are taken away (leading, doubtless, to the reading of such fictions as allegories). However, all this has been much discussed. What I'd like to argue in this paper is the way Coetzee problematizes the dialectic of the colonized 'other' and the colonizing 'Other' (or the Lacanian *grand-autre*) in various ways, notably through the creation of characters who fall in a limbo between the two, and by the manipulation of narrative distance so as to shape/direct readerly empathy in ways that unsettle such dialectic. The result of such problematizing of the subject-other dialectic is the creation of the kind of character I like to call the 'alien insider,' those who exist, sometimes, on the periphery of the colonizing subject position (even though there is no doubt about their existence within the matrix of such positions), and on other occasions, when they move more towards the centre, have their own subjectivity violently ridden with disintegrating forces. There are several other variations of this problematizing process, some of which are discussed below. Either way, the expected 'Other' in such locations, seems ill-equipped to play the role of the Lacanian 'grand-autre,' whether or not the texts ascribe the role to figures more suitable to such positions. These alien insiders seem to cause Coetzee's fiction to move farther from the Hegelian dialectic of the master-slave (which is not to say there aren't instances of the Hegelian process of subject-construction in Coetzee's fiction; there are—but they are not of interest to me here), and in a troubled way, align itself to the more democratic phenomenology of Alexandre Kojève: "It is only by being 'recognized' by another, by many others, or—in the extreme—by all others, that a human being is really human, for himself as well for others" (Kojève 9). The tortured, often self-deconstructing subjectivity of the alien insider in Coetzee's fiction makes contingent the formation of differ-

ential centres of subjectivity in an irregular hierarchy of power, rendering the absolute position of the imperial centre almost irrelevant or ineffectual, at least so within the paradigm of such fictions.

The classic case of the (novelistic) centrality of the alien insider, to my mind, is *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Postcolonial theorists have often singled out this novel as an instance of 'othering,' or to use a more recent term brought into currency by Spivak, the 'imperial soul-making,' mainly focusing on the decisive actions of Colonel Joll. It is said that Joll's entire project concerning the 'barbarians,' absurd in practical terms, as there is really no border trouble before the arrival of the 'Third Bureau,' "is in the business of *creating* the enemy, of delineating the opposition that must exist, in order that the empire might define itself by its geographical and racial others" (Ashcroft *et al.* 173). Such active process of 'othering' clearly establishes the classical Subject-other duality, placing a figure like Joll at the imperial centre of the power structure. However, of higher significance in the novel and greater relevance to this paper is the figure of the magistrate, who is aptly described as being 'situated at the edge of the 'empire' (Ashcroft *et al.* 173). He is, to my mind, the classic Coetzee protagonist, given supreme importance in terms of the narrative (constituted as the novelistic 'subject,' one may say), but clearly positioned on the margins of the matrix of decisive, operational power that moulds the circumstances, in this instance, the Empire. It is this curious, sometimes ironic gulf between the fictional centrality/Subjectivity of such protagonists and their peripherality within the systems of power engaged in the imperial soul-making that is of interest to me, especially in terms of their interaction to the 'colonized' other(s), with whom they seem to be engaged in a soul-making of a different kind, one that reflects, to my mind, Kojève's phenomenology (or his reading of Hegel's) more than that of Hegel himself as discussed above. Though undoubtedly in a superior power position with respect to such colonized 'others,' their interaction with the alien insiders seems to be a process of a construction of mutual subjectivity, rather than that of the subjectivity of the 'other' in the gaze of the imperial 'grand-autré'—and this is a process which necessarily lacks the conventional hierarchy of power embedded in the Lacanian process. The washing of the 'barbarian' girl's feet by the magistrate seems to me such a Kojevian moment of mutual construction of subjectivity where in fact the magistrate seems to have more at stake than the girl. There is no doubt, of course, about the magistrate's position in the matrix of functional power of the system—it is even institutionalized. He is the magistrate, though clearly the provincially of his jurisdiction and its distance from the central-

