

PAINFUL BELONGING: VIOLENCE IN J.M. COETZEE'S FICTION

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by  
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## Abstract

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J.M. Coetzee's fiction invites its readers to engage with the representation of political violence during and after the Apartheid period in South Africa. His work wrestles with a consideration of the processes that inform the hierarchization of individuals— whether they be human or non-human— and how consequential iterations of physical and psychological violence affect victims, perpetrators, and bystanders. In short, his fiction represents the consequences of encountering and attempting to represent the Other.

By comparing *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace*, I have isolated three distinct ethical considerations that inform Coetzee's representative engagement with violence in both texts: first, the infliction of direct physical pain on bodies that are marked as vulnerable due to specific ontological categories they possess; second, the violence perpetrated through the functioning of sovereign power in both ambiguous and specific spaces; and finally, the violence embedded within the criteria of citizenship and statelessness. The core of my analysis lies in arguing the fundamental interconnectedness of these three categories. Though

they are distinct and can be examined in isolation, they also simultaneously and necessarily inform each other and tend to unfold in a myriad of combinations and settings— for example, the infliction of physical violence in a political setting can be understood as an articulation of the tenuous relationship between perpetual sovereign power and the precariousness of national belonging. This quality of fundamental association between these categories moves across the spaces and contexts of these two novels, and as I hope to show, may extend to non-fictional political violence. In order to effectively delineate the connection between these three considerations, I rely primarily on the theoretical scaffolding provided by the political philosophers Hannah Arendt and Giorgio Agamben, as well as the works of Elaine Scarry, Susan Sontag, and Idelber Avelar on violence. This project unfolds over four chapters; the introduction, which contextualizes Coetzee within debates surrounding global literature, and the subsequent three chapters, which conduct examinations of the three modes of political violence represented in both novels.

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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: The Secret Body of the Other: Comparing Representations of Physical Violence in J.M. Coetzee’s <i>Disgrace</i> and <i>Waiting for the Barbarians</i> .....	19
Chapter Two: The Logic and Time of the Behemoth: Comparing Sovereign Violence in J.M. Coetzee’s <i>Waiting for the Barbarians</i> and <i>Disgrace</i> .....	59
Chapter Three: Ugliness, Bare Life, and the Camp: Comparing the Violence of Citizenship and Statelessness in <i>Waiting for the Barbarians</i> and <i>Disgrace</i> .....	101
Works Cited.....	142
Vita.....	147

## **An Introduction to Physical Violence, Sovereign Violence, and the Violence of Statelessness and Citizenship in J.M. Coetzee's Fiction**

In his 1986 essay “Into the Dark Chamber: The Novelist and South Africa,” the South African novelist J.M. Coetzee writes, “The novelist is a person who, camped before a closed door, facing an insufferable ban, creates, in place of the scene he is forbidden to see, a representation of that scene and a story of the actors in it and how they come to be there” (13). Coetzee writes about the difficulty of writing torture into narrative here—living in the midst of South African Apartheid forces him to negotiate with representing violence of which he, as a white man, has had no direct experience. When considering Coetzee’s novels, further complications arise due to the privileged position of their author and the dominant space the English language affords them. Broadly speaking, in this essay and in his oeuvre more generally, he touches on the precarious position writers often occupy when finding themselves tasked with answering difficult questions. What role can literature play in the intersections between the “real worlds” of politics, ethics, and violence? What can literary representation do to those realms— how can it critique them, exchange with them, or simply attempt to illustrate them? These questions remain, I argue, the most crucial space from which to examine Coetzee’s fiction, where the reality and representation of political violence interact, transact, or merely *do something* to one another.

I am primarily interested in how Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) and *Disgrace* (1999) interact with the specific realities of Apartheid and post-Apartheid South Africa and the more general realities of the apparatus of political violence occurring outside of that context. When read comparatively, and alongside some of the most relevant



contributions to political theory of the past century, I argue these texts open up the possibility of uncovering how representations of political violence relate to non-fictional, testimonial, and theoretical accounts of political violence. The novels move us closer to understanding the process that occurs when some of their creators, though banned from witnessing what occurs in the dark chamber of the state's torture room, still find themselves entrusted with bearing witness to the violence they are prohibited from seeing.<sup>1</sup> I am limiting this inquiry to three primary mechanisms of political violence at work within Coetzee's fiction: the violence of physical pain, the violence of sovereign power, and the violence of citizenship and statelessness.

Before explicating these categories, I would like to consider two primary critical and theoretical avenues of Coetzee's work that will allow me to situate the methodology I use when reading these two novels. Even before winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2003, Coetzee's work afforded him a vast amount of critical and popular attention. With the publication of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, perhaps his best known novel, Coetzee cemented his career as one of the most highly regarded writers in the English language. However, his work did receive and continues to receive a particular criticism that touches on the two realms of critical engagement I want to examine more closely. Especially upon the release and subsequent praise of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, many literary critics (both South African and not) accused his writing of being "preoccupied with problems of consciousness, thus betraying an idealist rather than materialist stance; [...] symptomatic of the forms of consciousness that it criticizes; [unable] to escape colonial history (and its Western

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, it is important to acknowledge that some novelists were themselves the victims and survivors of the violence they represent in their fiction.

ontology); [and failing] to delineate accurately the economic complexities of oppression” (Dovey 16).<sup>2</sup> This critique seems to rest on two important restrictions facing Coetzee’s fiction even in our current moment: how can a novelist who is both *white* and writing in *English* communicate the traumatic truth of South Africa’s fraught politico-historical position? These criticisms hinge on the ethical difficulties Coetzee’s work faces in attempting to represent the Other in the very language of their oppressors.

**“More ordinary than I like to think, she may have ways of finding me ordinary too”:**

### **Approaches to the Representing the Other in Coetzee’s Fiction**

For decades, critical and theoretical interventions have used Coetzee’s text in order to explore the ethics of representing the Other. This stems from Coetzee’s grasp of the intimacy between the trauma of Apartheid and the trauma of racially marked bodies who both bear witness to it through either the perpetual experience of its violence (black and Coloured South Africans)<sup>3</sup> or the perpetual complicity in its violence (white South Africans). According to a case study on survivors of political trauma during the Apartheid era conducted by Ileana Carmen Rogobete in 2015, when examining Apartheid, one must account for “the contextual differences with regard to the nature of traumatic events experienced by black communities compared to those of the White victims [...] in the case of black communities shattered by continuous oppression, trauma can be better understood

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<sup>2</sup> Dovey’s article, “Coetzee and His Critics: The Case of Dusklans” (1987), provides a cursory account of the main criticisms leveled against him by the Marxist literary critics writing in South Africa at the time. This passage summarizes Peter Kohler’s 1987 paper.

<sup>3</sup> The term Coloured here refers to a specific ethnic group in South Africa that “came to be linked with the surviving community of Free Blacks and the ex-slaves [...] who together acquired an identity— at first informal but after 1948 forbiddingly formal [...]-- as the Cape Coloured People” (Davenport 33). Certain South African individuals self-identify as Coloured to this day, while others refrain from using the term as a means of identification. Of course, this term indicates a specifically South African identity-category— it is in no way acceptable to use in other contemporary national contexts.

within the framework of a traumatic context and not as a result of traumatic events” (186). In order to reach the truth of Apartheid’s violence and its residual influences, there must be consideration of the many perspectives involved within South Africa—this assertion comes from a collection of testimonies stemming from a multitude of South African perspectives, both male and female, young and old, black, white, and Coloured. Yet, this prescription becomes difficult when applied to the realm of fiction. Attempting to represent the immensely complex conglomeration of experiences involved in the history of Apartheid runs the risks of fictional tokenization, over-simplification, exoticization, white-saviorism, and worse still, white-apologism. This difficulty, perhaps, touches on what Coetzee laments in his 1987 Jerusalem Prize Acceptance Speech: ““You cannot resign from the [master] caste. You can imagine resigning, you can perform a symbolic act of resignation, but short of shaking the dust of the country off your feet, there is no way of actually doing it”” (Durrant 18).

Grasping at the connection between the larger system and the particular participants does not necessarily mean Coetzee himself is able to, or even aims to, represent the absolute truth of the violated Other. This is the argument Sam Durrant relies on in his critical account of Coetzee’s fiction as a work of mourning (2004): “They [his characters] stand in for a base level of suffering that resists narrativization not simply because the suffering is in itself unspeakable, but because his awareness of his own position of privilege prevents him from speaking on behalf of their suffering” (18). Durrant uses this argument to explain the unexplainable moments in Coetzee’s descriptions—the apparent unspeakability of Apartheid’s violence correlates with Coetzee’s use of ambiguous, allegorical imagery in two of his earlier novels, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) and *Life and Times of Michael K*

(1983). However, this reading relies on a didactically allegorical approach to Coetzee's fiction, and specifically to *Waiting for the Barbarians*. In his book on Coetzee's fiction (2004), Derek Attridge cautions against interpretations informed by this methodology: "We need to ask how allegory is thematized in fiction, and whether this staging of allegory as an issue provides any guidance in talking about Coetzee's use of allegory" (34). Attridge's argument centers on the necessity in thinking through Coetzee's use of allegory both generally and specifically, and claims that too simple of a one-to-one comparison between his historical context and his fiction may obscure the more important aspect of Coetzee's fiction: its ability to communicate aspects of the ethical human condition in a more general capacity, apart from the South African context in which he writes. Attridge writes, "Coetzee's work both stage, and are, irruptions of otherness into our familiar worlds, and they pose the question: what is our responsibility toward the other?" (12).

Even between only two critics, we have monograph-length accounts for how to understand the relevance and treatment of Coetzee's representations of the Other. It seems on the one hand, Coetzee's representation of Othered bodies can be interpreted as a retreat from presuming to know the truth of the incommunicable trauma of Apartheid's history, and on the other, as an ethically charged event that intentionally displaces the reader precisely through using the representation of the Other as an intrusion.<sup>4</sup> One can even take Peter Singer and Anton Leist's use of Coetzee's representation of the Other in their analytical collection about the connections between Coetzee's fiction and ethical philosophy (2010): "Like

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<sup>4</sup> For shorter accounts of the ethics of Coetzee's representation of the Other, see citations included for Kelly Adams (2015), Mary LeBlanc (2017), Pavithra Tantrigoda (2016), Liani Lochner (2016), Jonathan Lear (2015), Liani Lochner (2016), and Mike Marais (2011).

transcendental arguments in philosophy, they [literary characters] must radiate their status of being extreme but at the same time must be able to shed some light on the less extreme [...] Coetzee's novels are populated with characters of this kind" (9).

Though Singer and Leist's collection provides an example of the interdisciplinarity elicited by Coetzee's fiction, I am disinclined to agree with their application of analytically-bent ethical theory to his prose, and am even less enthused about their connection between his fiction and transcendental philosophical ideals.<sup>5</sup> When read in this fashion, Coetzee's novels come dangerously close to fulfilling aspects of the criticism initially laid against them: namely, that the texts only serve to regurgitate and reify the ideologies they seek to dismantle, or expose. Coetzee's fiction seems less preoccupied with the implementation of transcendental ideals than with the material, psychological, and metaphysical effects of the violence he works to represent. In a moment in *Disgrace*, the text directly rejects the very emphasis on ideas purported by Leist and Singer: "The question is not, How can we keep the imagination pure, protected from the onslaughts of reality? The question has to be, Can we find a way for the two to coexist?" (22). This question permeates the rest of the novel, and any definite conclusion intentionally evades us. For fiction itself, perhaps, works in the space between imagination and reality that David Lurie touches on here, and in light of this liminality, a clear method with which to read the novels' treatments of Othered characters

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<sup>5</sup> Admittedly, Leist and Singer specify that, "To shift the puzzles of philosophical reflection into literature could be at least a first step towards tackling them in a more realistic and practical manner" (14). However, their reliance on the formal ethical systems provided in analytic philosophy feels facile in light of the lineage of continental philosophy, which houses a whole host of theorists that have been taking the "first step" of linking literature to theory for at least a century.

must be reached before its representation regarding the violence inflicted on those characters can be explicated.

Durrant and Attridge's perspectives, which also provide potential methods by which to think through the difficulties of Coetzee's representation of the Other, also rely almost too heavily on application of more "literary" ideas to these texts. That is, they place much of their emphasis on the formal elements of Coetzee's prose that apparently give it unique qualities. While not inherently incorrect, these readings also may place Coetzee's fiction too close to the critiques levelled against it by its historical materialist critics. The methodology with which I conduct my reading of this ethical quandary takes aspects of these perspectives into consideration, but relies most heavily on the perspective provided by Gayatri Spivak in *Death of a Discipline* (2003). In her argument about the necessity of cultivating a new Comparative Literature built on collaboration with the field of Area Studies, she turns to both *Disgrace* and *Waiting for the Barbarians* in order to make the case of her preference for qualitative texts that use a logical protocol over a rhetorical protocol.<sup>6</sup> After quoting a particularly ambiguous description the Magistrate provides of the apparent impenetrability of the Barbarian Girl, Spivak writes,

But the meaning that is sought is the meaning of the Magistrate as subject, as perceived by the barbarian as other. This meaning is undecidable in at least two ways. First, there is no stable declaration of meaning. And second, the alternative possibilities of the meaning of the dominant self in the eyes of the barbarian other are

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<sup>6</sup> Spivak writes "these logical passages are often accounts of the fruits of imperial experience with some historical generalizability within the loose outlines of the narrative" (22). In her understanding, logical protocol in qualitative narratives moves away from the impulse to efface the fact that the proper study of literature gives entry to the performativity of cultures, not the reality of them (13).

given as questions. It is possible to suggest that two alternatives are standing in for an indefinite structure of possibilities here [...] Our own undecidable meaning is in the irreducible figure that stands in for the eyes of the other (23).

In this observation, Spivak argues that Coetzee's ambiguous account of the Othered characters, instead of shrinking away from representation, instead intentionally illustrates the fact that when one regards the Other, one can neither completely access them nor ourselves in their eyes. In this way, Coetzee's narratives work to highlight the *mutual* ambiguity that continually effaces any attempt to access the Other. In so doing, his narratives work against the more anthropologically-based qualitative fiction Spivak warns against.

She applies a similar understanding to *Disgrace's* representation of gendered difference: "That novel [*Disgrace*] offers a glimpse of what happens when the woman is no longer an honorary brother, a figuration of the impossible" (34). In other words, Coetzee's novels embrace the shared impossibility of understanding implicit in the relationship between the self and the Other, and in light of this, highlights the agency of the Other often forgotten in other representations of alterity. This instance on mutuality can be glimpsed in another point in *Waiting for the Barbarians* when the Magistrate realizes the Girl finds his conversation uninteresting: "I would do well to take these thoughts seriously. More ordinary than I like to think, she may have ways of finding me ordinary too" (64). Here, for the first but not the last time, the protagonist in Coetzee's novel demonstrates his capacity to apprehend the mutual indecipherable quality he and the Girl share when attempting to understand each other. Spivak's text, however, while offering a preferred method to read

Coetzee's representation of the Other, provides another ethical snag often leveled against his fiction—the criticism of his use of the English language to write about South Africa.

This criticism stems first from the Marxist reading of the shortcomings in his fiction, which accuse it of being unable to move outside of its colonial history and thus, its Western ontological perspective. Spivak writes, “Literary studies will have to acknowledge that the European outlines of its premise [...]— positing the idea of the universality of each of the European national languages [...]— have in globaility and in subaltern U.S. multiculturalism, altogether disappeared” (12). In other words, literary studies' insistence on the absolute domination of European languages have resulted in the tendency to regard literature written in the languages of the Southern Hemisphere as inanimate objects of cultural study instead of active examples of cultural media, a perspective less in line with the movement of global dynamics as a whole (9). The insistence on the inherently dominant position of European languages ignores the possibility of encountering examples of cultural production written in the languages of the colonized populations of the Global South. In light of the fact that Coetzee writes in English, a possibility that his literature usurps the position of historically erased cultural and linguistic perspectives emerges. This anxiety appears in *Disgrace*: “The language [English] he draws on with such aplomb is, if he only knew it, tired, friable, eaten from the inside as if by termites. Only the monosyllables can still be relied on” (129). This anxiety allows us to move to an examination of the methodologies and perspectives critics have provided about the difficulty of communicating the reality of the violence of colonial dynamics in South Africa through the production of Anglophone fictional representations.



**“More and more he is convinced that English is an unfit medium for the truth of South Africa”: Approaching Conversations about Anglophone Literary Production**

Spivak begins to make her case for the urgency of a newly conceived methodology in the field of Comparative Literature by writing: “The literatures in English produced by the former British colonies in Africa and Asia should be studied and supported. [...] Yet the languages that were historically prevented from having a constituted readership or are now losing readership might be allowed to prosper as well” (15). She advocates here for mutual consideration of Anglophone literature— and linguistically European literature as a whole— and literature written in languages that have been historically suppressed. Spivak then predicts that if literary studies remains focused on translation into and from primarily European languages, the discipline loses the ability to recognize the texts that disappear precisely because of that mode of translation (18-19). In regards to Coetzee’s texts, then, the ethical questions surrounding his use of the English language become paramount to the role of literature in the specific colonial violence he represents.

Spivak’s concern about the direction of literary studies echoes in Emily Apter’s *The Translation Zone* (2006). However, Apter’s way of thinking about linguistic exchange may provide a way to approach the ethical stakes of Coetzee’s reliance on English. Apter introduces the concept of the translation zone, or a way of thinking about the parallels between linguistic exchange and war zones. Her book, written immediately after 9/11, when the stakes of accurate and effective translators became much higher, broadens the discipline of Translation Studies and demonstrates how contemporary political dynamics run parallel to contemporary linguistic interplay. She writes, “the translation zone applies to diasporic

language communities, print and media public spheres, institutions of governmentality and language policy-making, theaters of war, and literary theories with particular relevance to the history and future of comparative literature” (6). Translation Studies, and the discipline of literary studies by extension, needs to embrace the ways in which it influences and is influenced by political realities. When the concept of the translation zone is utilized, the possible implications of language and translation carry enormous political weight. Apter’s conceptualization of the proximity between global linguistic dynamics and contemporary war zones presents a tool with which to read Coetzee’s understanding of the relationship between language, fiction, and political realities. Coetzee’s fiction offers an example of what occurs in fiction when linguistic exchange is thought of as part of political war zones.

In a 2011 interview, Coetzee touches on his understanding of the English language in the context of South Africa’s political schema: “The chief lesson [...] a lesson whose force came home to me only years later, concerned the English language [...] a medium that I naively used to think was neutral and could be bracketed and forgotten” (Rainey 848). Here, Coetzee directly addresses the fact that English can never be considered a politically neutral language. If *Disgrace* and *Waiting for the Barbarians* are read with Apter’s translation zone in mind, the texts actually serve to provide ample evidence of the connection between fiction, linguistic exchange, and political violence. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, a particular point works within the framework provided by Apter’s understanding of translation as a war zone. The Magistrate, after being accused of sabotaging the Empire in order to aid the supposed barbarian uprising, is forced to “translate” a collection of ancient relics he has spent his life collecting. Though he has no actual knowledge of the characters embossed on the tablets he

has uncovered, he uses them to launch into a diatribe against the Empire that spans several pages, accusing them of everything from war-mongering to genocide.

Finally, he finishes, ““Sometimes when you have difficulty in falling asleep it is because your ears have been reached by the cries of the dead which, like their writings, are open to many interpretations. Thank you. I have finished translating”” (129). Though not actually based on a one-to-one translation between an ancient dialect and the language (presumably English) he uses, this moment indicates the text’s awareness of the powerful political stakes involved in linguistic interplay, and therefore acts as a mode of translation that moves it from the linguistic realm to the political realm. When the Magistrate “translates” in this moment, he actually presents a truth pertaining to the atrocities the Empire carries out in order to secure its dominance. This correlates with Apter’s claim that “The translation zone defines the epistemological intersections of politics, logic, linguistics, media, and environment” (6).

*Disgrace* also continually underscores the visceral stakes between the translation of linguistic and political realms by highlighting how shifts in the English language double the shifts in post-Apartheid racial dynamics : “More and more he is convinced that English is an unfit medium for the truth of South Africa. Stretches of English code whole sentences long have thickened, lost their articulations, their articulateness. Like a dinosaur expiring and settling in the mud, the language has stiffened” (117). Meta-textually, the novel acknowledges its own shortcomings elicited by the very language it uses. Just as David Lurie finds himself unable to penetrate the truth of the violence occurring around him because he only speaks European languages, so to, the reader is jolted into the recognition that

attempting to discover the entire truth of South Africa cannot happen through reading a novel written in English. In this way, based on its use of the English language, the novel itself demonstrates how the possibility or impossibility of adequate linguistic exchange mirrors the fluctuating political dynamics surrounding it both internally and externally.