ized high-command places it literally on the margins of Empire. But more interesting is the way his imperial subjectivity, or whatever fragmentary, peripheral agency of such subjectivity he is vested with, is conjoined with his centralized subject-position in the novel as its protagonist, a recurring process in several of Coetzee's novels. Even as there is no way of denying Joll's superior or more effective imperial agency, the foregrounding of the troubled and marginalized subjectivity of the magistrate (and our close narrative distance to him, to recount Wayne Booth's term) is almost Coetzee's way of drawing attention to the alien insider who problematizes the very subject-other dialectic through the unique fictional privilege ascribed to him. Menan Du Plessis, while concurring that Colonel Joll is engaged in the futile process of 'creating' the enemy (futile because the barbarians refuse to enter this combat, remaining elusive and invisible) so as to delineate the contours of the Empire through the consequent dialectic, feels that the magistrate, "as the citizen of one of Empire's outposts," might be "one of Hegel's pseudo-masters—a slave without a master, a master without a slave" (Kosew 119). This is perhaps another way of stating the reality of the figure whom I call the 'alien insider,' and I would eventually agree with Du Plessis that "if Coetzee is working through these forms of the Hegelian dialectic, it is always as part of a project that is directed towards a repudiation of the Right-Wing Hegel."

In the early parts of the novel, when the magistrate is still in his position (though jolted by the arrival of Joll), a relative illusion of his proximity and kinship with the Empire is maintained, though through his humanity and his ethical concerns (still relatively unproblematized, as the sense of his alliance with the imperial subject leads to questions of ethics in terms of his behavior to that which is consequently constituted as alterity, a constitution which soon begins to crumble with the problematization of his alliance with the imperial subject), he is set apart from the inexorable system of the Empire, of which Joll is a more representative (and barely recognizable as human) face. But even then, it is clear that his interaction with the girl is something other than the exercise of the power relation that exists between them, and more significant to this argument, divergent from the process of demarcating her as the clear 'other' so as to expedite the strengthening of one's own Subject position, as might be expected from the impression of his still relatively unimpaired alliance to the Empire. Rather during the epiphanic process of washing the girl's feet, there seems to be a dissolution of all subjectivities:

I lose myself in the rhythm of what I'm doing. I lose awareness of

the girl herself. There is a space of time which is blank to me: perhaps I am not even present. When I come to, my fingers have slackened, the foot rests in the basin, my head droops. (Coetzee, *Barbarians* 28)

As the novel moves on the illusion of the magistrate's real alliance to the Empire is progressively shattered. A representative movement is the expedition to the land of the barbarians which he leads, one that contrasts itself starkly with Joll's project in that it is not directed towards seeking out the barbarians in an effort to 'create' them, but an effort to return the girl to her people whose existence he is already assured of. It is an action which pushes him farther out on the margins of the empire (but never quite out there with the barbarians), as it earns the disapproval of those in power, thus revealing with greater directness and clarity, his position as the alien insider. And by the end of the novel he can clearly enunciate this deconstruction of subject-other position that the empire plays out, or more importantly, his desire for it:

I wanted to live outside history. I wanted to live outside the history that Empire imposes on its subjects, even its lost subjects. I never wished it for the barbarians that they should have the history of Empire laid upon them. How can I believe that this is cause for shame? (Coetzee, *Barbarians* 154)

The unforgettable Eugene Dawn of *The Vietnam Project* in Coetzee's very first book is just as clearly situated within the matrix of imperial agency. He is working on the project of carrying out a successful psychological warfare directed towards the Vietnamese against the backdrop of the US-Vietnam war (Coetzee's interest in different historical variations of imperialism may be an indication of his interest in the idea of imperialism in an almost abstracted form, less so than in specific historical incarnations, even though South Africa presents a peculiarly detailed and complicated situation in his fiction. It is instructive to remember his complaint that perhaps it is "that vast and wholly ideological superstructure constituted by publishing, reviewing and criticism that is forcing on me the fate of being a 'South African novelist.'"). The actual preoccupation with motifs of subjectivity and a rather Lacanian idea of a forbidding father figure for the Vietnamese in Eugene Dawn's contribution to the "New Life for Vietnam" is indeed striking. Dawn's work, as such, is rather sophisticated—not the typical imperialist's roughshod ride over the identity-construction of the colonized (or sought to be colonized) and the thoughtless imposition of western models of subjectivity, widely divergent from the indigenous paradigms, on them. In a striking gesture of relevance to the anti-foundational critique of the Enlightenment carried out by post-structuralist philosophy, Eugene

Dawn acknowledges the ineffectuality of the voice of the Western subject in the role of the propagandist as that he describes in the following words: "It is the voice of the doubting self, the voice of Rene Descartes driving his wedge between the self in the world and the self who contemplates the self" (Coetzee, *Dusklands* 21).