A last moment in *Disgrace* cements Coetzee's commitment to interrogating the political stakes of writing about colonial violence in English: "The real truth he suspects, is something [...] that would take months to get to the bottom of, months of patient, unhurried conversations with dozens of people, and the offices of an interpreter" (118). Here again, the text explicitly informs its reader that the truth of South Africa cannot be communicated in English. When Apter's understanding of translation-as-war-zone is considered in conjunction with Coetzee's texts, the criticism he faces pertaining to his choice to write in English are in fact criticisms that he himself has already apprehended, recognized, and leveled against his own work. The inherent violence attached to English, the impossibility of its neutrality, seeps through both novels. In the same interview from 2011, Coetzee remarks, "In practice, specific languages make specific ranges of thoughts and feelings easier and other ranges more difficult. In that sense every language inclines toward a particular sensibility" (Rainey 849). If we take him at his word, then we can perhaps understand his choice to use English when writing his fiction as an intentional one. English participates in the war zone between languages, it carries a distinct legacy of non-neutrality and violence. If written from a powerful perspective, as in Coetzee's case, it makes sense to write in English as a way to demonstrate the compulsory participation in the systemic violence of Apartheid. Coetzee writes exclusively from the position of the oppressor, and his use of English simultaneously

demonstrates the oppressors' participation in the violence of hegemonic oppression, and the oppressors' inability to completely access the cultural reality of those they dominate. Of course, this is not to say that Coetzee's fiction retains its communicative powers solely through its use of the English language, or that texts written in Sotho, Xhosa, or any of South Africa's other official languages would not be more effective in representing the violence of Apartheid. However, Coetzee's awareness of the exchange between language and politics, and of his own complicity in the violent dynamics of his nation, is made excruciatingly clear in his decision to write in English.

**“‘The crime that is latent in us we must inflict on ourselves,’ I say. ‘Not on others,’”:**

**Complicity and Mechanisms of Violence in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace***

Both *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace* continually address and return to the complicity the protagonists apprehend in their own behavior and social positions. In *Disgrace*, David Lurie touches on this complicity most directly when he tells Melane Isaac's father, “In my own terms, I am being punished for what happened between myself and your daughter. I am sunk into a state of disgrace from which it will not be easy to lift myself” (172). Here, David indicates that he has begun to view the violence inflicted onto his daughter by her rapists as an articulation of the same violence he inflicted on Melanie Isaacs, a student he coerced into engaging in sexual relations with him. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the Magistrate expresses what complicity has taught him to the would-be antagonist of the entire narrative, Colonel Joll: “I mouth the words and watch him read them on my lips: ‘The crime that is latent in us we must inflict on ourselves,’ I say. I nod and nod, driving the message home. ‘Not on others,’ I say” (170). When considered in terms of

complicity with the violence that happens in the novel, this moment indicates the importance in acknowledging the violent impulses within all of us. These impulses, which are elicited by fear and disgust of the Other, must be directed against the self. If directed against the self, it seems, concrete steps can be taken in the direction of critically thinking about and working to overcome the differences that engender the infliction of violence. If directed against the Other, as the Magistrate has already realized, unchecked, indiscriminate violence occurs and ultimately results in atrocity.

The element of complicity embedded within Coetzee's decision to use English as the vehicle for his fiction extends to all three mechanisms of violence I examine in this inquiry. The first chapter, which compares the infliction and experience of physical pain in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace*, traces the how complicity in physical violence inflicted on the disempowered Other extends to the infliction of physical violence on the self. The first section compares physical violence inflicted on bodies who are made less powerful, and therefore more vulnerable to violation by the powerful, based on gendered differences. The second section compares how this dynamic extends to bodies made less powerful because of racial differences. The final section argues that the texts' shared representation of this mode of violence extending to both the Magistrate and David Lurie work to demonstrate that once the infliction of severe physical violence is tolerated against particular bodies, there is little or nothing to stop it from extending to every body. In order to make these claims, I rely on the theoretical apparatuses provided by Elaine Scarry and Judith Butler, which are dedicated to parsing out the relationship between the infliction of physical pain and hierarchies created by hegemonic systems of power.

The second chapter begins with an examination of the tension between individual complicity and sovereign violence. How much can be expected of a single individual when they are faced with the simultaneously omnipresent and invisible behemoth of sovereign violence? The chapter then moves to explicate how each novel illustrates the paradoxical structure of sovereign power, but crucially, illustrate that structure at different points in its eternal cycle. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the sovereign violence of the Empire is articulated through the apparatus of torture, and thus becomes overtly apparent to some of its subjects for the first time. In *Disgrace*, the violence caused by the sovereign power of the Apartheid South African state has been technically dissolved, and yet, its residual influences and legacies continue to influence the dynamics between the characters. Both iterations of sovereign violence provided in these texts provide a basis upon which the eternal quality of sovereign power can be glimpsed, and moreover, argue that powerful individuals who inflict physical pain onto less powerful individuals become articulations of the sovereign power they live within. The last section of this chapter compares both protagonists' experiences of temporal and spatial fluctuations to argue how sovereign power, which partially rests on the fiction of its perpetual progress and futurity, implicates every individual it claims to protect through its infliction of violence. For these arguments to emerge, I use theoretical engagements from Judith Butler and Giorgio Agamben.

The last chapter, which deals with the violence of citizenship and statelessness, begins with an explication of the fictional division between bare life and political life sovereign power espouses in order to perpetuate itself. Individual characters, and particularly the protagonists in each text continually face their own complicity in the continuation of

sovereign violence precisely because of how they understand the divisions between bare life and political life. The novels both work to uncover these illusory binarisms between bare life and political life, and human and non-human life, through proliferating parallels between the plight of disempowered human characters and the abuses of non-human characters. In the chapter's next section, the criteria used to indicate belonging to either political life or bare life is compared; both texts use a criteria of citizenship attached to ethnic or racial origin, or birth in the territory of the nation. The last section of the chapter compares the space of the camp present in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace* in order to argue the fundamental connection between physical violence, sovereign violence, and the violence of citizenship and statelessness.

Comparing these modes of violence in Coetzee's texts ultimately reveals how the sovereign apparatus of nation or empire uses the criteria of citizenship and statelessness to justify the infliction of physical violence onto bodies whose differences threaten the illusion of absolute control and efficacy that is necessary for the conservation of sovereign power. This dynamic indicates that all three mechanisms necessarily engender each other, and that when one attempts to uncover the illusory character of political violence, one cannot exist without the other two. Comparing these modes of violence between Coetzee's novels also serves to illustrate what Claudia Bernardi writes about the creation of art in the aftermath of atrocity: "Art is a tender caress of remembrance, fatigue, loss, pain, and hope, finding in the proposition of beauty its vindication. Art may not necessarily mean an improvement, but art will assist in the recapitulation of the suffering endured, transformed, and finally rebirthed as a communal proposition" (179). In other words, this comparative project aims to uncover



how the representation of violence in Coetzee's novels works to simultaneously ensure that the violence of Apartheid will never be erased, and also proposes that confrontation with the past, with its far-reaching consequences, may gesture toward a reconceptualized future.

## Chapter One

### **The Secret Body of the Other: Comparing Representations of Physical Violence in J.M.**

#### ***Coetzee's Disgrace and Waiting for the Barbarians***

The first mechanism of violence this inquiry will examine in Coetzee's fiction is that of the infliction and experience of physical pain. Before examining physical pain in each narrative specifically, however, it is crucial to depart from an understanding that physical pain resists representation. As Elaine Scarry writes in *The Body in Pain* (1985), "[...] pain comes unsharably into our midst as at once that which cannot be denied and that which cannot be confirmed" (4). Ironically, this resistance to representation, this unspeakable or secret quality of physical pain, is an important aspect of the mechanisms of violence at work in J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) and *Disgrace* (2000). Though the instances where physical pain is illustrated are perhaps the most blatant examples of violence in these novels, they still carry a mysterious or evasive quality. Accessing them, however, is vital in the process of accessing the other two modes of sovereign violence and the violence of citizenship and statelessness. Infections and experiences of physical violence permeate both novels, and act as catalysts for much of their progression; moreover, the physical violence in both texts also engender, intersect, and inform the violence at work in the other categories of violence present in these texts.

In spite of the particularities of the representations of physical pain—both in its infliction and the experience of it—I argue that, when read comparatively, *Disgrace* and *Waiting for the Barbarians* reveal that the perpetration of violence occurs when certain bodies have been disempowered by being marked as outside the norms of hegemonic

systems of power. The exclusions which lead to the justification of physical violence serve the civilizing mission embedded within the settler-colonial dynamics present in both novels. The contexts that engender the sexually motivated violence inflicted on and experienced by Lucy Lurie in *Disgrace* and the Barbarian Girl in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and the racially motivated violence inflicted on and experienced by Pollux and the Barbarian prisoners in the novels highlight this necessary connection between physical violence and a condition of disempowerment. The novels also share a crucial other characteristic that influences their representations of physical violence. Both David Lurie and the Magistrate, the protagonists of *Disgrace* and *Waiting for the Barbarians* respectively, begin their trajectories from the positions of power their race and gender afford them. However, they both experience extreme physical violence that reconfigures their subject position into ones of powerlessness. Though both of these men witness other moments of brutal violence inflicted on gendered or racial Others prior to their own experience, they do not intervene in any significant way. This inaction indicates the centrality given to complicity that spans both texts—passivity in the face of physical violence by powerful<sup>7</sup> individuals is a part of what eventually renders them vulnerable to the same physical violence carried out on disempowered individuals.

There are two events in these texts that can be understood as catalysts for the central acts of physical violence under consideration later in the narratives. Lucy Lurie's rape and the Barbarian Girl's torture lead David Lurie and the Magistrate to respond in ways that perpetuate the initial violence of these events—their attempts to understand the womens'

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<sup>7</sup> I am using the terminology of powerful/disempowered to describe the characters' identities as they figure into the hegemonic schema within the texts. Disempowered bodies are bodies marked by racial and/or gendered difference that render them inferior (and less worthy of protection) when compared to the bodies of hegemonically dominant white men.

trauma lead to a cyclical re-traumatization. Moreover, the protagonists' responses to these two events lead them to directly and indirectly extend physical violence to the bodies of racially disempowered individuals, which eventually lead to the infliction of physical violence onto the protagonists themselves. The first two considerations in this chapter—the physical violence inflicted on disempowered individuals made so through discernable external differences of gender and race—intersect, beget one another, and culminate in the extension of violence to powerful bodies. In other words, once the infliction of physical violence on a *certain* body or bodies is excused, there is little (or perhaps, nothing) standing in the way of that violence being inflicted on *any* body. In this capacity, Coetzee's fiction, through its representation of the complexity and all-permeating quality of physical violence, may gesture toward a particular way to think through the ethics of action and accountability in a hegemonic culture that condones and perpetrates the infliction of physical violence. The texts force the reader to confront uncomfortable questions about the politics of complicity and consideration; for example, is it possible to advocate for the lives of others if the violence threatening them does not threaten the self as well? What responsibility does a single individual have when confronted with the political apparatuses that justify the infliction of violence onto some while punishing the infliction of violence onto others?

**“How natural a mistake, to believe that you can burn or tear or hack your way into the secret body of the other!”: Gendered Violence in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace***

The rape of Lucy Lurie and the torture of the Barbarian Girl are catalytic events in these texts that instigate later physical violence in each of Coetzee's narratives. *Waiting for*

*the Barbarians* centers on an ambiguous outpost on the fringes of an unnamed Empire, where the Magistrate of the township witnesses the systematic rounding up, imprisonment, and torture of barbarian populations in the name of securing the Empire from barbarian invasion. These populations are referred to only by names like “the barbarians” and “the river people,” terms that intentionally withhold national or ethnic markers, and thus gesture toward part of what makes the difference between how the subjects of the Empire are treated and how these populations are treated. Colonel Joll, the head of the Third Bureau of the Civil Guard and one of the only named characters in the novel, stands as the primary instigator of these practices, and as such, is the only individual present for all instances of torture in the narrative. Though initially disturbed by the Bureau’s “interrogation” tactics, the Magistrate only becomes directly opposed to them because of his relationship with an unnamed barbarian woman, who in light of the injuries sustained during the torture inflicted on her, is left behind by her community when Colonel Joll decides to release them. The Magistrate finds himself simultaneously fascinated and repulsed by the horrors the Barbarian Girl has lived through. Subsequently, uncovering the details about what transpired between Colonel Joll and the Girl primarily dictate the events that unfold for the first half of the novel. The Magistrate confesses, “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” (36). What ensues is a relationship fraught with ethical tangles.

The Girl and the Magistrate live together throughout the winter, during which he relentlessly attempts to discover the truth of what has happened to her. By design, the reader is never privy to the intricacies of what occurs in the hours when the Barbarian Girl is

tortured<sup>8</sup> in real-time—like the Magistrate, we can only guess as to what actually happened in the torture chamber. The first description we have of the Girl comes almost immediately after her encounter with Colonel Joll, and is so subtle that it can be easily overlooked. While surveying the yard of the barracks-turned-prison, the Magistrate notices that “One of the women has to be helped. She shakes all the time like an old person, though she is young” (27). Though the text never directly identifies this woman as the Barbarian Girl, the specificity with which this observation is foregrounded heavily implies this connection. Moreover, if we can posit that this woman is the Barbarian Girl, this moment illustrates that even in this early point in the narrative, she has already been marked by her trauma, and yet the specificities of her torture have already happened, away from the eyes of the Magistrate, and by extension, the reader.

The implications of this initial vague introduction to the Barbarian Girl can perhaps be better understood through Judith Butler’s theory of the necessary conditions that frame the difference between “valuable” and “expendable” lives in *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (2009). For Butler, at a most basic ontological level, all life, due to its precariousness or vulnerability, theoretically carries inherent value and mandates protection (3). However, that inherent value is obscured because of the ways in which that life is framed in hegemonic systems: “The ‘being’ of the body [...] is one that is always given over to others, to norms, to social and political organizations that have developed historically in order to maximize precariousness for some and minimize precariousness for others” (Butler 3). For Butler, this creation of ontological fields conditions the difference between the

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<sup>8</sup> For more about Coetzee’s understanding of the ethics of representing torture, see his essay “Into the Dark Chamber: The Novelist and South Africa” (1986).

cognitive process of apprehending a life (or registering without full cognition) and recognizing a life (or reciprocally registering with full cognition) (4).<sup>9</sup> She continues to describe a condition given to life recognizable as such: its grievability. Butler writes that “The apprehension of grievability precedes and makes possible the apprehension of precarious life” because the element of grievability indicates that the life in question is capable of being missed, or mourned, and therefore is a life meant to be lived (14). When life does not contain this element of grievability, “there is no life, or rather, there is something living that is other than life” (14). When life lacks grievability, there is a latent understanding that the life lost must not have been meant to exist in the first place.

From the first time he sees her, the Magistrate cannot recognize the Barbarian Girl’s life as grievable, and therefore, as a life that matters. The first description of her indicates that he apprehends her as little more than a spectral figure, a status given to her precisely because of the way she is framed within the settler-colonial dynamics between the Empire and the barbarians. She cannot conform to the hegemonically dominant norms of the Empire, which give bodies the condition of being either grievable, and worthy of protection, or ungrievable, and unworthy of that protection. In other words, the fact that her introduction in the text amounts to little more than a passing image of an ambiguous barbarian woman illustrates the same discourse of inherent ontological difference that made the violence inflicted on her justifiable by her torturers— her life is merely apprehended by the Magistrate, who regards it as mattering less, and therefore as less worthy (or completely unworthy) of any protection

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<sup>9</sup> For Butler, apprehension is less precise than the cognitive stage of recognition— it is possible to apprehend that something lies beyond recognition, but apprehension itself is a form of knowing that resists conceptual forms of knowledge whereas recognition does not. (4).

offered by the juridical power that simultaneously and paradoxically justifies the persecution of certain bodies in order to protect others.

Their first interaction, which takes place in the privacy of the Magistrate's residence, can be understood as the moment where her body, and therefore her life, become recognizable to the Magistrate. Of course, the connection here between her physical form and her recognizability is loaded with gendered implications—her feminine body becomes the site where the violence of the Empire finds articulation for the Magistrate, and his obsession with the evidence he believes it presents perhaps unintentionally interacts with a highly gendered process of dehumanization. Additionally, it is only through direct contact with him that she finally comes into full relief, and it is this interaction that becomes the necessary condition that allows her pain to move from apprehension to recognition. This implies that less grievable life only becomes recognizable through proximity to more grievable life—the Magistrate becomes invested in the Barbarian Girl only when she has a direct connection to him and not when she stood in the prison yard with other expendable bodies. Moreover, this first encounter also cements her inherent difference from the citizens of the Empire (and from the women the Magistrate has known in the past) which he locates in her experience of torture. She tells the Magistrate in their initial conversation, ““You do not understand. You do not want someone like me. [...] I am ...’ she holds up her forefinger, grips it, twists it. I have no idea what the gesture means” (31). The gesture implies what the Girl's linguistic barrier bars her from articulating: ““You do not want someone like me. I am *broken*.” Though she attempts to convey this to the Magistrate, he cannot recognize what she means by it— he



understands it only as a failure to communicate her experience, thus broadening the barrier between them.

This moment foregrounds an understanding of the phenomenology of pain that Scarry delineates. She writes: “Thus, when one speaks about ‘one’s own physical pain’ and about ‘another person’s physical pain,’ one might also appear to be speaking about two wholly distinct orders of events. For the person whose pain it is, it is ‘effortlessly’ grasped [...] while for the person outside the sufferer’s body, what is ‘effortless’ is not grasping it” (Scarry 4). This is the basis of the incommunicability of physical pain: to have pain is to have certainty, and to hear about pain is to have doubt (4). The Magistrate, though earnestly invested in understanding the truth of the Barbarian Girl’s pain, can only do so through the mediation of a necessary doubt. By continuously asking her to give her testimony, to declare the truth of her torture, he cannot apprehend that such an exchange has been made impossible by the incommunicability of physical pain itself. Their relationship unfolds through a series of exchanges like this: “‘Nothing is worse than what we can imagine,’ [...] She gives no sign that she has even heard me. [...] ‘Tell me,’ I want to say, ‘don’t make a mystery of it, pain is only pain’; but the words elude me” (36). Ironically, by requesting her disclosure in this respect, the Magistrate not only indirectly rubs up against the difficulty in communicating physical pain through his own elusive words, but simultaneously renders the possibility of her relating her testimony even more remote by essentializing the fact that her reality can never be as severe or as painful as his imagining.

The Magistrate's interrogation of the Girl, his attempt to find the truth of what has happened to her, places him close to performing the same function as her torturer, a proximity which grows clearer to him the longer he spends with her. He ruminates:

“But with this woman it is as if there is no interior, only a surface across which to hunt back and forth seeking entry. Is this how her torturers felt hunting their secret? [...] How natural a mistake to believe that you can burn or tear or hack your way into the secret body of another! [...] I might equally well tie her to a chair and beat her, it would be no less intimate. (49)

For Scarry, torture draws justification from the interrogation— this is how it cements its disguise as a practice meant to gather information, or to establish truth, and simultaneously elicits a response from its victim, usually coded as a form of betrayal, either against family, friends, or nation (28). The structure of the interrogation becomes a crucial formulation in the overall understanding of the infliction of extreme physical pain. For Scarry, it consists of two parts, the question and the answer. She writes that the question, always understood as the motive behind the infliction of the torture, “credits the torturer, providing him with justification, his cruelty with an explanation” and that the answer, often understood as a betrayal, “discredits the prisoner, making him rather than the torturer, his voice rather than his pain, the cause of his loss and self and world” (35). In forcing the tortured individual to use their voice in this way, the torturer negates it, and through repeatedly inflicting intense physical pain, reduces the victim of torture to their body alone. At the same time, in the interrogation, the torturer ceases to be experienced as anything other than a voice. The Magistrate, then, through performing a similar mode of interrogation,

except replacing the infliction of physical pain with the caresses of intimacy, still reduces the Girl to her body alone, placing himself in dangerous adjacency to Colonel Joll. While hunting for evidence of her torture on her body, he deprioritizes her voice, the words she actually speaks to him, and thus makes her testimony completely inaccessible.

In order to begin piecing together the Girl's suffering, the Magistrate turns to members of the Empire's army that may have witnessed the encounter first-hand. Confronted with the Magistrate's tireless questions, the soldier conversing with him cries out, "I do not know sir! [...] Sometimes there was screaming. I think they beat her, but I was not there" (40-41). This reliance on second-hand accounts to confirm the Girl's experience of torture correlates with a claim Idelbar Avelar makes in *The Letter of Violence* (2004): "This confirmation [the validity of the experience of the tortured subject] only emerges, however, with the torturer's confession, and is only valid inasmuch as it comes out of his mouth" (43). Through attempting to confirm or deny the truth of an experience of torture he necessarily cannot fully access by relying on its potential perpetrators, the Magistrate unwittingly prioritizes the testimony of the men who carried it out over the testimony of the individual on whom it was inflicted. Eventually, after this pattern of interrogation and reliance on external indications of the truth is established by the Magistrate, the Girl discloses the following account of her torture:

'They said they would burn my eyes out, but they did not. The man brought it [the instrument] very close to my face and made me look at it. They held my eyelids open. But I had nothing to tell them. That was all. That was when the damage came. After

that I could not see properly anymore. There was a blur in the middle of everything I looked at; I could see only around the edges. It is difficult to explain.’ (47)

In this singular account of the details of her torture, at least one vital implication is emphasized. After being subjected to the infliction of extreme physical pain, the Girl is now mostly blinded, and thus her visual access to the world around her is permanently impaired. This correlates with another one of Scarry’s formulations about the phenomenology of physical pain; physical pain is necessarily a process that destroys an individual’s world,<sup>10</sup> a “destruction experienced spatially as either the contraction of the universe down to the immediate vicinity of the body or as the body swelling to fill the entire universe” (35). In physical, linguistic, and psychological capacities, the Girl can no longer encounter the external world as it was before her experience of torture—in retelling that destruction to the Magistrate, she is forced to re-confront her trauma, and again finds linguistic articulation of little to no use.