Aware of the discrepancies in western and Vietnamese paradigms of subjectivity, Eugene Dawn is busy in devising better ways of intensifying the effectiveness of the father figure which will eventually subjugate the disobedient subjectivities of the colonized as they emerge, as it were, from the imaginary to the symbolic order, in a venerating submission to the phallic Law of the Father:

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.
(*Dusklands* 28)

The official location of Dawn within the matrix of imperialist agency is matched with his privileged narratorial position within the novella. *The Vietnam Project* is his story, first and foremost. He is the first person narrator, and as such the only character into whose mind we are allowed a direct glimpse. The problems we encounter in the novella are all his problems, even though we are aware that there are other pressing issues at hand, including his wife Marilyn's discontent, his son Martin's unhappiness, not to speak of the whole troubled history of the US-Vietnam war. But they are clearly relegated as secondary by the narratorial privilege of Eugene Dawn, and inducted into this fictional universe, we are willing to buy this primacy of his issues.

Dawn's 'alienness' within his status as an 'insider,' in the matrix of imperialist power, however, is a little different from that of the magistrate. Coetzee's intense preoccupation with the internal and the psychological in his earlier fiction (*In the Heart of the Country* being the other notable instance of this preoccupation) leads Dawn's destabilization in his position to being more overtly a matter of the inner construction of subjectivity and the consequent power relationships that come into existence than a working of the concrete forces of administrative and political power as in between the Magistrate and Joll. This is not to imply that that relationship is not without its psychological motivations, just that it seems to transpire in a world of real action more than that of Dawn and his superior, Coetzee. He writes, "Here I am under the thumb of a manager, a type before

whom my first instinct is to crawl" (*Dusklands* 1). The crabbiness of a professional life under the strictures of a demanding, even tyrannical manager is not enough to explain this literal disintegration of the personality; I feel that this disintegrating weakness is rather a permanent constituent of Dawn's self, and this brings us back to the ironic gulf between the affiliation of the alien insider with imperialism and his tenuous, peripheral position within it. Why, Eugene Dawn "cannot help" being Eugene Dawn—or not being so, one would think! Dawn's manager Coetzee's position here would indeed approximate Joll's, representing the impersonal (and hence more effective) agency of Empire and contrasting with the peripherality of Dawn, like that of the magistrate. While the perspective of the novel in *Waiting for the Barbarians* is predominantly the magistrate's, it is at least told in the third person, but in "The Vietnam Project," the ironic gulf of power/subjectivity is deepened by Dawn's narration of it, creating the classic case of the unreliable narrator. Dawn's position with respect to the Empire is threatened even more seriously than the magistrate's as the state comes after him over his irresponsible behavior with regard to his wife and son—he who was intent on carving the absolute Father figure over the Vietnamese turns out to be a hopelessly inadequate father himself! The emasculated individual who cannot effectively constitute his own subjectivity (let alone with respect to alterity), is barren ground as far as procreating or nurturing future generations as much as the positivity of eros, and hence the deadness of his sexual motions with his wife:

Before the arrival of my seed her pouch yawns and falls back, leaving my betrayed representative gripped at its base, flailing its head in vain inside an immense cavern, at the very moment when above all else it craves to be rocked through its tantrum in a soft, firm, infinitely trustworthy grip. The word which at such moments flashes across the heavens of my never quite extinguished consciousness is *evacuation*: my seed drips like urine into the futile sewers of Marilyn's reproductive ducts. (Coetzee, *Dusklands* 8)

Parenthood (or at least its basic responsibilities, carried out in a more stable past outside the framework of the novel) is a more successful affair with Mrs Curren in *Age of Iron*, but her location within the matrix of agency/subjectivity is no less problematic than any of the other alien insiders of Coetzee, if only in a drastically different way. Along with race, class and empire, gender is an issue which interests Coetzee deeply, as we also see in *Foe*, *In the Heart of the Country*, *Disgrace* and the quasi-fictional lectures involving Elizabeth Costello. The position of women usually enables him to further explore issues of subalternity, power and exploitation, and more

importantly, problematized subjectivities, and occasionally, critiques of such subjectivities and modes of discourse, as in *The Lives of Animals*. *Age of Iron* is told in the first person, a feature which immediately draws attention to the subjectivity of the narrator protagonist, but also demonstrates, to a much greater degree than the narrative of Eugene Dawn, a desire (often bordering on success) to assert mastery over her narrative, to give shape to it, a desire immediately corroborated by the fact that it is in fact in the shape of a letter written to her daughter, an actual effort at creativity and communication that is a stark contrast with Eugene Dawn's infertile inability to communicate with his progeny. Her position with respect to the tramp Vercueil would, at first sight seem to be one of the classic subject-other binary, with consequent ethical awareness of one's responsibility to the 'other' almost in the manner of Emmanuel Levinas, reminiscent of the magistrate's initial responses to the barbarian girl. While Vercueil is immediate and close, the community of the black South Africans under apartheid constitutes a kind of a collective 'otherness,' to whose oppression Mrs Curren's horrified, morally outraged attention has suddenly been drawn in the last years of her life, the time that the novel frames. Fictional structures reinforce the feel of this duality, what with the first person narration by Mrs Curren and the occasional luxury of philosophizing, often framed within the meaning and power of the classical allusions strewn throughout the text.

But that is where the limits of Mrs Curren's active power/agency lie. In the context of the real imperial/racial struggle (significantly, this is Coetzee's only novel, apart from *Disgrace*, written about contemporary South Africa, indeed, both a product of and a response to the times), Mrs Curren is hardly vested with any real agency, apart from her racial (and that of class, possibly) affiliation with the colonizers—nothing at all even in comparison with the troubled agencies of the magistrate and Eugene Dawn, who at least are real, official vehicles of imperialism, whatever might be their psychological identification with it. An old woman, dying of cancer (her death, as we move closer to it towards the end of the book, can be seen as a literalization of the final dissolution of her subjectivity), left alone in a deserted house, in a country that seems to be deserted by its capable youth, in an atmosphere of decay and despair. The irony of the situation of the alien insider is her realization of the horrors carried out by the colonizing race with whom her relationship is troubled and tenuous—she is racially connected to them but has lived in relative ignorance of their imperialist oppression, much less with any kind of sympathy or agency with such oppressions; whatever knowledge she has had being indeed invested in opposition to such

imperialisms. The blurb of the Penguin edition puts it well: “Mrs Curren has been opposed to the lies and brutality of apartheid all her life, but has lived insulated from its true horrors.” The unfortunate result of this realization in the sad twilight of her life is the sense of guilt, a classic mental state of the alien insiders who can never align themselves to either the subject or the other—guilt felt on behalf of her race, as it were, that which impels her to help the colonized and their activists and also subjects herself to a sad sense of historico-ethical determinism that makes counter-racial injustices seem proper and inevitable, though not to the extent David Lurie and Lucie seem to feel such determinisms in *Disgrace*.

With respect to the central symbol of ‘otherness’ in the book, Vercueil, the disintegration of Mrs Curren’s imperial subject position, or whatever weak vestiges of it are left in her, is steady and decisive right from their first meeting. It is almost ironic, the way the ethical guilt of the oppression by her people carried on the likes of Vercueil (a guilt not possible, in the first place, without a degree of subject-other binary) turns into a degree of kinship with him that effectively leads to the dissolution of such a binary. It is a process not entirely dissimilar to that between the magistrate and the barbarian girl, and it is interesting how the reversal of gender positions keeps corresponding nuances alive in the two relationships, if in inverted forms with respect to each other. Of all the alien insiders, Mrs Curren clearly moves closest to the ‘other’ by the end of the novel, even more than the magistrate. The final gesture of her and Vercueil’s embrace almost at the moment of her death becomes a simultaneous ritual of eros and thanatos—the physical death of the subject (symbolic, perhaps of its final severance from the agency of colonization) combined with an identification with the subjectivity of alterity.

One could continue with the observation of such alien insiders in Coetzee, as with Susan Barton in *Foe* or Magda of *In the Heart of the Country*, both of whose gender and inter-subjective conflicts, among a hundred other things make both of them ideal instances, or with Elizabeth Costello of *The Lives of Animals*, “The Novel in Africa,” and “What is Realism,” but for the sake of brevity I’ll refrain from discussing them in the present paper. It’ll suffice to say here that Elizabeth Costello, clearly alienated between such widely divergent and conflicting ‘subjectivities’ as those of animals, the straight white upper middle class American professional/intellectual family and the black male novelist from sub-Saharan Africa, is an especially interesting example of this figure I’ve been discussing throughout the paper, not only because of the superior power and intellectual agency she

possesses, but because of the way she uses such power to carry out a discursive analysis and critique of the complicity of subjectivity, discourse and power (no doubt, made easier by the generic structure of the works she appears in) of the ostensible subjectivity of global capitalist imperialism, but also of that of the supposed alterity, of the post-colonial novelist from Black Africa and his 'performance.' Truly an alien insider, Costello cannot align herself to either side, and is seemingly qualified, more than any other, to inhabit that interstitial space between madness and reason that Derrida felt was necessary to Foucault's project to speak about either with any degree of fairness.