In *Disgrace*, the same particular complexities of physical pain emerge in the aftermath of the focal event of the narrative: Lucy Lurie’s rape by three black South African men. The narrative centers on David Lurie, an aging professor who, after engaging in an coercive sexual relationship with one of his university students, quits his position and moves in with his daughter Lucy on the outskirts of Cape Town, alongside her black neighbor and employee Petrus. Their lives are changed forever when, upon returning to their home, they find three black South African men waiting for them. After beating David and leaving him locked in the bathroom, they bring Lucy into her bedroom and they take turns raping her for

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<sup>10</sup> By “world,” Scarry means everything that makes one’s subject-position their own— their beliefs, perspective, physical body, etc.

an unspecified amount of time. David attempts to free himself, thinking, “His child in the hands of strangers. In a minute, in an hour, it will be too late: whatever is happening to her will be set in stone, will belong to the past” (94).

A note that must be addressed before expanding upon any shared characteristics between the violence experienced by the Barbarian Girl and Lucy Lurie, however, resides at the point of distinction between the former’s torture and the latter’s rape. Physical violence that takes on a sexual dimension must be understood as necessarily different than physical violence that does not— moreover, rape’s only necessary function is a lack of consent and though it is *often* physically painful, it is not *always* physically painful. Torture, on the other hand, is necessarily painful— the infliction of physical pain is the very instrument through which torture is articulated. Through reading the experiences of the women in these novels in a comparative way, I am not attempting to erase the differences between torture and rape. Instead, I am attempting to follow a point made by Butler: “[...] we have to include both of these views [of sexual violence and torture] within a larger framework if we are to understand how these scenes of sexual debasement and physical torture are part of the civilizing mission’s efforts to seize absolute control over the construction of the subject [being violated]” (128). In both cases, the subject in question is a feminine subject— though this seems obvious, it is this gendered difference that gives these characters a distinct framing of expendability and disempowerment, which is part of how their violators justify their actions. Though the torturers in *Waiting for the Barbarians* do not limit their interrogations based on gender, the treatment the Girl receives from the Magistrate and other men in the town after she is tortured connects her experience to Lucy in a highly gendered capacity.

Both women's bodies become the site on which the violent political dynamics of settler/colonialism occur. Though their experience of physical pain is *different*, just as the experience of torture and rape is *different*, the way their bodies are examined and used by the men around them after their trauma indicates the *similar* consequences of the disempowered state they occupy because of their gender.

What underlies both of these representations of violence is this compulsion on the part of the violator to exercise absolute control over the bodies they are violating. Additionally, given the colonial dynamics at work in both novels, both women's experiences correspond to broader considerations of how feminine bodies are framed within those dynamics. For example, the colonial impulse to control, to possess, and to conquer land intersects with the impulse of patriarchal systems regarding the feminine individuals living within them. Precisely because femininity is normatively considered to be closer to a state of nature, patriarchal hegemonic discourses reduce feminine individuals to their bodies alone. When they are reduced to their bodies, these individuals become exponentially more vulnerable to the same impulses of possession and domination that inform colonial enterprises. Of course, the Girl is made inherently more vulnerable in this construction: both her gender and her ethnic origin make her vulnerable to the patriarchal and colonial impulses of domination, control, and possession. However, to varying degrees of severity, both Lucy and the Barbarian Girl are reduced to their feminine bodies during their encounters with their violators. That dehumanizing process then occurs again and again when the men in their lives attempt to understand what has happened to them through prioritizing their bodies and the means to arrive at some kind of truth.

If both the experience of torture and rape are informed, at least in part, by the discourse surrounding any ‘civilizing mission,’ then they are then intimately connected with the framing that creates the ontological distinctions between the grievability of ‘civilized’ bodies and ungrievable ‘barbaric’ bodies. The justification of the Barbarian Girl’s torture, and the torture of other unnamed barbarians is articulated in this way: “The barbarian tribes were arming, the rumour went; the Empire should take precautionary measures, for there would certainly be war” (9). Torture, then, becomes justified because of the curated division between civilization and barbarity— under the guise of security, of the importance in protecting the lives recognized as such by the juridical power in place. Though torture is never technically legal, in this way, it becomes the legal illegality Coetzee describes in “Into the Dark Chamber: The Novelist and South Africa”: “In the torture room, unlimited force is exerted upon the physical being of an individual in a twilight of legal illegality, with the purpose, if not of destroying him, then at least of destroying the kernel of resistance within him.” This construction follows Butler’s understanding that the security and freedom promised by such practices attached to civilizing missions, “[...] is an extension of the logic that establishes state power— and its mechanisms of violence— as beyond the law” (129).

Lucy Lurie’s rape is also intimately involved with the dynamics between civilization and barbarity in light of her identity as a white South African woman and her violaters’ identities as black South African men. However, her perspective comes at least in part from the historic oppressor because of the privilege she receives as a white woman, whereas the

Girl's perspective comes from a unilaterally oppressed position.<sup>11</sup> The text's representation of Lucy's violation contains an further element of complexity. In post-Apartheid South Africa, the formally upheld hegemonic structure has officially been disrupted; the legal code enforcing discrimination along racial lines has, at least in all appearances, been dissolved. This leaves both black and white populations in a position that necessitates an individual struggle to mediate the radically different socio-political dynamics of this "new" South Africa. Lucy's violation thus becomes fraught with enormously difficult implications. What emerges for some characters is the belief that her rape is retaliatory violence inflicted on Lucy by individuals whose lives have continually been regarded as beyond the scope of complete recognition, and therefore, as unworthy of juridical protection and subjectable to extreme violence. This becomes difficult to process in light of the horrific intimacy involved in Lucy's rape—though she has never met her rapists prior to their encounter outside of her home, three complete strangers still feel compelled to violate her in the most personal way imaginable. Though the connection between Lucy's rape and the broader legacy of racial discrimination in South Africa relies on speculation on the part of David Lurie, the possibilities it presents lead to questions about the ethics of turning her body into a metaphor for the racial trauma of the Apartheid system.

Ileana Rogobete articulates in *Reconstructing Trauma and Meaning: Life Narratives of Survivors of Political Violence During Apartheid in South Africa* (2015), "The helpless and depersonalization of rape victims was also experienced by apartheid sufferers through

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<sup>11</sup> The position occupied by the Girl may lend itself to the description of subalternity given by Gayatri Spivak, in which she articulates how white feminism's claims of some sort of shared oppression only along gendered lines works to efface the experience of individuals who are oppressed on multiple levels.



mutilations and cruelty, in which victim's sexual organs were part of the torture practices in solitary confinement" (107). When considering this element of sexual violation that took place during the torture inflicted on political prisoners during Apartheid, *Disgrace's* representation of Lucy's rape can be further understood as representing the fragility and confusion following the legal dissolution of the normative perpetrator/victim dynamics of South Africa. This confusion begins in this episode of sexual violence, continues throughout the novel, and appears to be an intentional way of demonstrating the prolific anxiety felt by characters attempting to navigate through tumultuous and shifting social dynamics. In other words, the white characters in the novel experience anxiety about possibility becoming the victims of the violence they themselves unleashed. Sexual violence, then, becomes especially egregious, in part because of the way feminine bodies are framed in patriarchal systems as able to be owned, and in part because of the racist fear of contamination presented by the possibility of white women being raped by black men. Moreover, this inversion of the typical dynamics of violence between white and black South African bodies could indicate a strategy that highlights the ethical implications of Coetzee's own privileged position as a white South African man—he does not attempt to write the novel from any perspective he does not have access to, and thus, both of his protagonists are aging white men witnessing a reality where, as Mamphela Ramphele describes, "Violence has become as a festering sore in the body of South African society [...] it bursts forth, pouring pus and blood just as we begin to have hope that temporary calm will become a true harbinger of peace" (104).

The main connection between Lucy and the Barbarian Girl's experience of violence manifests in the aftermath of both events. It is Lucy herself who frees David from his

confinement after the men have left: the first question he asks her is ““What on earth did they do to you?”” (97). At this point, the question is only answered when Lucy refuses to report her assault to the police: she tells David, ““You tell what happened to you, I tell what happened to me,”” (99). In spite of her refusal, David continues to pressure Lucy to bring her story to the police, and thus positions himself in the same place as the Magistrate— both men, after not witnessing the physical violence inflicted on the women in their lives, cannot accept not knowing, and try to force these women into recounting what has happened to them. In this way, though no verbal interrogation took place during Lucy’s rape, David Lurie comes precariously close to assuming the same function as her violators through deprioritizing her voice and reducing her to her body alone, or to the experience of rape alone. In his questioning, David also disregards Lucy’s reluctance to talk about her assault, and therefore does not consider her consent to be more important than his answers.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, through obsession over Lucy’s sexual violation, and using it as evidence to justify his own racist attitudes, David behaves in a way that parallels the liberal ideology described by Butler: “[...] when women’s sexual freedom [...] is invoked instrumentally to wage a cultural assault [...] that reaffirms [...] [national] sovereignty and violence” (105). At issue is David’s failure to grasp the broader implications of what Lucy’s assault may affirm for a juridical body that only recently abolished legal Apartheid; namely, the affirmation of the “essential” or

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<sup>12</sup> Again, I am not intimating that David and Lucy’s rapists are the same— I am suggesting that they share certain characteristics that prove potent enough to lead to re-traumatization.

“natural” barbarity of the black South African population upon which an entire system of legalized discrimination rested.<sup>13</sup>

The incommunicability of Lucy’s rape becomes a major source of conflict throughout the rest of the novel; David, in attempting to understand the motivations behind her silence, thinks, “She would rather hide her face, and he knows why. Because of the disgrace. Because of the shame” (115). When he brings this point up with Lucy, she doubles-down on her refusal to disclose her experience of sexual violence with state officials. In so doing, Lucy draws attention to the way that David’s intellectualization of her rape de-prioritizes her voice and her particular experience. According to Avelar, “For all survivors this war against metaphorization is particularly urgent and gives rise to the sensation of powerlessness common in memoirs of survivors. The traumatized subject perceives that the experience stained language irreversibly and made narrative an impossible endeavor” (47). David’s instinct to “read into” the implications of Lucy’s rape performs this metaphorization of physical violence. In abstracting her lived experience by extrapolating it to signify feelings of shame and disgrace, David continues the process of alienating Lucy from her voice, and thus her narrative agency, and has compounded the fundamental incommunicability of her experience of physical pain.

David, like the Magistrate, cannot think of anything but the violence he has encountered; the protagonists’ shared obsessions with that violence become traumatic in themselves. David cannot accept Lucy’s decision not to report her rape to the state

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<sup>13</sup> Additionally, hypersexualized stereotypes commonly attributed to black men and the hysteria surrounding the violation of a white woman by black men described in Patrick Wolfe’s “Land, Labor, and Difference” could also be affirmed in this scenario.

authorities: “That is what their visitors have achieved [...] Not her story to spread but theirs; they are its owners. How they put her in her place, how they showed her what a woman is for” (15). Scarry’s configuration of the structure of voice and body in the act of inflicting physical violence correlates with David’s rumination. Through making the body present in its own destruction while simultaneously rendering the voice absent “makes [...] any experience of great physical pain mimetic of death; for in death the body is emphatically present while that more elusive part represented by the voice is [...] absent” (49). Both physical pain and death destroy an individual’s world, or at least, fundamentally alter it and forbid any return to what it previously was.

This is particularly clear when Lucy, after being pressured by David once again to give her testimony to the police, tells him, ““Dear David. You have not been listening to me. I am not the person you know. I am a dead person and I do not know yet what will bring me back to life”” (161). Both Lucy and the Barbarian Girl have experienced physical pain so extreme that return to normal life in its aftermath becomes impossible. There are literal reminders of this, since both women carry permanent physical reminders of their experience (the Barbarian Girl’s near-blindness and impaired movement and Lucy’s pregnancy) as well as apparent psychological reminders.

Lucy, in articulating that rape has killed her, demonstrates the proximity of the experience of physical pain and the experience death; in both cases, one is made into a body merely— the entirety of the universe condenses onto the site of one’s physical form. She makes this connection more explicit earlier in the narrative, when she tells David, “When you have sex with someone strange [...] isn’t it a bit like killing? Pushing the knife in; exiting

afterwards; leaving the body behind covered in blood— doesn't it feel like murder, like getting away with murder?" (158). Clearly, in this moment, Lucy is, for one of the first times, attempting to discuss what has happened to her with another individual. She abstracts herself from the content of that discussion, however, in using the phrase "the body" instead of "my body." Though Lucy does not divulge the particularities of the pain she most likely experienced during her violation (she refrains from answering when David initially asks her if she is hurt), formulating the proximity of "strange" sex to murder implies the explicit physical and latent psychological pain she experiences. Her linguistic construction here indicates what Scarry describes as: "The ceaseless, self-announcing signal of the body in pain, at once so empty and undifferentiated and so full of blaring adversity, contains not only the feeling 'my body hurts' but the feeling 'my body hurts me'" (47). Lucy can only divulge her experience through evacuating her subjectivity from it; *her* body becomes *the* body, "when *you* have sex" is the locution used to describe the feeling of being killed, instead of an explicit use of the statement "when *I* was raped." The bodies of her violators and even her own body become weaponized, and by extension, she becomes almost completely alienated from her body. She can articulate her trauma only through this language of abstraction. In that abstraction, however, Lucy seems to also address a specific type of toxic masculinity that rapes in the first place—it is not a coincidence, for example, that she addresses this "you" to her own father, who ended his career in disgrace after being accused of raping Melanie Isaacs.

Lucy's rape and the Barbarian Girl's torture share certain characteristics that connect them to one another— though they emerge in the drastically different contexts of torture and

rape, these two events rupture the narrative arcs in both texts and either directly or indirectly beget later iterations of physical violence in the novels. First, both women experience the destruction of their previous world, both physically and psychologically, in the aftermath of these events. Second, in order to understand what has happened to the women they love, the men in the novel continually attempt to force Lucy and the Girl to re-encounter their trauma, to disclose the specificities of their experience of pain, and in so doing, diminish their agency by reducing them to their violated bodies and thus perpetuate their violent experiences. However, a crucial difference emerges in this last point. The reasons behind both women's silences about their experiences diverge dramatically, and this divergence can be attributed specifically to the particular settings of both novels. The next section of this chapter examines the reasons for Lucy Lurie's silence and uses it as a point of departure to explore another mode of physical violence at work in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace*: the infliction and experience of physical violence motivated by racial difference.

**“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”:** Racial Violence in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace*

A major source of conflict in *Disgrace* centers on Lucy's refusal to disclose her sexual violation. She attempts to explain her reasons for remaining silent about her rape several times in the narrative:

You want to know why I have laid no particular charge with the police. I will tell you, as long as you agree not to raise the subject again. The reason is that, 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. It is my business, mine alone. (112)

What Lucy refers to here is the context in which her narrative unfolds, a context that haunts the text and much of Coetzee's fiction: the legacy of Apartheid in South Africa. *Disgrace* takes place specifically in the aftermath of the legal dissolution of Apartheid in South Africa in 1994. In light of this context, the complexities posed by the racial identities of her perpetrators emerge; the problem Lucy, a white South African woman, finds in disclosing her rape by black South African men stems from her awareness of the implications of doing so. In this explanation, Lucy gestures toward the reasoning behind her silence; she does not wish to involve the police because doing so may reinforce the legacy of the South African state's brutality against the black South African population during Apartheid.<sup>14</sup> This reasoning becomes more overt as the exchange continues. David begins to pick up on the implications attached to her vague language and asks, "Do you hope you can expiate the crimes of the past by suffering in the present?" (112). Lucy replies, "No. You keep misreading me. Guilt and salvation are abstractions. I don't act in terms of abstractions. Until you make an effort to see that, I can't help you" (112).

Here, two conflicting views of the trauma of Apartheid emerge. David, a white South African man residing in the city, and an academic specializing in English Romantic poetry, understands the reality of the racism involved in Apartheid in exceedingly abstracted terms—the only direct interface he has with the black population is with a sex worker named Soraya, an interaction which only serves to reinforce the position of power his whiteness gives him.

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<sup>14</sup> From Rogobete: "The breaking of the law [by the black population] attracted repressive actions from the apartheid state in the form of arrests, shootings, detentions, and even killings" (109).

Lucy, though a white South African woman, lives in the relative isolation of her small township, and works in close proximity to Petrus and his family. In light of her position in this regard, Lucy is concerned only with the material realities of the racial dynamics she encounters on a day-to-day basis. David's lofty academic conclusions about the purposes behind her refusal to disclose her trauma to state officials, which draw from universalisms and make no account of the particularities attached to her specific experience or any individual experiences of the remnants of the Apartheid system, miss the mark.

Because he is both unable to understand his daughter's violation and fails to convince her to report that violation, David grows increasingly racist toward the black South Africans he encounters. He focuses most of his emerging prejudice onto their neighbor, Petrus. This cycle begins with a simple question: "Does Petrus know who the strangers were? Was it because of some word Petrus let drop that they made Lucy their target?" (116). This momentary accusation soon spirals and engenders pronounced and disturbing fantasies in David's imagination. Not much later in the text, David thinks, "In the old days one could have had it out with Petrus. In the old days one could have had it out to the extent of losing one's temper [...] [but] it is a new world they live in, he and Lucy and Petrus. Petrus knows it, and he knows it, and Petrus knows that he knows it" (116-117). In toying with the idea of inflicting physical violence on Petrus, David not only presents a disturbingly wistful picture of the Apartheid-era years, but simultaneously exposes the innate social disempowerment attached to Petrus' identity as a black South African that persists even if his legal disempowerment does not.



David's fantasies of inflicting violence on Petrus indicate an aspect of Butler's understanding of how the perpetration of violence on disempowered bodies becomes justifiable by the powerful. She writes:

Forms of racism instituted and active at the level of preception tend to produce iconic versions of populations who are eminently grievable, and others whose loss is not loss, and who remain ungrievable [...] [this] has implications for why and when we feel politically consequential affective dispositions such as horror, guilt, righteous sadism, loss, and indifference. (24)

Though Petrus has done nothing to warrant David's vengeful musings, he is nevertheless figured as deserving of them. Petrus as an individual is obscured in David's mind due to how the hegemonically dominant white population frames the black South African population as eminently un-grievable— Petrus exists in David's mind as constitutive of the "iconic," monolithic, and dangerous black population. Because the overdetermination provided by something as visually recognizable as the color of one's skin, it is all the more probable that every black body is registered as the same from David's point of view.

The equating of individual black South Africans with the entire population of black South Africans is made more apparent in one of David and Lucy's discussions. She notes that one of the most shocking elements of her rape was the personal nature of it: "It was so personal," she says. 'It was done with such personal hatred. That was what stunned me more than anything [...] I had never set eyes on them'" (156). David replies in a way that reinforces his understanding of the division between black and white South Africans, and exacerbates his willingness to inflict violence on racially Othered individuals. He tells Lucy that "It was

history speaking through them [...] A history of wrong” (156). This connection David perceives between the particular violence of Lucy’s rape and the more broad violence of racial hierarchies in the Apartheid system is part of what makes *Disgrace* so difficult to read. In light of Coetzee’s refusal to represent perspectives he has no access to in reality, we can really only interrogate the implications of David’s speculations. Though he may have touched on part of what informed Lucy’s rapists, David’s line of thought works to abstract specificity in favor of a universalizing historical narrative, one that serves to justify endless and violent acts of vengeance. Instead of using this point as an opportunity to explore the ethical considerations at work in their situation, David instead finds that this realization only compounds his growing resentment.

This resentment culminates in David’s impulsive, yet severe, beating of Pollux, Petrus’ nephew, who witnessed and may have participated in Lucy’s rape. When he catches Pollux spying on Lucy as she showers, David beats Pollux, sickens one of their dogs on him, and chases him until he collapses. A fit of rage ensues:

Swine! Never has he [David] felt such elemental rage. He would like to give the boy what he deserves: a sound thrashing. Phrases that all his life he has avoided seem suddenly just and right. Teach him a lesson. Show him his place. So this is what it is like, he thinks! This is what it is like to be a savage! He gives the boy a good solid kick, so that he sprawls sideways. (206-207)

David’s beating of Pollux serves as an explosion of the tension that has mounted internally since their encounters earlier in the narrative. Though in the moment he understands this beating as indicative of an archaic savagery, it may actually serve to destabilize ontological

categories of civilization and barbarism often used to justify the violence perpetrated against colonized populations (in this context, black populations) by conquering populations (white populations). Though David, as a white, educated man, seemingly embodies the epitome of European colonial “civilization,” his violent actions here indicate his capacity to easily step into the archetype normatively ascribed to a “savage.” David justifies his “savage” actions because he views himself as defending the already-violated Lucy, who, as a white woman and as his daughter, he understands as inherently closer to the “civilized” end of the binary. Moreover, it is Lucy’s rape that causes David to begin viewing black South Africans as more barbaric than civilized, and though he views his vengeance on her behalf as working in opposition to that barbarism, the reciprocal violence only proves that the categories of “civilization,” “barbarism,” “white,” and “black” are not mutually exclusive.

Butler writes “that violence in the name of civilization reveals its own barbarism, even as it ‘justifies’ its own violence by presuming the barbaric subhumanity of the other against whom that violence is waged” (93). What actually emerges when David beats Pollux is evidence that the infliction of physical violence obscures any understanding of a concrete or inherent division between the supposedly savage black population and the supposedly civilized white population of South Africa. In mercilessly beating Pollux, in stepping into the role of the “savage,” David, overturns the division between himself and the victim of his beating. The violence inflicted on Pollux in this moment renders the categories of civilization and barbarism undifferentiated—their location no longer resides in the purported “certainty” of racial difference. What is foregrounded in David’s beating of Pollux, through his own

twisted recognition of the “savagery” involved in the act, is the notion that the logic of racial superiority based on innately “savage” or “civilized” behaviors begins to break down.

This instability becomes apparent in consideration of physical violence perpetrated because of racial difference in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. After delivering the Girl back to barbarian territory, the Magistrate returns to his town and is immediately imprisoned by Colonel Joll for fraternizing with the enemy. In what could be the most brutal representation of physical violence in the entire novel, the Magistrate witnesses the collective beating of a group of captured barbarians by the armed forces of the Bureau and the population of the town he used to preside over. The Magistrate, though technically in the midst of attempting to escape, finds he cannot move away from the spectacle before him. He describes that “The Colonel steps forward. Stooping over each prisoner in turn he rubs a handful of dust into his naked back and writes a word with a stick of charcoal. I read the words upside down: ENEMY... ENEMY... ENEMY... ENEMY. He steps back and folds his hands” (121). The crowd, composed of state officials and civilians alike, then begin to beat the prisoners until “The black charcoal and ochre dust begin to run with sweat and blood. The game, I see, is to beat them till their backs are washed clean” (121).

This violent scene takes place in a town supposedly attached to a “civilized” Empire, which is able to form its identity as such in opposition to the savagery of the barbarians. Even in its exhibition, the text makes the reliance on this dichotomy readily apparent.<sup>15</sup> This can be seen in a moment examined in the earlier section, where Magistrate narrates, “But last year

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<sup>15</sup> Perhaps, even, in its title, based on the poem by C.P. Cavafy whose final lines read, “And some of our men just in from the border say/ there are no barbarians any longer./ Now what’s going to happen to us without the barbarians?/ Those people were a kind of solution”

stories began to reach us *from the capital* of unrest among the barbarians” and then later on, “Of this unrest I myself saw nothing. In private I observed that once in every generation, without fail, there is an episode of hysteria about the barbarians” (9, emphasis added).

Important in these lines is a subtle implication that the “savagery” of the barbarian population seems to paradoxically come from the direction of the Empire’s capital instead of from its frontier; logically, any reports of barbarian uprisings should come from the frontier town the Magistrate presides over because of its proximity to barbarian territory. This seemingly contradictory directional movement can be analyzed alongside sociologist Patrick Wolfe in “Land, Labor, and Difference: Elementary Structures of Race” (2001) when he writes, “The primary issue [that perpetuates racial prejudice] is [...] the maintenance of social divisions, an imperative that requires difference to be configured and reconfigured in highly contextual manners” (904). In other words, the prejudice engendered by racial difference must be curated, orchestrated, and adjusted to support the rhetoric of inherent superiority of conquering populations over conquered populations. For Wolfe, this curation accounts for the fact that though racism has certain structural similarities, it manifests differently in settler-colonial dynamics in separate spatial and temporal contexts.

The ambiguous reports of barbarian unrest and uprisings come not from the barbarian territory but from the capital of the Empire and seem to indicate that this complex maintenance Wolfe describes is at work in the text. The Empire must represent the barbarians as a constant threat in order to simultaneously reify its own superiority over the barbarians, which renders any atrocity perpetrated against the barbarians part of a civilizing mission, while also ensuring the continuation of its sovereign power. The barbarians are framed as

dangerous in order to solidify the “civilized” position of the conquering population, and this framing allows for the justification of violence against them based on claims of state security. The Magistrate begins to grasp the frailty of this supposedly inherent separation, and exposing himself to the crowd, attempts to intervene: “‘Look!’ I shout. We are the great miracle of creation! But from some blows this miraculous body cannot repair itself [...] Look at these men! *Men!*’” (123-124). Through witnessing the infliction of physical violence onto racial Others by citizens and protectors of the Empire, the Magistrate apprehends the fiction of civilization that the Empire has attempted to make into truth. He tries to make it readily apparent to the rest of the crowd by forcing them to not only *apprehend* the lives of the barbarian prisoners as equally precarious to their own, but to *recognize* their shared fragility — of course, his imperative ultimately falls on deaf ears.

The Magistrate’s failure to convince his fellow residents of the barbarian’s humanity stems from the Empire’s ability to render the captured barbarians as inherently Other. This process begins with the instilling of mass-hysteria from ambiguous reports and culminates with the Colonel literally writing the word “enemy” on their backs. Though they are clearly disempowered and vulnerable due to their captive, violated state, the crowd still finds justification in making and participating in the spectacle of the barbarians’ pain: “There is a word from the Colonel: all four of them [the soldiers] cease their labour and come forward offering their canes to the spectators” (122). Instead of recognizing the fragility of the barbarian lives at stake in this episode of extreme racially motivated violence, the crowd becomes directly involved in the perpetuation of it. This point in the narrative resonates with this description from Butler’s *Frames of War*:

Yet, precisely because each body finds itself potentially threatened by others who are, by definition, precarious as well, forms of domination follow [...] the shared condition of precariousness leads not to reciprocal recognition, but to a specific exploitation of targeted populations, of lives that are not quite lives, cast as ‘destructible’ and ‘ungrievable.’ [...] they are cast as threats to human life as we know it rather than as living populations in need of protection. (31)

Though arising in disparate contexts, the infliction of physical violence onto racial Others in both *Disgrace* and *Waiting for the Barbarians* relies on this structure outlined by Butler. Due to the intentional exploitation of conquered populations by conquering powers based on perceived racial difference, the barbarians in *Waiting for the Barbarians* are framed as ungrievable and therefore as expendable, become undifferentiated “savages.” Inflicting physical violence onto them, regardless of any viable charge, becomes not only justifiable, but commendable. In *Disgrace*, Petrus and Pollux’s individual actions and identities are subsumed into a monolithic black South African population, which in his mind, is capable of “savage” acts of violence and must be put back in its place. The point, of course, is not that black South African men are not capable of violence, but that everyone, regardless of constructed difference, is capable of violence.

Both of these moments also situate a fundamental connection between the physical violence exerted on gendered and racial Others in these texts— the protagonists respond passively to the violence they witness perpetrated against disempowered bodies, and because they do not care enough to meaningfully intervene, they become victims in return. The Magistrate never attempts to directly intervene in the first iteration of torture inflicted by

Colonel Joll onto the barbarian father and son, and he moreover never thinks to convince his constituents of the inexcusability of torture in any context, actions which could theoretically have prevented the events in the town square from occurring in the first place. Instead, he resides in a place of relative power, comfort, and privilege, preferring to bury himself in other pursuits. Likewise, David Lurie's relative position of isolation from the realities of Apartheid violence, and even his participation in exploiting racialized feminine bodies for his own pleasure, renders him unequipped to even begin to access the complexities surrounding the violence inflicted on Lucy and on himself. Instead, he cannot fully comprehend the violence he experiences and bears witness to, and thus recedes into the racist mentality he initially believed himself incapable of. Both of these protagonists' actions or inactions serve to directly or indirectly allow for the extension of the infliction of violence onto disempowered bodies, making them complicit in the mechanisms they seek to oppose. However, it is worth contemplating whether or not the systems of violence they find themselves engulfed in are systems that can be disrupted or broken by the actions of a single individual, even if that individual acts in a far more radical capacity than either the Magistrate or David Lurie. Moreover, how much responsibility can be placed on a single individual faced with an entire historical, political, and cultural legacy of natural and justifiable domination? The questions of complicity and accountability, then, are central to the physical violence represented in both of these texts.

**“Why should it be inconceivable that the behemoth that trampled them will trample me too?”: Violence and Complicity in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace***



In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the Magistrate becomes increasingly uncomfortable with his passivity in the face of the Bureau's "investigation tactics." As Colonel Joll begins to interrogate and torture the first groups of barbarians, the Magistrate, though morbidly curious about the content of the interrogations, instead confines himself to "sit in my rooms with the windows shut, in the stifling warmth of a windless evening, trying to read, straining my ears to hear or not hear the sounds of violence" (24). Later, the Magistrate, while explaining the reasons for insomnia, asks, "But what can I possibly say? 'Terrible things go on in the night while you and I are asleep?' The jackal rips out the hare's bowels, but the world rolls on" (24). In both of these instances, the Magistrate can apprehend that the torture perpetrated by the Bureau is ethically reprehensible, evinced by his inability to sleep at night, and yet he naturalizes these practices through drawing a parallel between the Bureau's violation of the barbarians and a jackal pursuing a hare. This comparison implies the Magistrate's reluctance to interrogate the framing through which the barbarians are presented to the population of the Empire— as naturally subordinate, difficult to catch, but whose capture and killing ensures the survival of their predators. He seems to naturalize the dynamics between the Empire and the barbarians in an attempt to justify his passivity—if the Empire is the predator and the barbarians are the prey, then regardless of the Magistrate's individual feelings about torture, attempting to convince others of its ethical reprehensibility would prove daunting, and potentially impossible.

This way of understanding the dynamics between the barbarian prisoners and Colonel Jolls' Bureau conditions the Magistrate's refusal to act against the torture he sees occurring before his eyes in this early yet crucial point in the narrative. The Magistrate, however, in

spite of his best efforts, remains unable to completely convince himself of any truth in the Empire's justifications. This emerging disbelief begins to take shape when he takes an interest in the first person to endure the Colonel's torture and survive: the unnamed and injured barbarian boy arrested in the first few pages of the narrative. Upon visiting the boy after one of the Colonel's more severe sessions with him, the Magistrate attempts to uncover the specifics of his experience and realizes, "I cannot pretend to be any better than a mother comforting a child between his father's spells of wrath. It has not escaped me that an interrogator can wear two masks, speak with two voices, one harsh, one seductive" (8). At this point, the Magistrate occupies a liminal space; he has apprehended the implications of his complicity in the Empire's cruelty but does not yet fully recognize those implications.

This anxiety about the proximity he feels between himself and the torturers of the Bureau escalates, however, while engaging with the Girl after the first series of tortures have been conducted. He struggles against his instinct to not act, however, even after he has delivered the Girl to barbarian territory and has been subsequently arrested. In a critical moment, while reflecting on the opportunities he had to intervene, the Magistrate realizes this point:

Deliberately I bring to mind images of innocents I have known: the boy lying naked in the lamplight with his hands pressed to his groins, the barbarian prisoners squatting in the dust, shading their eyes, waiting for whatever is to come next. Why should it be inconceivable that the behemoth that trampled them will trample me too? (109)

Through reflecting on how the Bureau's torture practices have escalated from the individual body of one innocent barbarian to an entire population of barbarians all in the pursuit of

unearthing the truth of their imminent threat, the Magistrate apprehends that his passive mode of complicity has allowed for the possibility of their violence to extend to himself as well. Torture has ceased to retain any justification from the Empire's deliberate framing of the barbarians as savage, threatening Others that must be neutralized to ensure the safety of its subjects—the Magistrate, through asking this crucial question, at last recognizes the inconsistent logic that excuses the infliction of physical violence in service of the Empire's security. This questioning resonates with Butler's theoretical construction about the instability of the attempt to frame any individual or population as necessarily outside or inside the norms of the dominant and powerful:

To call the frame into question is to show that the frame never quite contained the scene it was meant to limn, that something was already outside, which made the very sense of the inside possible, recognizable. The frame never quite determined precisely what it is we see, think, recognize, apprehend. Something exceeds the frame that troubles our sense of reality; in other words, something occurs that does not conform to our established understanding of things. (9)

Through recognizing the impermanence of the dominant framing that justifies the torturing of the barbarians, the Magistrate simultaneously grasps that this instability also implies something crucial about the Empire. Namely, that this mode of justification can easily shift to excuse perpetrating torture against any subject, "civilized" or "savage." When the framing of the barbarians is called into question, the Magistrate glimpses the innate precariousness attached to all life, the vulnerability of all individuals.

At this point, the Magistrate ceases to reside in the space between passive suspicion and active intervention, which culminates in his public outcry during the beating of the barbarian prisoners. Even still, while being escorted back to his cell, he wonders, “What, after all, do I stand for besides an archaic code of gentlemanly behaviour towards captured foes, and what do I stand against except the new science of degradation that kills people on their knees” (124). Even when he attempts to act in direct opposition to the violence inflicted on Othered individuals, to break with his complicity, the Magistrate finds that he cannot separate himself from a moral code formerly prescribed by those who have now turned away from it. He cannot separate himself from the code he has learned through his position as an Imperial official—he is stuck in a part of the same logic that has evolved to justify the torture of enemies. He realizes that complicity with that violent “behemoth” cannot be eradicated through action alone—it is ingrained in his very subject-position as the Magistrate. An additional point, which may be obvious, but still important to consider, is the immediate repression of his outcry by state officials.

What eventually serves to disrupt this underlying participation in the ideology that leads to the willful infliction of physical violence is the transformation of that subject-position. This occurs in his transition from a passive perpetrator to victim after he is tortured. The Magistrate realizes “They were interested only in demonstrating to me what it meant to live in a body, as a body, a body which can entertain notions of justice only as long as it is whole and well” (132). As Scarry explains, “The goal of the torturer is to make the one, the body, emphatically and crushingly present by destroying it, and to make the other the voice, absent by destroying it” (49). The Magistrate experiences the destruction of his beliefs, his

perspective—his world—as a result of experiencing the physical pain of torture. He is made into a disempowered body in spite of his powerful subject-position as a white state official and begins to grasp that his fate is tied to the growing hostility felt against the barbarians: “The higher feeling runs against the barbarians, the tighter I huddle in my corner, hoping I will not be remembered” (142). Here, the text makes a critical gesture about the consequences of tolerating the infliction of physical violence onto the Other through illustrating how tenuous invulnerability can be: complicity in the infliction of violence onto bodies marked by difference allows for the possibility of that violence being extended to those who tolerate it. Ideally, the threat of violence extending to the self would not be necessary in order to advocate for the value of the lives of Others. If nothing else, this construction works to effect individuals who would resist the accountability their privilege affords them in hegemonic systems of oppression.

In *Disgrace*, before moving in with Lucy, David proves that he is complicit with hegemonic violence of patriarchal society through almost all of his interactions with women. The first moment in the narrative where this is described is in his pursuit of a black sex worker named Soraya. He invades her privacy through uncovering her personal information, including her address and her telephone number, and after she spurns his advances, he mildly observes “But then, what should a predator expect when he intrudes into the vixen’s nest, into the home of her cubs?” (10). The complicity at work in this moment is manifold: he, as an affluent white man, transgresses the boundaries of an economically disadvantaged black woman. He describes himself as a predator, and indeed, can prey on Soraya because of her disempowered position in Cape Town society.

The next scenario in which David actively participates in the infliction of gendered violence occurs when he forces himself onto one of his students, Melanie: “Not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core. As though she had decided to go slack, die within herself for the duration” (25). The description here resonates most uncannily with the correlation Lucy makes later about the experiencing sexual violence as death. Though this encounter with Melanie eventually forces David to withdraw from his position at the university, he refuses to recognize the fact that he has done anything violent or even reprehensible. He observes that “his mind has become a refuge for old thoughts, idle, indigent, with nowhere else to go. He ought to chase them out, sweep the premises clean. But he does not care to do so, or does not care enough” (72). Like the Magistrate, David Lurie almost recognizes his complicity in a social schema that disempowers certain bodies and makes their subjection to violence less abhorrent, and yet chooses to continue residing in the comfort of his privilege.

David’s infliction of violence onto disempowered individuals, which is only possible because of his powerful subject-position as a white man, shifts when he is physically assaulted by the men who rape Lucy. After he tries to intervene on Lucy’s behalf, the men beat him, splash him with methylated spirits, and set him on fire. While ablaze, he realizes that “He and his daughter are not being let off lightly after all! He can burn, he can die; and if he can die, then so can Lucy” (96). Like the Magistrate realizing that the sovereign apparatus of the Empire can turn against him as well as the barbarians, David can also glimpse, even in this frenzied state, the innate precariousness attached to life. It is no accident that this almost-recognition occurs as he is on fire. As the flames inflict severe physical pain, they also

transform his appearance: “His eyes are stinging, one eyelid is already closing. He runs a hand over his head and [...] save for a patch over one ear, he seems to have no hair; his whole scalp is tender. Everything is tender, everything is burned, Burned, burnt” (97). This description indicates his literal transformation from a powerful subject to a disempowered subject. He becomes physically marked by the violence which disrupted his comfortable position in South Africa. Crucially, however, though he can *apprehend* the shared precariousness of life in this moment, he cannot completely *recognize* it. As Butler describes, “precariousness [...] can be apprehended, taken in, encountered, and it can be presupposed by certain norms of recognition just as it can be refused by such norms” but “it cannot be properly recognized” (13). This inability for mutual precariousness to assume full cognitive recognition is part of what allows David to move past this apprehension of ubiquitous human fragility after this violent encounter. He apprehends the precariousness of life when his own precariousness is exposed, but this later serves to reinforce the mentality that justifies violence based on the fact that it is the Other who has exposed the self’s fragility.

**“‘And I did nothing. I did not save you.’ That is his own confession”: Complicity and the Behemoth in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace***

After explicating some of the complexities attached to the problem of the protagonists’ complicity in the perpetration of physical violence in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace*, I would like to highlight two final moments in each text.

Unable to intervene in his daughter’s violation, David encounters an iteration of the specific form of physical violence he perpetrated during his time in Cape Town. The text implies this acknowledgment when David tells Lucy, “‘And I did nothing. I did not save

you.’ That it is his own confession” (157). Whether David literally means that he could do nothing to save Lucy from her attackers, or whether he refers to his willful participation in the social and political mechanisms that made her violation possible in a more abstracted sense, this confession is one of the only moments in the text where the ambivalence of accountability, of who or what to hold responsible for physical violence comes into focus.

The ambivalent character of accountability also surfaces in this moment in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, where the Magistrate ponders that the cell he now occupies was once the site of the Barbarian Girl’s torture: “they hurt her and he [her father] could not stop them (on a day I spent occupied with the ledgers in my office). Thereafter she was no longer fully human, sister to all of us” (94). Not only does the Magistrate’s speculation on the dynamics between the Barbarian Girl and her father parallel the dynamics between David and Lucy Lurie, but it also calls into question the identity of who (or what) can *be* identified as accountable for her torture. Though he allows for the joint failures of her father and himself as a solution to the problem of identifying who is accountable, both characters arguably lacked the means to meaningfully intervene in that particular moment. Indeed, as illustrated later, once the Magistrate makes the choice to act on behalf of the barbarians, he finds himself crushed by the same “behemoth” that crushes the barbarian captives. One possible answer, it seems, resides in the last sentence of this reflection, which may offer a characteristic of who or what must be held accountable.

Whoever or whatever made torture possible, made it permissible, stripped her of her humanity and simultaneously divulged the inherent fragility shared by all life, a fragility that binds every subject together, but which has resided in obscurity up until this point. This



description resonates with Rogobete's account of testimonies collected from survivors of political violence during Apartheid: "Trauma was not only experienced individually or privately [...] Even in situations in which the perpetrators could be identified, all participants *found it difficult to distinguish individual perpetrators responsible for causing their pain*" (114-115, added emphasis). Why does the identity of a perpetrator continually evade these fictional and non-fictional accounts of the experience and trauma of living through the infliction of severe physical pain? If no singular person or thing can be held accountable, what can possibly be done to redress the injustice of the atrocities that have been carried out? Or at least, what can be done to allow the beginning of any collective healing? This line of questioning begins to grasp at an insidious, liminal, and fleeting presence that permeates both the fictional settings and cultural context of *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace*— one that at certain points I have brushed up against, almost addressed, but have never fleshed out fully. This presence, this behemoth, this violent mechanism that makes the conditions for the infliction of physical violence a reality, is what I will identify and explicate in the next chapter of this project.

## Chapter Two

### The Logic and Time of the Behemoth: Comparing Sovereign Violence in J.M. Coetzee's

#### *Waiting for the Barbarians and Disgrace*

The second mechanism of violence in both *Disgrace* and *Waiting for the Barbarians* pertains to two separate (but perhaps intimately connected) moments of recognition in the novels. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the Magistrate feels despair when he begins to inquire into the larger forces behind the torture he knows agents of the Third Bureau are perpetrating: “I know somewhat too much; and from this knowledge, once one has been infected, there seems to be no recovering. [...] The knot loops in upon itself; I cannot find the end” (23). A shameful confession in *Disgrace* that correlates with the Magistrate’s hopelessness occurs when David Lurie first attempts to explain why his and Lucy’s violation happened: “That is the theory [...] just a vast circulatory system, to whose workings pity and terror are irrelevant. That is how one must see life in *this country*: in its schematic aspect. Otherwise one could go mad” (98, added emphasis). These two examples have several crucial similarities. Both illustrate the protagonists grasping at the larger forces at work behind the physical violence they experience or witness and then simultaneously retreating from them. More significantly, however, each character, in responding to either the Empire or the South African State, begin to apprehend, but do not quite fully recognize,<sup>16</sup> the identity of the mechanism itself, the behemoth that circulates endlessly and evades outright explication: the violence of sovereign power.