What is the meaning of highlighting such alien insiders, of making them the fictional centres of the novels? One can make an endless number of conjectures. Is it an effort to present a more human face of the empire, implying that the real human beings vested with imperial agency are in fact pathetically ill-equipped to do justice to such agencies, that the real 'grand-autre' is the impersonal, non-human system which perpetrates itself without any real investment in actual human beings? Not likely. If the magistrate and Eugene Dawn are the troubled middle-subjects on behalf of such an impersonal imperial system, the human features of Colonel Joll or Coetzee of *Dusklands* are discernable enough, or, for that matter, that of Jacobus Coetzee, whose narrative in my mind demonstrates most directly the process of the Hegelian construction of subjectivity in the negation, indeed, the physical annihilation of the rival subject, of the bondsman by the master. Or is it Coetzee's way of deconstructing the established paradigms of stability and coherence of the process of imperial soul-making, as might be evident from the disturbed subjectivities of such figures as the magistrate, Eugene Dawn, or Mrs Curren in spite of their clear location within the imperial/privileged class? Again, the unlikelihood of this implication is indicated by the relative coherence and functionality of the figures that illustrate the Hegelian or Lacanian models of soul-making, as those mentioned above. Is it then a foregrounding of the poststructuralist notion of the subject as a 'site' than a 'centre' or a 'presence,' where the 'self' is disintegrated, and following the loss of its status as a source or master of meaning, emerges more like a construct? Such notions of subjectivity approximate the more egalitarian phenomenology of Kojève, as indeed evident in Jonathan Culler's statement: "Even the idea of a personal identity emerges through the discourse of a culture: the 'I' is not something given but comes to exist as that which addressed by and related to others" (Culler 33). Joll and Jacobus Coetzee may exist, and so might Daniel Foe (I do not wish to suggest,

as my repeated allusion to these figures might be guilty of implying, that their 'soul-making' is necessarily unproblematic; it is only relatively so compared to that of the alien insiders), but the author's narrative emphasis on the troubled 'sites' of selfhood might indicate a relative sympathy with the poststructuralist paradigms.

Either way, it is instructive to relate the problematic locations of such alien insiders to Coetzee's own position with respect to the established canons of English literature, or, for that matter, within the historical milieu of South Africa, which by itself holds a uniquely problematized position among postcolonial communities—if it can indeed be called one. A white South African, but not one of English origin, of predominantly Afrikaans ancestry, with a troubled childhood and conflicting cultural influences...Coetzee's position clearly does not possess the degree of clarity that can be afforded by either that of an Achebe or a Kipling, and both volumes of his autobiography, *Boyhood* and *Youth* bear ample evidence to this problematic location. The young protagonist's troubled experience in school, the complicated process of Anglicization his family goes through, eventually creating the cultural forces that shape him (including, possibly, his decision to write in English), carry over to his unique marginalization in England as an aspiring author from the periphery of Empire (not only the center of imperial power but also perceived as that of the cherished paradigms of culture), and significantly, the relative lack of an indigenous cultural tradition (or access to it, anyway) as independent from the colonizing West that renders impossible such gestures as Ngugi's return to Gikuyu...all these autobiographical facts indicate the status of an alien insider who is inherently disempowered to align oneself clearly to either the colonizer or the colonized.

The alien insider of Coetzee's fiction seems to be of a similar breed as that of many of the protagonists of Graham Greene. The direct correspondences between Henry Scobie of *The Heart of the Matter* and the magistrate of *Waiting for the Barbarians* is indeed striking, but several other figures, like the priest in *The Power and the Glory* and to a lesser extent, Pinkie in *Brighton Rock* also demonstrate comparable instances of the troubled subject, often located on the periphery of the dominating order in the context of colonization or class, race or gender struggle. The big difference is that with Greene's protagonists the struggle and the process of disintegration seem to possess an overtly moral dimension, especially with regard to an order of morality that is heavily Catholic—notions and actions relating to 'guilt' and 'sin' abound with respect to such protagonists.

In Coetzee, even though expiation is a running, if implied motif, it occurs more in a historical context (that of colonial and racial oppression), as suggested by the gestures of the magistrate washing the barbarian girl's feet and the help and cooperation offered by Mrs Curren towards Verceuil and the young activists and less in a personal context, much less guilt in a Catholic, or any religious sense. Even so, the moral dilemmas (not to speak of the commonality of the 'colonial' locales) of many Greene protagonists, and their gradual fall, almost in the manner of Greek tragedies, have striking correspondences with the destabilized subjectivities of the alien insiders of Coetzee, whose conflict however seem more of a phenomenological and a psychological nature rather than of a moral one (Ethics, however, is a large part of this conflict, inasmuch as it relates to one's interaction with/obligation towards alterity, but the ethics of such relationships, necessarily contingent on the construction of the subject and the other, is also considerably complicated following the problematizing of the subject-other duality by the very existence of such alien insiders). Another writer whose position in the English canon (rather his position before he was suitably canonized by Leavis and company) seems comparable to what Coetzee probably holds today is Joseph Conrad, the Pole-turned naturalized British subject, writing in his third language, English, and often dealing with issues of colonial power and identity construction. It would in fact be interesting to read Conrad's protagonists as alien insiders, as some of them are indeed placed on the margins of an imperial power system, but they are, all the same, engaged in the process of the imperial soul-making in the colonies, whether as weak intermediaries, or purveyors of private dreams, as Jim or Kurtz. *Lord Jim*, like many of Conrad's novels, has been often read in terms of the patterns of classical, especially Greek tragedy—the Aristotelean good man with a single flaw, his hubris, the fall and the expectation of anagnorisis and catharsis. Such readings, put in conjunction with contemporary analyses of the political situation in which the novel is set can yield a narrative of postcolonial discourse if we filter the flaws and falls of the Aristotelean hero with the kind of challenges with which Michel Foucault confronts the European Enlightenment. The determinate nature of the tragic path which, for all its insistence on the power of destiny and the furies, ends up glorifying the individuality of Oedipus or Medea (though maybe not to the extent Renaissance humanism glorifies a Hamlet or a Lear), in this interpretation, gives way to a critique of the notions of progress, reason and the munificence and efficacy of pastoral power, notions which the protagonist can be seen as possessing in a naïveté not dissimilar to the brittleness of the

Cartesian Cogito. Still, the Conradian hero (significantly, almost always white and male) seems to have his subjectivity constituted relatively unproblematically (compared to those of Coetzee's anyway), and is somewhat better qualified to play the role of the Lacanian 'grand-autre' than Coetzee's magistrate or Eugene Dawn—or at least masquerade for it. They are even, as in *Lord Jim*, motivated by notions of 'progress' and the subsequent wielding of the pastoral power on the colonized people, though their fates often end in a tragic demolition of the romance of such progress, reason and goodwill, as is the fate of both Jim and Kurtz. Still the relative integrity of their subjective constitution, and their 'progressive' optimism, coupled with their privileged racial and gendered make up, place them at a considerable distance from the position of the alien insider—the insider who comes to grief is not necessarily an alien insider! Equidistant on the other side of the alien insider would be a protagonist like Achebe's Okonkwo from *Things Fall Apart*, who remains firm, almost in the manner of an Aristotlean hero, till his death, in his refusal to have either his subjectivity or his fate shaped by the gaze of the colonizing Grand Other, in a gesture of truculent independence that resonates with Frantz Fanon's conclusion in *Black Skin: White Masks*: "I am my own foundation. And it is by going beyond the historical, instrumental hypothesis that I will initiate the cycle of my freedom" (Fanon 231). A comparison of such widely divergent, indeed conflicting subjectivities (what might have happened if Okonkwo and Kurtz figured in the same novel is best left to one's bloodthirsty imagination, a situation, however, perhaps no more potentially explosive than one in which the Ibo tribal leader might meet Kipling's Gunga Din!) helps us get a better sense of the alien insider, truly caught in between the conflicting forces of power-struggle and imperial soul-making, for which Coetzee's fiction remains one of the most striking sites in contemporary fiction, especially among works dealing with the processes historically invested with the motifs of subjectivity and subalternity.

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