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<sup>16</sup> In this chapter, as in the previous one, I am using Butler’s understanding of the terms “apprehension” and “recognition” in order to articulate different levels of cognition. The protagonists in both novels apprehend the sovereign violence surrounding them at various points, but full recognition does not come, indeed if it ever does, until much later.

Both characters, when confronted with the reality that their experience of extreme physical violence has been perpetrated by the sovereign powers of the Imperial system and the South African state, find themselves overwhelmed and wishing they had not apprehended it at all. Instead of seizing the knowledge this realization affords and attempting to trace the complexities surrounding it, David clings to it only in abstraction, the method through which he claims he can preserve his sanity. The Magistrate also retreats from the initial apprehension of the violent sovereignty, and adamantly repeats a pattern of wishing he had never investigated the techniques employed by the Empire's agents against innocent people. Of course, this tension between approaching and retreating from the behemoth that is sovereign power brings other considerations into relief. What action can be expected from a singular person when they confront the terrifying enormity of sovereign power? Can one person effectively work against this kind of violence when it appears in almost every level of any social structure?

Though David and the Magistrate's apprehension of the sovereign violence in their respective contexts both incur continual denials and retreats, their similar description of the cyclicity of sovereignty imply that the sovereign violence at work in both novels does not end—that it continues to permeate all aspects of life, effectively haunting each text. Crucially, however, the sovereign violence in both texts is rendered at a different point; *Waiting for the Barbarians* centers on the violence of sovereign power through describing the effects of the state of emergency implemented by the Empire, and *Disgrace* depicts the violence of sovereign power after it has technically or legally diminished, but maintains its influence and continues to operate in the lives of individual South African subjects. Though

depicting a different point in the eternal cycle of sovereign power, each text demonstrates a crucial characteristic of sovereign violence: the exceptional state of emergency is, actually, not exceptional at all, but has become the norm through which sovereign power finds its articulation. The men's shared experience of temporal instability resulting from sovereign violence in both novels will then be foregrounded, and that mutual fluctuation they experience may prove to show the intimate connection between sovereign violence and the final mechanism of violence I will examine in this project: the violence that informs the criteria of statelessness and citizenship.

Though inquiries into the function and characteristics of sovereign power is a legacy fraught with epistemological difficulty, I argue that analyzing Coetzee's novels alongside the theoretical interventions of Giorgio Agamben and Judith Butler may allow for a method to think through its logic and temporality that accounts for the particular sovereign violence present in each novel, while also producing potential patterns of sovereign violence that are represented in both novels. Moreover, through conducting this analysis, the difficulties each protagonist has in identifying a singular perpetrator—evidenced by the patterns of who and what they blame at certain points in each narrative—may become more comprehensible and also provide a way to understand that many individuals are involved in the perpetuation of sovereign violence and the violence of citizenship and statelessness, which ultimately lead to the infliction of physical violence.

**“Now people just pick and choose the laws they want to obey. It's anarchy”:** The  
**Liminality of Sovereign Violence in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace***

In the initial chapter of *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998), Agamben offers the following description of the paradoxical structure of sovereign power:

The paradox of sovereignty consists in the fact the sovereign is, at the same time, outside and inside the juridical order. [...] the sovereign, having the legal power to suspend the validity of the law, legally places himself outside the law. This means the paradox can also be formulated this way: ‘the law is outside itself,’ or: ‘I, the sovereign, who am outside the law, declare that there is nothing outside the law. (15)

This description of the sovereign paradox foregrounds the liminal quality of sovereign power — it resides both inside and outside the juridical order *at the same time*, which makes any question of its exact location an attempt to locate liminal space itself, which seems to be an epistemological impossibility. This is why the Magistrate and David Lurie both find it enormously difficult to locate a singular perpetrator on whom to place the blame of the atrocities they experience and witness.

According to Agamben, the liminal characteristic of sovereignty is what makes it resistant to any efforts to effectively “pin down” its specific locations or functions. Agamben’s description carries another vital component with which to think through the paradoxical structure of sovereign power— because the sovereign power has the ability to decide when the law either applies or does not apply to any given situation, to either suspend or resume its own legality, the sovereign can reside both inside of the law (because of the ability to make this decision) and outside of the law (because that decision does not apply to the sovereign power itself). This ability for the sovereign to decide what is inside or outside the legal system is a concept Agamben develops from Carl Schmitt’s understanding of the

sovereign decision. When the sovereign exercises its ability to decide the terms of inside and outside, while residing in the threshold between the two, this decision creates what Agamben calls the state of exception.

In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the Magistrate begins to apprehend sovereign violence as it is embodied through one of the only named characters in the text: Colonel Joll. The particularity given to Colonel Joll through the act of naming him already gestures to a significant mode of sovereign violence. As a high-ranking member of the Third Bureau of the Civil Guard, Joll is the character that most explicitly wields the violence of the Empire. By giving Colonel Joll one of the only singular names in the novel, the text demonstrates a connection between a militant imperial apparatus and the sovereign violence it is meant to uphold. It also allows for the population of the town, the Magistrate, and the reader to attach Imperial sovereign violence to a singular character, made memorable because of the fact that he is named in a text where almost no other character is. Colonel Joll's name draws attention to his specific character, and allows the reader to identify how the enormity of sovereign violence can be embodied and practiced through a single individual. In the first few chapters, the Magistrate and the reader are continually led to believe that Colonel Joll is the perpetrator on whom to attach the blame of the atrocities that occur.

In addition to naming Colonel Joll, the text also draws attention to him through highly individualized physical descriptions. The novel opens with a description of Joll's eyeglasses, which emphasizes that "The disks are dark, they look opaque from the outside, but he can see through them" (1). Already, the narrative implies that Colonel Joll is fundamentally different from the ambiguously signified townsfolk of the frontier— because of his shaded lenses, he

can maintain constant surveillance but that surveillance remains undetected. At the least, his darkened glasses can be understood as a literal division between Colonel Joll, an operative of the Empire, the civilian population of the town, and most importantly, the victims of the torture he inflicts. Moreover, the text describes the fact that the Colonel *constantly* wears these lenses, in spite of the weather or the time of day, and even in spite of being inside. The significance of this decision to wear the lenses at all times certainly works to make the Colonel individual and therefore more memorable, as noticed by the Magistrate when he wonders, “Whom will that other girl with the blind face remember: me [...] or that other cold man with the mask over his eyes who gave the orders and pondered the sounds of her intimate pain” (155). In this reflection, the Magistrate compares Joll’s lenses to a mask covering his face, and connects this “mask” to Joll’s ability to destroy the Girl’s world through torturing her. This implies another possibility—if we can conclude that wearing sunglasses indoors or at night actually makes the faculty of sight weaker, or that wearing a mask over one’s face similarly obstructs vision, Colonel Joll may intentionally be obscuring his ability to see the extent of his violence, and thus experience any amount of kinship between his victims and himself.

This point correlates with the last glimpse we receive of Joll when he returns from his campaign into barbarian territory: “His face is naked, washed clean [...] Memories of his mother’s soft breast, of the tug in his hand of the first kite he ever flew, as well as those intimate cruelties for which I abhor him, shelter in that beehive. He looks out at me, his eyes searching my face. The dark lenses are gone” (170). The intention of obscuring any similarity between the Colonel and his victims has dissipated with the disappearance of his dark lenses,

and by extension, the Magistrate and Colonel Joll are each confronted with the humanity of the other. Colonel Joll, a character who presents the discrepancy between the benevolent form of humanity and the form of humanity that perpetrates atrocity, is finally revealed here to be just a man.<sup>17</sup> When he resolutely recognizes Joll's humanity, the Magistrate's attempt to locate the whole of sovereign imperial violence in the man through which it is wielded can no longer be valid. He realizes that Joll is undeniably a person, and thus demonstrates the ethically dubious— and misdirected— attempt to blame the perpetuation of sovereign violence on any one individual.

Unlike in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, which uses the figure of Colonel Joll to mark the supposed *beginning* of the infliction of the sovereign violence of the Empire, *Disgrace* begins from an understanding that in post-Apartheid South Africa, the sovereign violence that formerly perpetuated legally sanctioned violence against the black South African population has *ended*. If the novel took place in the midst of apartheid, the violence of the sovereign nation state of South Africa would perhaps be more explicit. However, *Disgrace* takes place when the dynamics of that sovereignty have shifted. The sovereign violence in *Disgrace* is illustrated in divergent, individual iterations of the residual violence of the modern South African state apparatus, which includes the legacies of Apartheid that have shaped it for decades. In its ability to create and suspend the law, the state apparatus of South Africa resides inside and outside of the juridical order simultaneously, and therefore, after the

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<sup>17</sup> This realization correlates particularly with Hannah Arendt's understanding of the banality of evil in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963), in which she emphasizes the importance of understanding atrocity as a human faculty, and condemns the apparent ease with which egregious violence can be abstracted as monstrous or inhuman.



legal suspension of Apartheid policy, the source of the violence it continues to inflict on its subjects becomes extremely difficult to locate.

This difficulty can be seen in an observation made by David's secretary, Dawn: "I mean whatever the rights and wrongs of the situation [Apartheid], at least you knew where you were [...] Now people just pick and choose which laws they want to obey. It's anarchy" (9). In other words, the text suggests that after the South African state has *officially* ended the overt violence of Apartheid, its subjects are now faced with a complete restructuring of the law they have been embedded in for decades. This means that those who benefited from Apartheid (the white South African population) supposedly no longer retain the same privileges, and those victimized by Apartheid (the black South African population) supposedly are no longer violated by official representatives of state authority. The figures who would ordinarily act as a conduit through which state violence is exercised (i.e. the South African police) no longer retain the authority to officially perpetuate the violence of Apartheid policy. As Ettinger, Lucy's neighbor and a thoroughgoing racist, advises after the Lurie's home invasion, "'The best is, you save yourself, because the police are not going to save you, not any more, you can be sure'" (100). His advice to the Luries is to make somewhat of a fortress out of their farm, and not to hesitate to protect themselves with reciprocal violence if the situation calls for it.

**"I am trying to understand the zone in which you live. I am trying to imagine how you breathe and eat and live from day to day. But I cannot! That is what troubles me!": The Violence of Sovereignty in *Waiting for the Barbarians***

Though both *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace* illustrate the liminal characteristic of the paradox of sovereignty, the sovereign violence that is perpetuated through sovereignty's paradoxical structure appears to differ substantially in each text. This is in light of the fact that the sovereign violence inflicted in *Waiting for the Barbarians* is presumed to be beginning, and the sovereign violence in *Disgrace* is presumed to be ending. However, examination of sovereign violence as it manifests differently in each novel will serve to actually connect both representations as examples of the cyclicity of sovereign violence. Therefore, through comparing the structure at work in these different stages, any understanding of a certifiable "beginning" and "ending" of sovereign violence will be both undesirable and potentially impossible to reach.

After the Magistrate first encounters Colonel Joll, he describes, "We do not discuss the reason for his being here. He is here under the emergency powers, that is enough" (1). The reasons behind Colonel Joll's visit to the frontier town, then, are almost completely obscured—the Magistrate knows only that Joll is presently operating under "emergency powers" put into place after a barbarian raid near the border of the Empire. The reasons for his visit emerge however, once the Magistrate informs him of the state of their prison facilities, and mentions that two barbarians have been arrested under suspicion of participating in a raid against the frontier town. The pair are still detained even after the barbarian father and son inform the Magistrate that, "The soldiers stopped us and tied us up. For nothing. We were on the road, coming here to see the doctor" (4). When Colonel Joll hears this, he tells the Magistrate that, "Nevertheless [...] I ought to question them. This evening, if that is convenient" (5). Joll's refusal to listen to the Magistrate demonstrates an

element of what can be expected when living under “emergency powers.” Joll does not accept what the Magistrate would consider to be normal juridical proceeding— that is, releasing prisoners when there is no evidence supporting their arrest (or a version of “innocent until proven guilty”). Colonel Joll, based on the authority derived from the vague title “emergency powers,” is at liberty to modify these proceedings, and indeed, does so. At this point, the Magistrate also becomes aware of the meaning behind Colonel Joll’s use of the term “question,” and makes several more failed attempts in convincing him of the validity of the barbarians’ story. In spite of these protestations, Colonel Joll proceeds in his “questioning,” and begins the process of torture that leads to the death of the barbarian father and the mutilation of the barbarian son. This exchange between Joll and the Magistrate effectively illustrates that the normative juridical proceeding the Magistrate believes to be benevolent and attempts to perpetuate has been suspended. The Colonel, as acting sovereign, decides that the normative juridical order does not apply to the barbarian father and son. Joll alters the validity of the normative process of law in this situation— which the law itself tells us is an impossibility— and draws his authority to do so based solely on the “emergency powers” the frontier town is under. However, underlying this suspension of the law, a situation assumed to be exceptional, is the fact that in its ability to suspend its own proceeding, the sovereign power of the Empire proves that this emergency state is actually part of its normal functioning.

Agamben explicates the structure in place that enables the sovereign to decide what or who is inside or outside the juridical sphere by defining two of its components: the rule and the exception. For Carl Schmitt, what is created when the rule is suspended is its

exception— the relationship between the rule and the exception are considered to be diametrically opposed concepts, thought as either “inside” or “outside” in mutually exclusive sense. Though Agamben confers with the understanding that the suspension of the rule creates the exception, he finds the relation between the two to be significantly more complex. Instead of the rule and the exception, or the inside and the outside, being mutually exclusive

*[t]he rule applies to the exception in no longer applying, in withdrawing from it. The state of exception is thus not the chaos that precedes order but rather the situation that results from its suspension [...] The exception does not subtract itself from the rule; rather, the rule suspending itself, gives rise to the exception and, maintaining itself in relation to the exception, first constitutes itself as a rule.” (18, original emphasis)*

The exception must, therefore, be thought of as a necessary constituent of the rule itself. In practice, it is not exceptional at all. The sovereign decision to suspend juridical rule creates the exception and includes the exception within the rule precisely because it is through this creation of the exception that it can constitute itself as the rule. This relation between the rule and the exception, in its most extreme form, is a “relation of exception,” a situation through which, “something is included solely through its exclusion” (18).

In the case of sovereign violence in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, this “emergency state” of the township directly reflects the characteristics of Agamben’s perpetual state of exception. The emergency powers in place in the frontier town give the Colonel the ability to suspend the normal proceedings of the juridical order. He does so, and through the decision to suspend the juridical order, he creates the relation between the rule (the subjects of the Empire, for whom the normative juridical process still applies) and the exception (the

barbarians, for whom the normative juridical process is suspended). In other words, he suspends the validity of the law for the barbarian father and son, and in so doing, renders them exceptional to the law that pretends to offer protection from the violence he inflicts on them. However, Coetzee's decision to withhold the specifics of the Empire's "normal" legal proceeding invite the reader to question their own relationship with the laws in place in their context. Believing that the law itself *should* protect those living under it leads to a humanist understanding of how sovereign power operates, and is demonstrably not how sovereign power seems to work in the context of *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Through maintaining itself in relation to the exception, the rule has the ability to constitute itself as such in the first place. The population of the town, and the population of the "civilized" Empire more broadly, constitute themselves as inside juridical rule precisely because they place the barbarians outside of that juridical rule, as exceptions. In order to claim their validity as the rule, they require that there be the exception, the outside. What goes unrecognized, however, is the reliance of the rule on the exception—the exception is what gives the rule its validity and is therefore always included through its exclusion. The boundaries between what is included and excluded, or what is inside and outside the juridical rule, prove less stable than previously supposed. This disrupts any claim that attempts to naturalize or essentialize the identity of who is inside of the law and who is outside of the law. Moreover, and as we see in both novels, this inability to essentialize this criteria of rule/exception means that individuals who believe themselves to be the rule can easily become the exception.

The instability of divisions between inside/outside, rule/exception, then, reflect how Agamben previously defines the state of exception as that situation that can occur only once

the sovereign power has suspended the validity of the law: “What emerges in this limit figure [in the relation of exception] is the radical crisis of every possibility of clearly distinguishing between membership and inclusion, between what is outside and what is inside, between exception and rule” (25). This leads to the crucial point, which will prove instrumental in application to Coetzee’s texts; once the procedure of the juridical sphere has been suspended for a certain group of people, the divisions between the protected and unprotected, or the inside and outside, cannot be distinguished. In order to demonstrate this inability to distinguish between supposedly rigid ontological categories, Agamben uses the figure of the *homo sacer* in Roman law. The *homo sacer*, or the sacred man, refers to the individual that may not be sacrificed, but may be killed without consequences (71). This figure represents part of the enigmatic character of sovereign power: how can a person be simultaneously killed with impunity and nevertheless be prohibited from execution according to ritual practice? The sacred man is simultaneously excluded from both the realm of the political and the realm of the religious—he cannot find protection in either sphere. Agamben describes the significance of the *homo sacer*’s double exclusion in the following description: “*The sovereign sphere is the sphere in which it is permitted to kill without committing homicide and without celebrating a sacrifice, and sacred life— that is, life that may be killed but not sacrificed— is the life that has been captured in this sphere* (83). The life within the sovereign sphere is sacred life, or bare life, and reveals that life itself is the original referent of sovereign power. The crux of Agamben’s use of this concept resides in this relationship between life and sovereign power. In its ability to suspend normative juridical proceeding, and therefore to make the purported differences between the rule and the exception

indistinguishable, sovereign power renders *everyone* vulnerable to its violence. In the figure of the sacred man, we glimpse the fictional element of sovereign power's supposed benevolence. Though it pretends to perpetrate violence only against certain individuals who are excluded from its sphere, it actually has the ability to perpetrate violence against anyone at any time.

This can be seen throughout *Waiting for the Barbarians* specifically through the juridical process the Magistrate is subjected to after returning from delivering the Barbarian Girl back to her people, when Colonel Joll accuses him of “treasonously consorting” with the enemy. Through his association with the Girl, then, the Magistrate is placed outside of consideration of the sovereign protection. He ceases to become the rule and instead is forced closer to a position of the exception: “They will use the law against them as far as it serves them, then they will turn to other methods. That is the Bureau’s way. To people who do not operate under statue, the legal process is simply one instrument among many” (97). The Magistrate describes the law as an instrument of the sovereign violence that creates it. In so doing, he shatters the conception of the law as a monolithic, detached, or non-human entity, which sovereign power usually claims. He also demonstrates that the law only pretends to operate justly—instead of being used as a tool of justice, it is actually used as a tool of power. The law itself is like any weapon used in the torture perpetrated in its name, and as such, must be understood as an intimately human creation that is susceptible to being manipulated by those in power. Thus, the sovereign violence represented in the novel disrupts the understanding that law can ever be thought separately from life, or as naturally benevolent. When it is understood as an instrument of sovereign violence, the justice that the law claims

to uphold or secure ceases to assume any sort of higher, divinely ordained status. The violence of the sovereign state of exception is rendered in this moment most explicitly—when the law is exposed as an articulation of the interests of sovereign power, its protection no longer applies, and torture can and is considered justifiable.

Torture becomes justifiable, and indeed, *necessary* for the protection of the Empire. As Agamben notes, “the sovereign is the point of indistinction between violence and law, the threshold on which violence passes over into law and law passes over into violence” (32). The perpetual sovereign state of exception makes the distinction between inside and outside difficult to ascertain, and it extends this function to the muddling of violence and law. This fluidity between violence and law manifests, perhaps, as sanctioned violence and unsanctioned violence. Though the Magistrate used to reside inside the legal protection of the Empire, the emergency powers in place now reveal the malleability of those divisions between inside and outside, and he transgresses into a position that is outside of that normative legal protection, which allows for the justification of his torture.

The indistinction between violence and law becomes especially clear when the Magistrate reflects on the reasons why he has not been given a trial: “they will never bring a man to trial while he is healthy and strong enough to confound them. They will shut me away in the dark till I am a muttering idiot, a ghost of myself; then they will haul me before a closed court and in five minutes dispose of the legalities they find so tiresome” (130). Here, the legal proceeding is responding to the Magistrate in an extreme state of exception, in a way that Agamben describes as, “the pure form in which law affirms itself with the greatest force precisely at the point in which it no longer prescribes anything” (50). When the



Magistrate and the barbarians are both subjected to torture in the novel, the mechanism of sovereign violence directly highlights the instrumental structure of the law, emptied of the fiction of any content, and has exposed it for what it is: pure form. The law is the mode through which sovereign violence asserts itself. It does not respond to any particular transgression; in fact, the question of transgression or compliance is no longer necessary. In its full force, law under the state of exception singles out individuals and populations that oppose the sovereign power in spite of any specific violation of any specific law. As Agamben puts it, “life under a law that is in force without signifying resembles life in the state of exception, in which the most innocent gesture or the smallest forgetfulness can have the most extreme consequences” (53). Sovereignty ceases to respond to realities of innocence and guilt while the township is under the “emergency powers” of the Third Bureau. Therefore, the sovereign violence at work in Coetzee’s text enacts the law in its full force, exposes it as pure form without any necessary content or signification, and collapses the distinction between violence and law. It suspends normative juridical proceeding, placing itself simultaneously inside and outside of the law, and therefore, embodies the characteristics of the paradoxical mechanism of sovereignty described by Agamben.

Under this sovereign state of exception, the abhorrent practices of the Third Bureau are permitted to begin, continue, and as the Magistrate notes, are even celebrated: “A scapegoat is named, a festival is declared, the laws are suspended: who would not flock to see the entertainment?” (137). This liminality of sovereignty in the text, this ability for sovereign power to destabilize oppositional mechanisms, is finally *recognized* by the Magistrate when he asks his torturer, Mandel— one of the only other named characters in the

novel, “I know that the workings of justice are often obscure. I am only trying to understand. I am trying to understand the zone in which you live. I am trying to imagine how you breathe and eat and live from day to day. But I cannot! That is what troubles me!” (145-146). Though he technically addresses his torturer Mandel in this moment, his line of questioning can be extrapolated to the entire Imperial enterprise at work in his society, and to society as a whole. The questions can also be applied to the Magistrate himself, and thus, implications of individual accountability or complicity in the perpetuation of sovereign violence emerge once again. This impenetrable location, this zone of indistinction, this liminal residence is precisely what characterizes sovereign violence. Combined with its ability to make the state of exception permanent, which makes distinguishing between law and violence, between rule and exception, and between inside and outside impossible, that sovereignty engenders egregious violence.

**“That is not how vengeance works. Vengeance is like fire. The more it devours, the hungrier it gets.”: Sovereign Violence in *Disgrace***

The instability of epistemological categories brought about by the sovereign state of exception can be seen in *Disgrace*, but crucially, the novel takes place at the moment when Apartheid has been “officially” disavowed by the mechanism of the South African state. Unlike in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, which is intentionally set in an ambiguous context where the dynamics of violent sovereignty play out openly, *Disgrace* is set in a state that has only just attempted to dissolve the legality of Apartheid.

What *Disgrace* illuminates are the complexities that arise when those usually considered outside of the juridical proceedings move inside of them (when black South

African populations suddenly carry as many juridical protections as white South African populations).<sup>18</sup> In short, it explores what occurs after certain legislation has been exposed as nothing more than an articulation of sovereign power. Agamben offers the following description of sovereign violence:

Law is made of nothing but what it manages to capture inside itself through the inclusive exclusion of the *exceptio*: it nourishes itself on this exception and is a dead letter without it. In this sense, the law truly has ‘no existence in itself, but rather *has its being in the very life of men.*’ The sovereign decision traces and from time to time renews this threshold of indistinction between outside and inside, exclusion and inclusion, in which life is originally expected in law. (27, first emphasis original, second emphasis added)

If the law has no inherent materiality or function other than what it manages to constitute inside of its own structure through the exception, we can tentatively say that in practice, through relinquishing the exception it has captured inside of itself in the form of the black South African population, the law in *Disgrace’s* South Africa is a “dead letter.” The ideologies and racial prejudices that informed the system of Apartheid have not disappeared altogether. Believing they have is an extension of the same logic that claims racism disappeared when legalized slavery was abolished in the United States. When discrimination against populations is disavowed, the law is exposed as nothing other than an articulation of the interests of the hegemonically dominant population, the interests of whom are always

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<sup>18</sup> I am drawing from the homogenous national identity prescribed by the state of South Africa itself that has then been internally divided along monolithic racial differences between ‘white’ and ‘black’ populations. There are, of course, many ethnic divisions in both the black and white populations in South Africa that adhere to more complex and nuanced internal hierarchies.

served and protected by the sovereign power of the state. Those who usually benefit from that discrimination— in this context, white South African citizens— can either attempt to adjust to the new South African state apparatus or choose to perpetuate the old state of Apartheid through their individual actions and beliefs.

David's way of understanding the violence he experiences and witnesses during the Lurie's home invasion correlates with what Agamben's description. When the exception is relinquished by the law, and the law is reduced to a "dead letter," it proves that the law is in the very lives of men and has no inherent existence or form without reference to human life. For example, in the immediate aftermath of the Lurie's violation, David begins to suspect Petrus' complicity. He tells Lucy, "I find it hard to believe they arrived out of nowhere, and did what they did, and disappeared afterwards like ghosts. And I find it hard to believe that the reason they picked us was simply that we were the first white folk they met that day" (118). These kinds of suspicions work their way into David's understanding of the situation, and escalate the racial prejudices within him, which eventually inform his violent actions against Petrus and Pollux. This has at least one implication in the context of *Disgrace*, magnifying Agamben's questions about the connections between law, life, and politics. The first is that if the law's reliance on the exception is what engenders its existence, then when the state relinquishes the laws that enforce that exception, it does not necessarily indicate that the sovereign power that made that exception possible has dissipated entirely. Indeed, as is implied in many moments in *Disgrace*, what is more likely is the residual extension of the sovereign violence of the Apartheid system to individual lives through the white characters' resurgence of racist ideology and action.

The characters in *Disgrace* are constantly responding to the dissolution of the sovereign power of the Apartheid system. However, these responses to their changing juridical processes seem to center on various notions of vengeance. When David first realizes their violators took the time to shoot the dogs Lucy and David had been caring for, David reflects, “Contemptible, yet exhilarating, probably, in a country where dogs are bred to snarl at the mere smell of a black man. A satisfying afternoon’s work, heady, like all revenge” (110). This sentiment repeats when David reacts to Lucy’s refusal to disclose her assault to the police: “Do you think that by meekly accepting what happened to you, you can set yourself apart from farmers like Ettinger? [...] That is not how vengeance works, Lucy, Vengeance is like fire. The more it devours, the hungrier it gets” (112). At least in David’s estimation, which could account for his later beating of Pollux, post-Apartheid South Africa has emerged as a landscape riddled with exchanges of vengeance, responses to a process of discrimination and violence begun hundreds of years earlier.

In “Potentiality and Law,” Agamben begins to explicate the relation between constituting and constituted power in the juridical realm which will illuminate a way to understand the structure of the residual sovereign violence at work in *Disgrace*. Following Benjamin, he defines constituted power as the power which exerts violence to preserve law and constituting power as the power which exerts violence to posit law (40). For example, in a typical liberal revolution, the constituted power involved may be understood as the tyrannical government or monarchy, while the constituting power would be thought of as the insurgent force. However, he complicates this relation, and describes that it is impossible and actually harmful to think of the two as mutually exclusive. In light of the fact that most

juridical systems allow for the possibility of revision through the mechanism of a constitution or a legislative body, what follows any overhaul of the previous system is that, “the sovereign power divides itself into constituting and constituted power and maintains itself in relation to both, positioning itself at their point of indistinction” (41). Sovereign violence divides itself between constituted and constituting power— because it contains both— and makes it difficult for the constituting power, once it has successfully posited new laws and overthrown the constituted power, to “legitimate something other than law-preserving violence and even maintains an ambiguous and ineradicable relation with constituted power” (41). In other words, in order to maintain the law that it has posited, the constituting power must wield the law-preserving violence of the constituted power it has just overthrown, and it is able to do this precisely because of the sovereign power that has divided itself between the two. This structure of and relation between constituting and constituted power is part of the reason why, for Agamben, revolutions often result in the institution of an even more oppressive sovereign regime.

To be clear, Agamben’s conclusion about insurrections against sovereign violence usually eliciting the foundations for a more violent sovereign mechanism is not what I am arguing is occurring in the South African state. However, certain aspects of his structure can apply to the dynamics occurring internally and externally in the text and can help explicate the sovereign violence at work in these cyclical acts of revenge. Agamben’s model can provide an explanation for a legacy of violence in South Africa. We can posit that while the Apartheid system was in full effect, the constituting power would be the anti-Apartheid movement, or those attempting to overthrow the violence of Apartheid legislation, and the

constituted power would be the system of Apartheid and its supporters/sympathizers, or those attempting to maintain the legality of Apartheid. Even if the sovereign violence of the South African Apartheid system has been dissolved, the relationship between sovereignty, constituted, and constituting power entails that the sovereign violence of that system has not actually disappeared. It has only divided itself between the constituted and constituting powers it already contained within itself. The relations between the constituting and constituted powers of the sovereign Apartheid system are still at work in the actions and beliefs of individual characters in *Disgrace*, emerging as violent exchanges justified through claims of revenge. To put this more succinctly, the legality of sovereign violence in *Disgrace* has been prohibited. However, the ideology of the sovereign violence of Apartheid continues to operate in the relations between those who either benefited from that violence or suffered under it.

It is possible to glean this particular dynamic throughout the progression of the novel, in both subtle and overt ways, but perhaps most tellingly when Petrus decides to throw a party to celebrate the acquisition of his land. He invites the Luries to this gathering, and they are the only white South Africans present. Before the celebration ensues, however, David and Petrus share an exchange, where David asks Petrus, “I want those men to be caught and brought before the law and punished. Am I wrong? Am I wrong to want justice?” to which Petrus replies, “No, you are not wrong” (119). The question David poses to Petrus about the importance of seeking justice mirrors the feeling permeating the country more broadly. All individuals that suffered under the violence of Apartheid have been seeking retribution and

some form of justice for the violence that has been inflicted on them for generations— this could be why Petrus responds in such a clear, yet detached manner.

Yet, an important clarification that must be made at this point is the difference between justice and revenge; I am working from the understanding of that difference provided by Nietzsche in *The Genealogy of Morals*. Justice operates primarily through the establishment and enforcement of a legal code by those in power. It focuses on training the individuals involved in any legal matter—both the victim and the violator—to depersonalize the crime under scrutiny. Revenge, therefore, is the quest for reparation that occurs outside a codified legal system, and that intentionally emphasizes the personal element attached to any violation (51). However, when sovereign power collapses law into violence, the difference between the impartially coded legal code and the individually invested act of personal revenge become more difficult to distinguish. The perpetuation of sovereign violence actually serves to invalidate the law it constitutes as a means to secure the perpetuation of its own validity. Therefore, though this description of the difference of justice and revenge is what Nietzsche identifies as the normative understanding of these terms, he adds that “states of legality can never be anything but exceptional states, as partial restrictions of the true will to life, that seeks power and to whose overall purpose they subordinate themselves [...] as a means of creating greater units of power” (52). The ability of sovereign power to efface supposedly undeniable distinctions between seemingly oppositional concepts also comes through when interrogating this understanding of justice versus revenge.

Ironically, when David asks Petrus if it is wrong to want justice for Lucy, he effaces any distinction between justice and vengeance (and acts in a way that is reminiscent of



sovereign power), and moreover, does not apprehend the possibility that Petrus, as part of the population most affected by the violence of Apartheid, may in fact be more keenly aware of the importance of retribution than any white South African individual. Instead, when he and Lucy attend the celebration and realize that one of Lucy's violators— Pollux— is in attendance, David unabashedly declares, “I am going to telephone the police’ [...] There is a disapproving murmur from the onlookers. ‘I am going to telephone the police,’ he repeats to Petrus. Petrus is stony-faced” (132). Here, although the sovereign violence of Apartheid is technically dissolved, it extends and is enforced through David Lurie himself, when he invokes residual dynamics between black individuals, white individuals, and the apparatus of the state police.

When he and Lucy return to their home, and Lucy chastizes David for threatening Petrus and his guests, he further extends the sovereign violence of the Apartheid system, albeit in a manner which he considers justified in light of Lucy's rape, and tells her, “I fail to understand why you did not lay real charges against them, and now I fail to understand why you are protecting Petrus. Petrus is not an innocent party, Petrus is *with* them” (133). Here, the remnants of the state of exception embedded within the sovereign violence of Apartheid comes into partial relief. Petrus, who has done nothing wrong and has no direct involvement in the violence inflicted by the black South African men against the Luries, is still thought to be necessarily connected to those who did. David is responding in a way that is consistent with the constituted sovereign violence of the Apartheid system, refusing to discriminate between the guilty and the innocent, and thereby viewing the entire black South African community in their region as exempt from the due process of the juridical system. He

continues to reify the formerly constituted power of the Apartheid system when, after he and Lucy leave Petrus' house, he thinks, "he does not mind the attention. Let them know I am still here, he thinks, let them know I am not skulking in the big house. And if that spoils their get-together, so be it" (135).

David's mentality carries traces of the sovereign violence described by Agamben; specifically, in the way it seems to legitimize his violent actions in seeking revenge or "justice" through the apparatus of the law. Because he views Lucy's sexual violation as occurring outside of the legal mechanism of "justice," he characterizes it as an act of "revenge." In attempting to involve the state, David believes that he is not acting out of revenge, but acts instead out of an attempt to secure justice for his daughter. After the party, he demands that Petrus reveal the identity and location of Pollux and the other two perpetrators, stating that after he does, "Then we can leave it to the police to investigate and bring him and his friends to justice. You will not be involved. I will not be involved, it will be a matter for the law" (137). However, the apparatus of South African law is, and has been, designed to secure "justice" for white individuals through overtly discriminating against black individuals. Therefore, David's claim that neither Petrus nor the Luries would have any involvement reveals his reliance on the abstract, "just" operation of law, a conception of law that does not correlate with the law in practice. Only once that reliance is taken away from him, when Lucy prohibits him from involving the state in any capacity, does he perpetuate violence in the name of revenge.

Important to note is the fact that these dynamics of vengeance, which re-engage the dynamics between the constituted and constituting relations of the Apartheid system, are

actively worked against by two characters in the novel: Lucy and Petrus. In response to the demands David places on him to disclose Pollux's identity to the police, Petrus says, "But you will not get your car back from this boy. He cannot give you your car. He does not know where your car is. Your car is gone. The best is, you can buy another car with the insurance, then you have a car again" (138). Here, Petrus attempts to frame the Luries' situation in a way that dismantles the cyclical exchange of violent acts of revenge by using the car as a metaphorical way to engage with the dynamics of post-Apartheid South Africa. Namely, he points out that the "justice" David seeks will not undo what has already been done. Instead, it will reify the sovereign power that forms the base of the systems of legal racial discrimination, like that of Apartheid. However, Petrus' remarks also serve to inflict an iteration of the gendered violence which made Lucy's rape possible. By making the reality of her experience equivalent to the loss of a material object of David's car, he, though perhaps unwittingly, reinforces the objectification of women in patriarchal society.

Lucy also attempts to work against David's actions through her refusal to disclose her assault, or the identity of her assailants, to the police. Of course, Lucy's position as a survivor of rape also complicates this refusal—patriarchal systems are never designed to protect victims of sexual assault, which could also contribute to Lucy's reluctance to involve the nation's legal system. Toward the end of *Disgrace*, Lucy tells David, "But perhaps that is a good point to start from again. Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept. To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity" (205). Lucy's words gesture toward the crux of the ethical dilemmas posed by *Disgrace*. In the post-Apartheid social schema, in which the sovereign violence of

Apartheid has extended to individual dynamics, Lucy could respond to her violation in the same capacity that David does— to reify the sovereign violence of the constituted power of the dissolved Apartheid state through involving the police, inflicting violence against her perpetrators herself, or supporting David's inclination to do so. However, she adamantly refuses to approach the situation in this way. Instead, upon finding herself in this particular situation, she realizes that if she wishes to live in a way that corresponds with her political and ideological views (which are fundamentally opposed to Apartheid) she can no longer rely on the protection of the South African state, or even of her father. She chooses to insert herself into a position that recalls the way Agamben describes those living under the sovereign state of exception as the exception— stripped of rights, property, protection, and ultimately, as an individual with nothing. She implies this decision earlier in the narrative when she asks David, "What if... 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. [...] Why should I be allowed to live here without paying?" (158). This question, this way of formulating her situation, stands as one of the most ethically difficult moments in the entire novel. In thinking of herself as owing something to the black South African men who violated her, Lucy attempts to enact justice at an individual level. Nevertheless, though she attempts to reconcile the history of violence and trauma enacted by the sovereignty of the Apartheid South African state, she still unwittingly reifies the individualized relations between constituted and constituting powers at work in the novel.

In justifying the violence perpetrated against her by her rapists in light of a history of discrimination, Lucy implies that the history of Apartheid becomes a kind of unshakable,

binding mechanism (like the normative understanding of law itself) which excuses the most intimate, personal physical violation imaginable. In this capacity, if in a muddled way, Lucy's mentality mirrors the sovereign's prerogative to dissolve the distinction between violence and law. Additionally, in framing the violence perpetrated against her as a necessity, she potentially opens up an opportunity for the constituting power of the newly Apartheid-free South African state to resemble the constituted power it has theoretically overthrown.

Vengeance, in other words, as it is understood by both David and Lucy, becomes that very method through which the constituting power and constituted power still relate to each other through the mechanism of sovereign violence. An act of vengeance dissolves the difference between violence and law, and essentializes the condition of the exception in relation to the rule. Lucy's understanding of vengeance simply inverts the same understanding purported by David. Perhaps this is what can be gleaned from David when he tells her that, "It is not finished. Don't pretend you don't know what I mean. It is not finished. On the contrary, it is just beginning. It will go on long after I am dead and you are dead" (202). Though they conceptualize them differently, David and Lucy navigate the dynamics of their post-Apartheid state through essentializing acts of revenge, on individual and universal levels, that perpetuate the sovereign violence at the heart of Apartheid itself. David's warning also notes another ability of the violence of sovereignty that emerges in post-Apartheid South Africa: its capacity to break with normative temporal boundaries.

**"I am the same man I always was: but time has broken, something has fallen in upon me from the sky, at random, from nowhere": Sovereignty and Temporality in *Waiting for the Barbarians and Disgrace***

*Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace* both hinge on a preoccupation with the disruption of the movement of time and the location of space. Sovereign violence gains its justification through implementing a juridical system designed to protect those who most closely resemble the sovereign in power (the hegemonically dominant population) and punishes those who diverge from the sovereign in power (any subject or population that diverges from the hegemonically dominant population). This mechanism becomes evident when the characters in Coetzee's novels attempt to reconcile their location in time and space while beginning to apprehend the sovereign violence of the Empire and the Apartheid system.

For the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, temporal experience shifts according to his proximity to either Imperial territory or barbarian territory, or to Imperial subjects or barbarian subjects. For example, in the singular instance where the narrative depicts an actual encounter with the barbarians outside of the Empire's territory, when the Magistrate returns the Girl to her people, he thinks, "And here I am patching up relations between the men of the future and the men of the past, returning, with apologies, a body we have sucked dry— a go-between, a jackal of Empire in sheep's clothing!" (82). This moment indicates a fundamental relationship between spatial considerations and temporal considerations; the further the Magistrate travels from territory controlled by the Empire, (the further he ventures into the "unknown" territory of the barbarians), his feeling of traveling into the past becomes stronger. Moreover, this moment also draws attention to the way the Magistrate formulates temporality and "civilization." He and his men exist, in his mind, as men of the future, while the barbarian men he delivers the Girl to exist as men of the past. Therefore, his anxiety upon confronting them stems from this innate contradiction; if he and

the rest of the Empire's subjects are progressive, forward-moving people of the future, and the barbarians are archaic, prehistoric subjects, then this, and any other, interaction should not be possible. This impossibility proving possible unsettles and destabilizes the Magistrate's understanding of his position in relation to both other Imperial subjects and barbarians to whom they are supposedly diametrically opposed. This muddling can be glimpsed later in the narrative as well. After leaving the Girl with her people, the Magistrate ponders, "Plodding across the salt I catch myself in a moment of astonishment that I could have loved someone from so remote a kingdom" (86). Here the Magistrate's descriptions of the barbarian territory as remote or cut off from the present moment of the Empire and his surprise at his connection with a subject from so "remote" a place undercut the ideology espoused by the sovereignty of the Empire, which hinges on maintaining protection for the hegemonically dominant while justifying a lack of protection for those who are not.

A similar relationship between temporal experience, spatial movement, and the sovereign violence of the state occurs in *Disgrace*. For example, David becomes almost painstakingly aware of the innate differences both spatially and temporally between Cape Town and the frontier where Lucy lives, and additionally between those who reside in the city and those who reside in the country. David observes, "Curious that he and her mother, cityfolk, intellectuals, should have produced this throwback, this sturdy young settler." Later, he thinks, "So: a new adventure. His daughter [...] is taking him on an outing, showing him life, showing him this other, unfamiliar world" (61, 71). Not only does David view himself and his former wife as the opposite of Lucy's "throwback," antiquated farmer, which relies on a perceived difference in the location of the subjects in question, but he also understands

the location itself to belong to either the past or the present world. Another crucial consideration this observation brings into relief is the fact that before arriving in this rural space, David did not anticipate life itself existing in any conjunction with life in the confines of the progressive “intellectual” city. Even though Lucy is his daughter, he finds contradictions between them that hinge on her decision to live in the “other” or “unfamiliar” world of “throwback” settlers. Ironically, this may inform David’s view of Lucy as the reactionary member of their family. Interfacing with Lucy in this particular place destabilizes his sense of familial belonging, and moreover, decenters his sense of place and time in relation to the country he has lived in his entire life.

For Judith Butler, the relationship between time, space, and sovereign violence has a crucial and undeniable attachment to politics informed by a specific iteration of Eurocentrism (and more generally, a specific iteration of hegemonically constructed social relations). In *Frames of War*, Butler begins to discuss her understanding of the structure of sovereign violence: “To be protected from violence by the nation-state is to be exposed to the violence wielded by the nation-state, so to rely on the nation-state for protection from violence is precisely to exchange one potential violence for another” (26). This description aligns with the structure of sovereign power explicated by Agamben in *Homo Sacer*; namely, that the sovereign in question wields violence solely in order to maintain its powerful and dominant position.<sup>19</sup> Butler then writes, “The problem, rather, is that certain notions of relevant geopolitical space— including the spatial boundedness of minority communities— are circumscribed by this story of a progressive modernity; certainly notions of what ‘this time’

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<sup>19</sup> This can be seen particularly in Agamben’s discussion of “Potentiality and Law,” and in his understanding of the sovereign relation of exception in the first volume of *Homo Sacer*.



can and must be are similarly construed on the basis of circumscribing the ‘where’ of its happening” (103). The space, and by extension the subjects residing within that space, that can be recognized as “relevant,” and therefore as worthy of protection from sovereign violence, has an intimate connection with the fiction of progressive modernity and to an exclusively linear conception of history built around the development of European powers. Spaces considered “outside” of the modern, European progress—such as those spaces we refer to as “developing” nations, or the more antiquated term of “third-world” nations—are also considered to be “behind,” or to be “backwards.”<sup>20</sup> Therefore, Butler gives us an important element to consider when thinking through the mechanism of sovereign violence: when certain places are considered to diverge from, or to exist outside of, both the time and space of the sovereign power in question— whether that sovereign be the Empire in *Waiting for the Barbarians* or the mechanism of Apartheid in *Disgrace*— the infliction of violence draws a crucial element of its justification.

If we can use Butler’s understanding of what considerations of time and space have to do with the infliction of sovereign violence in particular areas and onto particular people, we can begin to see how these dynamics in both of Coetzee’s novels partially lead to the protagonists’ fluctuation between almost apprehending the presence of sovereign violence and then retreating from that apprehension. In other words, both David Lurie and the Magistrate are conditioned to be unaware of the presence of sovereign violence in most every aspect of their society, and one of the most important places where their disillusionment with

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<sup>20</sup> In Butler’s third chapter, “Sexual Politics, Torture, and Time,” she notes that this is often how Imperial practice continues in a “post” colonial world: the necessity of humanitarian intervention in order to “rescue” certain populations from the dangers of their fellow citizens’ backwards policies and perspectives.

and encroaching recognition of sovereign violence— on both systemic and individual levels — can be seen is in their experience of the destabilization of normative time and space.

For David, who views Lucy's frontier town as part of another, more primitive South Africa, this destabilization of time and space begins to occur after the Luries' home invasion: "He is helpless, an Aunt Sally, a figure from a cartoon, a missionary in cassock and topi waiting with clasped hands and upcast eyes while the savages jaw away in their own lingo preparatory to plunging him into their boiling cauldron" (95). In the immediate aftermath of his direct exposure to the violence of post-Apartheid South Africa, David experiences himself moving backwards, becoming part of the dynamics between the colonizer and the colonized before the development of the South African nation-state itself. Crucially, instead of this disruption of time forcing him to confront the idea that the dynamics in the post-Apartheid schema differ from the dynamics of the Apartheid schema in legal terms only, he instead concludes that his experience is directly attached to the overall "backwardness" of this part of the country. This assumption emerges continually in the rest of the novel when David makes observations such as "Country life has always been a matter of neighbours scheming against each other, wishing on each other pests, poor crops and financial ruin" and "As a woman alone on a farm, she [Lucy] has no future, that is clear" (118, 134). The more evidence that accumulates in conflict with David's understanding of the progression of the South African state, and of himself as a white man, the more he doubles-down on his pejorative understanding that rural places are the actual source of the violence he witnesses and experiences. He frames the violence he encounters as a direct product of the fact that Lucy resides in a part of the country that is fundamentally backwards, emblematic of a

bygone era of racially motivated prejudice and violence. Lucy pushes back against this response from David, and continually attempts to force him to engage with the pervasive presence of residual sovereign violence from the Apartheid system. This dynamic can be seen in a particularly heated exchange, when David attempts to convince Lucy to abandon her home and lifestyle. Lucy tells him,

“We can’t just pick up where we left off,”

“Why not?”

“Because it’s not a good idea. Because it’s not safe.”

“It was never safe, and it’s not an idea, good or bad.” (105)

Here, Lucy attempts to force David to consider that what happened to them was not an anomaly produced by an inherently archaic countryside. She implies that exchanges of violence based on the racial dynamics and discrimination of Apartheid is *still* a perpetual possibility, one that the legal dissolution of Apartheid never actually effaced, but only pretended to efface. Here again, Lucy reacts against David’s tendency to extrapolate reality into ideas alone—the continuation of her livelihood and position in society it is not merely an idea. It simply is.

Ironically, the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* begins with an observation about time that parallels David’s tendency to blur the boundaries between perceivable reality and idealistic abstraction: “The space about us here is merely space, no meaner or grander than the space above the shacks and tenements and temples and offices of the capital. Space is space, life is life, everywhere the same” (18). The Magistrate makes this observation after immersing himself in the ruins of a previous civilization residing just outside of the limits of

his township. He catches himself waiting for them to yield some sort of essence of what they once were, and chides himself for expecting the realm of ideas and reality to suddenly lose their differentiation. However, the Magistrate's initial belief in the agency of the past continues to emerge in the first part of the novel: "The new men of Empire are the ones who believe in fresh starts, new chapters, clean pages; I struggle on with the old story, hoping that before it is finished it will reveal to me why it was that I thought it worth the trouble" (27). This is his general attitude toward the past. He believes that examination of the past inevitably connects with the progression of the past from the present and the present to the future. This understanding of temporality, though somewhat deviant from the unstoppable progress and obsession with the future that characterize the Empire's conception of time, still works within a normative, linear understanding of history. At this point in the novel, because the Magistrate has not fully begun to apprehend the extent of the sovereign violence surrounding him, his conception of time lacks what Butler describes as "the critique of state violence and the elaboration of its coercive mechanisms" that may lead to "an alternative political framework, one that implies another sense not only of modernity, but also of the time, the 'now,' in which we live" (110). The observations he makes about the structure of time may slightly disrupt the Empire's emphasis on eternal progression and futurity. However, his inability to fully recognize and critique sovereign violence's pervasiveness renders him unable to formulate an understanding of temporal movement that could ultimately lead him to an alternative perspective of time that opposes the violence of the Empire.

David Lurie's experience of the instability of time only seems to project him into the past. The Magistrate's experience of the instability of time actually dislodges him from the categories of past, present, and future entirely. What ultimately serves as the catalyst for this destabilization and subsequent removal from the boundaries of normative temporality is his relationship with the Barbarian Girl. By examining and interacting with the Girl's brutalized body, the Magistrate experiences a dislocation of himself in relation to the time in which he resides. While initially washing the Girl's legs and broken feet, for example, he observes, "I lose myself in the rhythm of what I am 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" (32). Here, the Magistrate loses his sense of time and place almost completely, but still retains a modicum of awareness regarding this disruption. That awareness eventually disappears entirely, when he describes, "But more often in the very act of caressing her I am overcome with sleep as if poleaxed, fall into oblivion sprawled upon her body, and wake an hour or two later dizzy, confused, thirsty. These dreamless spells are like death to me, or enchantment, blank, *outside of time*" (35, added emphasis). Interaction with the Girl's maimed body produces this destabilizing effect on the Magistrate's relationship with the time and space around him.

This connection indicates several important considerations that extend to the relations between time, space, and sovereign violence. Through washing the Girl's body, the Magistrate attempts to piece together what has happened to her, to find the evidence of what the sovereign violence behind Colonel Joll's Third Bureau has inscribed on her body. For the first time, he attempts to fully recognize the extent of the sovereign violence of the Empire and therefore comes closer to recognizing the omni-presence of sovereign power in his own

life. More significantly still, however, is the fact that this recognition is attempted through careful consideration of a body from “so remote a kingdom,” or from a population thought to embody the archaic characteristics of humanity that Imperial rule and control brings into the unceasing progress of its own futurity. In other words, the Magistrate finds himself dislodged from all considerations and movements of time and space when he washes the Barbarian Girl because interacting with her forces him to directly confront the pervasive quality of sovereign violence, and simultaneously disrupts the narrative espoused by the Empire that places itself in the future and the barbarians in the past. In this interaction, the Girl and the Magistrate exist in the same time and in the same place, and that, according to the ideologies purported by the sovereign imperial power, should be an impossibility.

As a result of this experience, the Magistrate reifies the violence inflicted on the Girl by her torturers; again, she is reduced to her body alone, and the Magistrate cannot interact with her as he would with an Imperial subject, or rather, with a living subject that is recognizable as such. This becomes especially clear when, after engaging with her in these terms for the duration of several weeks, the Magistrate reflects, “I am the same man I always was; but *time has broken, something* has fallen in upon me from the sky, at random, from nowhere: this *body* in my bed, for which I am responsible, or so it seems, otherwise why do I keep *it?*” (49, added emphasis). Linguistically, this reflection indicates the Magistrate’s dehumanization of the Girl, and thus his complicity with the sovereign power that began that process in the first place. He only begins to confront this complicity when he returns to the township and is imprisoned by the same agents of sovereign power that tortured her:

Have I truly enjoyed the unbounded freedom of this past year in which more than ever before my life has been mine to make up as I go along? For example: my freedom to make of the girl whatever I felt like [...] at whim, because I had no duty to her save what it occurred to me to feel from moment to moment: from the oppression of such freedom who would not welcome the liberation of confinement? (91).

Here, when forced to not only begin apprehending sovereign violence of the Empire, but also to be subjected to it himself, the Magistrate's understanding of the categories and distinctions of freedom and imprisonment under the sovereign rule of the Empire collapse.

For Butler, when the concept of freedom under sovereign power is interrogated, it is “one that is free of the law at the same time that it is coercive; it is an extension of the logic that establishes state power— and its mechanisms of violence— as beyond the law” (129). In interrogating the freedom that gave him the ability to make the Girl into a symbol of whatever he felt toward her, the Magistrate apprehends the connection between that freedom, which is only provided to him through the protection of the Empire, and the violence perpetrated against those for whom that freedom does not exist. The distinctions between freedom and imprisonment come apart— he begins to recognize that the freedom that allows him to treat the Girl according to his whims is a direct articulation of the same mechanism of sovereign violence that led to her imprisonment and torture.

In *Disgrace*, David Lurie comes to a recognition of a similar sort, but it does not manifest in an overtly physical way, such as in the case of the Magistrate's physical imprisonment. When speculating about the mentality of his daughter's rapists, David realizes that, “He can, if he concentrates, if he loses himself, be there, be the men, inhabit them, fill

them with the ghost of himself. The question is, does he have it in him to be the woman?" (160). In response to this question, David returns to Cape Town and engages with Melanie Isaac's parents, the student he sexually coerced in the first part of the novel. When speaking to her father, David says:

In my own terms, I am being punished for what happened between myself and your daughter. I am sunk into a state of disgrace from which it will not be easy to lift myself. It is not a punishment I have refused. I do not murmur against it. On the contrary, I am living out from day to day, trying to accept disgrace as my state of being. (172)

David, who is free to reduce Melanie to a sexually violable body, recognizes that his ability to do so is a different manifestation of the conditions that allowed his daughter's rapists to reduce her to nothing except a sexually violatable body. Those conditions, which stem from the hegemonic structure of patriarchy, collapse David's ability to differentiate his actions from those of Lucy's rapists. And yet, David's disgrace is not his alone to bear; the fact that he views Lucy's rape as the method by which to atone for his own violent actions speaks directly to the toxic masculine self-centeredness engendered by the patriarchal hegemonic system.

Like the Magistrate, David finds his punishment justified, though the stakes attached to David's punishment differ from the Magistrate's because David is not physically imprisoned or tortured, while the Magistrate is. David's primarily internalized punishment of living in disgrace, then, possibly becomes the reason why he seems unwilling to extend the recognition of his complicity in the mechanisms of sovereign violence to his perpetration of



violence against Pollux and Petrus. This gestures toward an element of the temporality of sovereign violence in both novels addressed in the beginning of this chapter— its eternal cycle, its ability to return again and again, even after one believes that return to be impossible. This emphasizes the fact that sovereign violence must be understood as a process that does not end. This is potentially part of the reason why both the Magistrate and David Lurie experience a destabilization of time when they come the closest to fully recognizing the extent of sovereign violence. Namely, they experience the instability of time most extremely when they approach the possibility of their own complicity in perpetuating sovereign violence, and this recognition leads to the paradoxical concept of these men finding freedom in their disgrace and imprisonment.

**“There has been something staring me in the face, and still I do not see it”:** **The Mechanism Connected to the Cyclicity of Sovereign Violence in *Disgrace* and *Waiting for the Barbarians***

Two final moments in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace* provide ambiguous reflections on sovereign violence that gesture toward the final mechanism of violence I will examine in this project’s last chapter. *Disgrace* concludes with an interaction between David and Bev Shaw, the woman David has been working with in the animal shelter: “*It gets harder all the time*, Bev Shaw once said. Harder, yet easier too. One gets used to things getting harder; one ceases to be surprised that what used to be as hard as hard can be grows harder yet” (219). In the context of this conversation, Bev Shaw is speaking to the difficult process of killing the numerous stray dogs they harbor in the animal shelter, but the text implies that this way of understanding life applies specifically to post-Apartheid South Africa. Namely,

though the legality of the sovereign violence of Apartheid has been abolished, it persists in the individual dynamics of South African subjects because the hegemonic sovereign ideology that informed it remains. In other words, her reflection speaks to the difficulty of imagining that even when one iteration of the state of exception is technically suspended in the juridical realm, the possibility of its resurgence remains intact because the criteria through which the sovereign power constitutes itself (i.e. through the ability to trace a threshold between categories of inside/outside, rule/exception) remains embedded within even the individual process of establishing collective belonging or non-belonging.

In the final moments of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, when the Magistrate reassumes his juridical position, he attempts to write a record of what has transpired. However, in light of his responsibility as the magistrate, finds himself unable to do so honestly. It is not insignificant that it is his role as the magistrate, as the civil officer in charge of administering the law, that makes him feel unable to create any records that may undermine the Empire. This leads him to engage in a few final reflective moments. He realizes, after thinking more seriously about his complicity in the infliction of the Empire's sovereign violence, that in spite of this seemingly full recognition, he still feels unable to explain that violence to anyone. He thinks, ““There has been something staring me in the face, and still I do not see it”” (179).

This *something* staring the Magistrate in the face is precisely what I will examine in the final chapter of this project. The something in question may be connected to what continues to make the condition of life harder in *Disgrace's* post-Apartheid context— one that is fundamentally connected to the perpetuation of sovereign violence. The tensions and

interactions between this mechanism and the structural apparatus of sovereignty produces nothing other than the infliction of physical pain. It is the process through which certain individuals are understood as worthy of protection or persecution: the process of determining an individual's belonging or non-belonging to a collective.

### Chapter Three

#### **Ugliness, Bare Life, and the Camp: Comparing the Violence of Citizenship and Statelessness in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace***

The third and final chapter of this thesis project will examine the final mechanism of violence in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*: the violence of citizenship and statelessness. Both those living inside and outside of the sovereign apparatus in both novels find themselves in a vulnerable position— for those categories to emerge at all, each included and excluded individual must both directly and indirectly consent to their individual, private lives melding with the overarching political interests of the sovereign power they live under. The process of the individual's private life becoming identical with their public life is part of the mechanism of biopolitical power.<sup>21</sup> Biopolitics becomes the necessary component of how categories of belonging or non-belonging emerge in both of Coetzee's novels.

Attempting to compare the criteria used to identify belonging and non-belonging in *Disgrace* and *Waiting for the Barbarians* requires an understanding of how biopolitical power has previously been applied to the violent process of establishing the difference between citizenship and statelessness. Using the political theories of Giorgio Agamben and Hannah Arendt, I will compare the categories of belonging and non-belonging in each of Coetzee's novels, and move toward a more concrete understanding pertaining to the relationship between physical violence, sovereign violence, and the violence of belonging or

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<sup>21</sup> "The new non-disciplinary power is applied not to man-as-body but to living man, to man-as-living-being; ultimately, to man as species. [...] The new technology that is being established is addressed to a multiplicity of men [...] to the extent that they form a global mass that is affected by overall processes characteristic of birth, death, production, illness, and so on" (Foucault 1442).

non-belonging to the sovereign imperial or state apparatus. The physical violence articulated through the infliction of sovereign power can only occur once an understanding of the difference between those who belong and those who do not belong is reached—in both texts, those differences take the form of either statelessness or citizenship.

**“It occurs to me that we crush insects beneath our feet, miracles of creation too, beetles, worms, cockroaches, ants, in their various ways”:** *Bare Life and Political Life in Waiting for the Barbarians and Disgrace*

It is crucial to first attempt to understand *what* makes the difference between belonging and non-belonging in each text—how are these categories established, and what criteria is used to support them? Parallel to the question of *what* is the question of *how*—how are these distinctions made, and on what criteria do they rest? Generally, in both fiction and reality, human life, if not all life, carries an assumed, innate, sacred quality. Because of this fragility and sanctity, a life that is not recognizable as such defies normative expectations. It presents a paradox of a particularly urgent nature— if it can be generally agreed upon that all life is worthy of protection because of its value, then how can wide-scale extermination of life occur? As Hannah Arendt puts it in “The Decline of the Nation-State and the Ends of the Rights of Man” (1951), “No paradox of contemporary politics is filled with a more poignant irony than the discrepancy between the efforts of well-meaning idealists who [...] insist on regarding as ‘inalienable’ those human rights [...] and the situation of the rightless themselves” (279).

Characters in both *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace* echo the anxiety surrounding this paradox— they rigidly hold to the innate value of all life, even when their

belief in that value opposes the realities they experience. The Magistrate touches on it when he speaks what he believes to be his last words when his torturer tells him that he will be hanged: ““I want to say that no one deserves to die. [...] I want to live. As every man wants to live. To live and live and live. No matter what”” (137). Though he has witnessed total disregard for human life in his frontier town, when confronted with the certainty of his death, the Magistrate appeals to the simple fact that because all life wants to live, no life deserves to die. In *Disgrace*, when Bev Shaw and David discuss the process of euthanizing the stray dogs in the animal shelter, he offers that potentially, some of the dogs are ready for death. She replies, ““Do you think so?” she says. ‘I’m not sure. I don’t think we are ready to die, any of us, not without being escorted”” (84). Here, even when tasked with deciding whether or not the dogs in the shelter should live or die, Bev Shaw clings to the innate belief that because life only wants to continue living, it carries inherent value, regardless of whether or not that value is normatively recognizable.

In both situations, then, the innate value of life is not only apprehended, but is actually, at moments, recognized by characters in each text. Of course, the distinction between human life and non-human life still exists for characters in each text—but the certainty of those distinctions unravels as they witness and experience the accelerated infliction of violence. In regards to exactly *what* makes the difference between recognizable life and unrecognizable life, the answer, ideally speaking, is nothing. Nothing should make the difference between life that is worthy of protection and life that is not. This is precisely what certain humanitarian collectives rest their praxis upon— because all life wishes to continue living, because most life has an instinct of self-preservation, no life inherently

deserves to end. And yet, wide-spread threats to and extermination of life occurs in these novels, even by characters that hold this understanding of the universal value of life to be true. Therefore, the second question becomes the only question: *how* is life distinguished as either worthy of protection and or unworthy of protection, as universally valuable or not?

The answer, for Giorgio Agamben, lies in the ancient distinction between life in essence, (*zōē*), and the form or manner in which life is lived in relation to other life, or life in relation to the public, to the political realm (*bios*). Sovereign power is normatively thought to apply only to life in relation to politics, to the public realm. This belief, however, is where the paradox between mass execution and universal rights rests. Agamben clarifies that “Contrary to our modern habit of representing the political realm in terms of citizens’ rights, free will, and social contracts, from the point of view of sovereignty *only bare life is authentically possible*” (106). Bare life refers to ‘real life,’ or the element of life thought to exist beyond any relation to any external mechanism (67). Sovereign power pretends to only affect life that exists in public, in the political realm, when in reality, the original relation between life and sovereign power is bare life, or life in essence. For Agamben, this illusory quality of the sovereign relation to bare life can be glimpsed, for example, when examining the Hobbesian political model. Instead of preserving the sovereign subjects’ natural rights, the model actually only reifies the sovereign’s right to do anything to anyone at any time, which corresponds to its right to punish (106). The incorporation of bare life into the political realm occurs unilaterally here—the sovereign completely resides over the lives of its subjects regardless of their specific relation to the public realm of politics. Therefore, Hobbes’ model unintentionally exposes how sovereign power upholds a distinction between political life and

bare life while simultaneously effacing that distinction in the very way it relates to the life it claims to protect. From that perspective of sovereignty, bare life is the only possible life because the distinction between bare life and political life is a false distinction from the outset.

This indicates that in order to think through the process by which universally valuable life loses that inherent value, the foundational metaphysical distinction between *zoē* and *bios* must be exposed as an idealistic belief with no referent in reality. From the position of sovereign power, it does not exist, but in order for sovereign power to ensure its own perpetual existence, the fiction of that distinction must be in place. Agamben uses the image of the werewolf, the individual that metamorphosizes between human and animal, as the ideal image to disrupt the supposed division between *zoē* and *bios*: “The transformation into a werewolf corresponds perfectly to the state of exception, during which [...] time the city is dissolved and men enter into a zone in which they are no longer distinct from beasts” (107). In light of the perpetual quality of the state of exception, explicated in the previous chapter, the image of the werewolf serves as a crucial reminder that under sovereign power, every individual always resides between human animal and non-human animal, between life that is recognized as sacred and life that is not. Those who enjoy the protections afforded by a sovereign power who recognizes the value of their life can just as easily find themselves removed from the political realm and forced into the vulnerable position of life as such, life without recognizable value. The image of the werewolf occurs earlier in an observation made by Arendt about the humanitarian groups tasked with the protection of inalienable human rights: “The groups they formed, the declarations they issued, showed an uncanny similarity



in language and composition to that of societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals” (292). The distinction between human and non-human life, on which the foundation of supposedly universal human worth rests, proves feeble even in the rhetoric of organizations tasking themselves with the fight against mass violence and atrocity.

The image of the werewolf, which refers to the division between human life and non-human life (between life worthy of protection and life unworthy of protection) under sovereign power, provides a potential explanation for the proliferation of references to and comparisons between the human realm and the non-human realm in Coetzee’s novels. In a seeming non-sequitur in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, for example, after the Magistrate has publicly protested against the beating of the barbarian prisoners, he thinks: “It occurs to me that we crush insects beneath our feet, miracles of creation too, beetles, worms, cockroaches, ants, in their various ways” (124). Here, the Magistrate recognizes the instability in believing that some life is a miraculous form of creation and some life is not. This recognition however, comes only after he has witnessed and participated in the dehumanization of barbarians. Early in the text, he describes the ways the frontier town looks in on the yard housing the barbarian prisoners: “There are always children with their faces pressed to the bars of the gate; and from my window I stare down, invisible behind the glass” (21). Here, the population of the frontier town regards the captured barbarian population as one would regard the captured inhabitants of any zoo exhibit. They become specimens of spectacle, and recognition of their innate human value is absent entirely. Moreover, he later ‘jokes’ with the Barbarian Girl that, ““People will say I keep two wild animals in my rooms, a fox and a girl”” (39). In this comparison, diluted through humor, the Magistrate’s offense against the Girl is

two-fold; he compares her to the fox he procured for her amusement through drawing attention to her gender and to her foreignness. Because the barbarian populations in the novel are continually dehumanized, he can connect the Girl and the fox through a notion of an inherent ‘wildness,’ or proximity to a state of nature. Moreover, he can easily make this comparison due to the disempowered position the Girl occupies— not only is she barbarian, but she is also a woman, and can therefore more easily be compared to non-human life than human life identified in the criteria of a hegemonically patriarchal society. Moreover, the Magistrate unwittingly furthers her dehumanized state by how he justifies holding her captive in his rooms—in his mind, he keeps her with him in order to spare her from the cruelties of the townsfolk and the harshness of the winter. He tells her, “Winter is almost here. You must have somewhere to live. Otherwise you must go back to your own people” (30). This rhetoric comes from an attitude of preservation— as Arendt noticed about human rights advocates, the Magistrate’s language actually more so mirrors that of groups dedicated to the preservation of non-human lives and habitats. In these moments, the lines between human life, or sacred life worthy of protection, and non-human life, or life unworthy of protection, vulnerable to complete objectification and violence, become indistinguishable.

In *Disgrace*, erosion of differences between human and non-human life plays out most overtly in David Lurie’s observation and understanding of the narrative’s non-human lives. In the beginning of the novel, David tells Lucy, “As for animals, by all means let us be kind to them. But let us not lose perspective. We are of a different order of creation from the animals [...] So if we are going to be kind, let it be out of simple generosity, not because we feel guilty” (74). For David, protecting non-human life, at this point, is not an ethical duty

that serves to protect the universal value of all life as such, but a mere moral choice.<sup>22</sup> His ideas shift when he meets two sheep Petrus means to slaughter to feed his guests during the celebration of his acquisition of land: “I’m not sure I like the way he does things— bringing the slaughter-beasts home to acquaint them with the people who are going to eat them.” (124). He admits to Lucy that he would prefer the process remain hidden, confined to the abstracted, cloistered space of the slaughterhouse. She replies, “Wake up, David. This is the country. This is Africa.” (124). Here, Lucy Lurie emerges as a character who, especially because of her gender, sexuality, and the particular violence of rape she experienced because of them, recognizes that the difference between violence perpetrated against humans and non-humans amounts to an idea alone. By telling David to “wake up,” she points out the absurdity in attempting to obscure violence that surrounds them all the time. She tells David that his wish to maintain that barrier between violence he sees and violence he does not need to see has no impact on whether or not that violence occurs. She exposes the hypocrisy in David’s understanding of human and non-human life not to create or reify a hierarchy of value, but instead to subtly advocate for the protection of all forms of life. David, on the other hand, uses Lucy’s violation to extend the comparison between human and non-human life that eventually serves to justify his feelings of prejudice and violence against the black South African individuals in the novel.

After returning to Lucy’s home and discovering her pregnancy, David reflects that his daughter’s rapists were “Not raping, they were mating. It was not the pleasure principle that ran the show but the testicles, sacs bulging with seed aching to perfect itself [...] What kind of

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<sup>22</sup> I am working within a normative understanding that ethical duties refer to external systems, while moral choices refer to internal decisions.

child can seed like that give life to, seed driven into the woman not in love but in hatred [...] meant to soil her, mark her, like a dog's urine?" (199). David uses a harrowing comparison between human and non-human life and perhaps unintentionally reifies an already extant understanding that black South Africans are inherently closer to nature because of the color of their skin— that black individuals are closer to non-human, bestial life than human life. Though perhaps unaware of the racist attitude expressed through this comparison, in this moment David still demonstrates the ease with which a seemingly progressive individual falls into attitudes of racism in the South African context. In so doing, he doubles down on an understanding of life that makes a marked difference between human and non-human life, between bare life and political life, between life that needs protection and life that is exempt from it. Moreover, Lucy's pregnancy, only made possible through her sexual violation, can only serve to underscore the 'inhuman' method of its conception. Her rapists, instead of violating her body and forcibly penetrating her (a demonstration of the power elicited by gendered inequality) mark her, *urinate* on her. David understands her decision to carry the pregnancy to full-term, to raise the child growing inside of her, not as a further articulation of Lucy's commitment to protect and value all life, but only as the last element needed to complete her disgrace. Lucy commits to protecting life in practice; David commits to protecting life in theory. Their divergent attitudes and understandings about the relationship between human and non-human life cements this.

The difference between human and non-human life, in consideration of literal human and non-human presences in both novels, becomes a flimsy idea at best. The point recalls Agamben's understanding of how the werewolf exposes the status of all life under sovereign

power; life under sovereign power means that shifting between human and non-human status occurs continually and can occur without reference to any ontologically certifiable distinction, though there are certain identities (either through racial or gendered distinction) that are more easily violated because they are considered closer to non-human (disempowered) life. The repetitive references to non-human life throughout Coetzee's novels, both in literal and comparative terms, underscores Agamben's assertion that "The state of nature is, in truth, a state of exception [...] The foundation is thus not an event achieved once and for all but is continually operative in the civil state in the form of the sovereign decision [...] the latter refers *immediately* to the life [...] of the citizens, which thus appears as the originary political element" (109). Bare life has actually never been excluded from the political realm of sovereign power— in fact, bare life has always already been fundamentally a part of political function.

This understanding echoes in the Magistrate's answer to his own question about what bars humans from living as non-humans do: "It is the fault of Empire! Empire has created the time of history. Empire has located its existence not in the smooth recurrent spinning time of the cycle of the seasons, but in the jagged time of rise and fall, beginning and end, of catastrophe" (153-154). The answer the Magistrate provides here echoes Arendt's observation that, "Historical rights were replaced by natural rights, 'nature' took the place of history, and it was tacitly assumed that nature was less alien than history to the essence of man" (298). In other words, the sovereign apparatus intentionally curates the distinction between nature and culture, and does so in order to create a hierarchy of life that claims certain lives belong more to one category than the other. Lives that are perceived to be closer

to nature rather than culture, then, become lives that contain less value. Sovereign power legitimizes and even requires the illusion of difference between bare life and political life, between nature and culture, while simultaneously using the guise of that difference for its own benefit.

This transformation occurs most overtly in the establishment of belonging or non-belonging to the sovereign power in question, a process that uses the criteria of citizenship or statelessness.

**“So that is it. No more lies. *My people*. As naked of an answer as he could wish”:**

#### **Ugliness and the Criteria of Belonging in *Disgrace* and *Waiting for the Barbarians***

In *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace*, the status of citizenship or subjecthood differs because the implementation of these criteria are at different points in the process of distinction. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, that designation occurs in an imperial context, and its violent implications are just beginning to be realized. This point in the process seems to mirror the very beginnings of the emergence of the category of citizen from the category of subject. According to both Arendt and Agamben, the decaying authority of the Christian Church initiated the necessity for sovereign power to draw alternative justification for the continuation of its power, and more crucially, its violence. Arendt articulates that the rise of the nation, and thus the category of the citizen, is “inevitable once the absolute and transcendent measurements of religion or the law of nature have lost their authority” (299). For Agamben, using the Hobbseian metaphor of the leviathan being formed out of the bodies of all individual subjects, modern sovereign power, which emerges after the Church loses some of its efficacy, covertly demonstrates for the first time the fact that its original referent

is nothing besides the bare life of those living under it. Agamben sketches this process through delineating that

Declarations of rights must therefore be viewed as the place in which the passage from divinely authorized royal sovereignty to national sovereignty is accomplished [...] The fact that in this process the ‘subject’ is, as has been noted, transformed into a ‘citizen’ means that birth— which is to say, bare natural life as such— here for the first time becomes [...] the immediate bearer of sovereignty (128).

In other words, the transition from the subject to the citizen exposes that sovereign power equates citizenship with birth, and for the first time demonstrates the connection between sovereign power and bare life. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the Empire has yet to completely take on the characteristics normatively associated with that of a modern nation state— they still identify themselves as subjects of the Empire, not as citizens of a nation-state. However, the transition from subject to citizen unfolds in the dynamics between the rightless barbarian prisoners and refugees in the novel and the residents who were born within the borders of the Empire.

In an early conversation between the Magistrate and a high-ranking military official, these dynamics can initially be glimpsed. In response to the officer’s descriptions of the overt aggression of the barbarians, the Magistrate counters, “‘How do you eradicate contempt, especially when that contempt is founded on nothing more substantial than differences in table manners, variations in the structure of the eyelid?’” (58). The officer answers, “‘Even if it became necessary to supply the settlement by convoy, we would not go. Because these border settlements are the first line of defence of the Empire’” (59). The baseless contempt

the Magistrate describes here is the very instrument through which the sovereign power of the Empire works to achieve the perpetuation of its power. Through delineating the alleged inherent differences between the imperial subjects and the barbarians, the sovereignty of the Empire solidifies its power over both those belonging to it and those outside of its borders.

This dynamic between the subjects of the Empire and the barbarian merchants resembles those between the citizen and the stateless individual in Arendt's understanding. After explaining how the rights of citizenship rely on natural belonging, which in itself relies on shared ethnic or racial origin, she writes, "The reason why highly developed political communities [...] so often insist on ethnic homogeneity is that they hope to eliminate as far as possible those natural and always present differences and differentiates [...] because they indicate all too clearly those spheres where men cannot act and change at will" (301). The Empire draws its power from bolstering belief in its absolute ability to control every aspect of life— it is from this understanding that it legitimates its violence as a form of protection. The contempt felt by the residents of the frontier town toward the stateless barbarian populations is an intentional strategy introduced and maintained by the sovereign power of the Empire. Any camaraderie between the subjects of the Empire and the barbarians represents a threat to the complete control and domination of the Empire because it allows for the possibility of that the subjects and the barbarians could recognize their shared oppression by the sovereign power of the Empire. That possibility, which would come from alliances between the imperial subjects of the township and the stateless barbarian individuals, must be worked against by intentionally and directly disseminating feelings of contempt based on otherness.



In working to achieve that contempt with no basis in behavior or fact, the Empire successfully defines those who do not belong, and simultaneously instrumentalizes its subjects as the very means through which it articulates its violence. This dynamic occurs in *Waiting for the Barbarians* through the perpetual rumors floating around the township pertaining to the barbarians, which are illustrated overtly in the first pages of the text: “There is no woman living along the frontier who has not dreamed of a dark barbarian hand coming from under the bed to grip her ankle, no man who has not frightened himself with visions of the barbarians carousing in his home [...] setting fire to the curtains, raping his daughters” (9). Arendt understands the condition of the rightless as one in which, “Privileges in some cases, injustices in most, blessings and doom are meted out to them according to accident and without any relation to what they do, did, or may do” (296). Supposedly essential non-belonging becomes all the justification necessary to subject an individual to the violence of the sovereign— that understanding occurs without reference to any individual action that actually transgresses sovereign law. Though there are no specific instances of barbarians perpetrating violence in any form, the town’s inhabitants attribute every crime that occurs to the barbarians. In giving an account of a young girl who has been raped, the Magistrate notices, “Her friends claim a barbarian did it. They saw him running away into the reeds. They recognized him as a barbarian by his ugliness” (142). Though no one aside from the girl witnesses this moment of violence, her story is appropriated to reify the panic surrounding the imminent barbarian invasion. The only indication that her rapist was necessarily a barbarian is his apparent “ugliness,” a trait which is continually ascribed to barbarians specifically, though can easily be seen manifesting in imperial subjects and

officers alike. Beliefs like this ultimately lead to the townsfolk participating in inflicting physical violence against the barbarian prisoners.

The inherent ugliness of the barbarians in the minds of the residents of the Empire comes through most poignantly in the Magistrate himself, as he lies next to a sex worker who is also a subject of the Empire. When thinking of the Barbarian Girl in this moment, of the woman he has spent weeks sleeping next to, whose inaccessible body and mind he has spent countless hours obsessing over, he finally remarks, “How ugly, I say to myself. My mouth forms the ugly word. I am surprised by it but I do not resist: she is ugly, ugly” (53). Even in the most intimate relations, this didactic conception of barbarian otherness and subsequent ugliness comes through. The dynamics between subjects of the Empire and the barbarian populations they equally fear and loathe rests on a highly specific understanding of belonging and non-belonging, of similarity and difference based only on the difference between where certain individuals are born. It penetrates even the most personal of individual relationships.

Those divisions between belonging and non-belonging rest on the connection between birth and citizenship described by Agamben as the criteria used most extremely by Nazism’s ideology of “blood and soil.” He writes that they are “the concise expression of the two criteria that, already in Roman law, served to identify citizenship (that is, the primary inscription of life in the state order): *ius soli* (birth in a certain territory) and *ius sanguinis* (birth from citizen parents)” (129). In light of where they are born, the residents of the frontier town become the bearers of the sovereign power of the Empire instead of any other higher authority, and can thus be understood as burgeoning citizens of a fledgling nation. This formulation of citizenship can be seen in a more developed, and therefore more covert

capacity when the question of belonging or non-belonging is framed in the context of the nation-state of South Africa in *Disgrace*.

In “Race and Bureaucracy,” Hannah Arendt examines the development of the South African national schema up until the mid-twentieth century.<sup>23</sup> She maps the colonization of the native population residing in South Africa by the Boers, and later the British, in the nineteenth century. In this colonial schema, black South African colonial subjects, based on nothing besides the color of their skin, a characteristic which indicated their inherent difference from their white colonizers, were subverted in spite of the fact that the white Boers were also (though differently) oppressed by English occupiers (206). What Arendt draws attention to here is the fact that the South African colonial formation represents one of the first modern examples of innate foreignness, or non-belonging, being used to legitimize unilateral disempowerment. She then connects the example of South Africa to the eventual rise of Nazism in Germany “When the European mob discovered what a ‘lovely virtue’ a white skin could be in Africa [...] the stage seemed to be set for all possible horrors. Lying under anybody’s nose were many of the elements which gathered together could create a totalitarian government on the basis of racism” (221). The non-belonging attributed to black populations in colonial South Africa, based only on racial difference, preempted the same hierarchy that occurred in Europe during World War Two, which led to the most deliberate

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<sup>23</sup> It must be noted that although Arendt’s use of primary resources appears legitimate, the language she uses to discuss racial relations in South Africa often (if unintentionally) reinforces the racist ideologies she seeks to uncover. I use her observation at this juncture only because of how she connects the racial hierarchy established in colonial South Africa to the development of violent totalitarian regimes.

and prolific recorded extermination of human life in the past century.<sup>24</sup> Writing in 1951, Arendt examines a colonial history that would lead South Africa to implement the system of Apartheid, the system which differentiated between citizens with complete rights and citizens with only certain rights based on race, only three years before.

The Apartheid system worked precisely through connecting civil rights with national rights, which are understood to imply a belonging to the same origin based on racial and ethnic similarities. When articulating the place of naturalized citizens in Europe between the world wars, Arendt writes that “the difference between a naturalized citizen and a stateless resident was not great enough [...] the former being frequently deprived of important civil rights and threatened at any moment with the fate of the latter” (285). In the context of *Disgrace*, black South African populations can be understood as akin to the naturalized citizens Arendt describes. Black South Africans, though technically now sharing the same place in society as native white citizens, are still regarded differently, and do not enjoy any claims of inherent belonging. Instead, their full rights have to be given to them in spite of the color of their skin, as opposed to white South Africans, who for generations have possessed those rights simply by merit of being born white. When they are marked as such, Arendt writes, the nation-state doubles down on the equation of human rights and civil rights, and those civil rights are only afforded to those belonging to the same racial or ethnic origin (275).

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<sup>24</sup> It should not go without saying, however, that European colonial enterprises in Africa in all likelihood produced numerous genocides that exceeded the Holocaust. The difference, of course, resides in the presence or absence of reliable record-keeping, which in itself means that the lives of the white Jewish populations in Europe were, harrowingly, already understood as more valuable than any colonial population of color.

Arendt and Agamben both describe that citizenship in Europe at the time is equated with being born in that country, but also that the formula between birth and nation rests on categorization and subsequent hierarchization along racial lines. This status of black South African citizens inspires multiple moments of anxiety for the characters in *Disgrace*. In a conversation between David and Lucy, David remarks, ““If they had been white you wouldn’t talk about them in this way [...] If they had been white thugs from Despatch, for instance’” (159). Here, David indicates his disapproval that the identity of his daughter’s perpetrators seems to allow them leniency in the new social order of South Africa. Because of their newly granted rights, he finds further justification for resenting them because the new social schema of their country demands that the racial legacy of Apartheid into consideration. David takes issue with the fact that Lucy, and by extension other South Africans, would think of her violation in different terms if her rapists had been white. It indirectly exposes the white fragility that the dissolution of Apartheid partially brings into relief— if the system itself has ended, white folks like David would like racial distinction to end as well. In his mind, the end of Apartheid should signal the end of racial discrimination or preference— white perpetrators should be treated the same as black perpetrators. However, because legal consideration has been historically based on racial and ethnic origin in South Africa, those distinctions are not easily unmade, and race necessarily plays a large part in how the legal system addresses individuals who commit crimes of any sort.

The narrative of *Disgrace* unfolds once that attempt to maintain a legal connection between human rights and national rights (drawn along racial differences) seems to fail, and has resulted in the dissolution of the Apartheid system. Theoretically, post-Apartheid, all

South African civil rights are granted to all of its citizens, regardless of racial difference or ethnic origin, and therefore, all lives of South African citizens have equal value. Coetzee's text, however, opposes the assumption that the violence of Apartheid can be undone through its formal dissolution, and satirizes art that conveys this in *Disgrace's* first pages. While watching a performance about the reality of contemporary South Africa, David Lurie begins to analyze it: "Patter passes among the three of them [the characters]: jokes, insults. Catharsis seems to be the presiding principle: all the coarse old prejudices brought into the light of day and washed away in gales of laughter" (23). As the violence in the rest of the novel indicates, the possibility of laughing away the legacy of Apartheid, of perceiving the end of its violence in the end of its legality, proves to be only artifact— perhaps this is why the text intentionally uses the genre of the play to communicate this.<sup>25</sup> *Disgrace* centers on the shifting dynamics and violence in a nation-state that has granted full rights to all of its citizens, and yet the prejudices that led to the allocation of civil rights to white citizens alone continue to permeate the national consciousness.

The novel indicates how categories of citizenship function as a means to name what Agamben describes as "the new status of life as origin and ground of sovereignty, and therefore, literally identifies [...] *les membres du souverain*, 'the members of the sovereign.' Hence the centrality (and the ambiguity) of the notion of 'citizenship' in modern political thought" (129). In the context of South Africa, the members of the sovereign, those initially

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<sup>25</sup> To clarify, it seems intentional that Coetzee uses the vehicle of drama— the actors on stage literally *play* at the kind of cathartic humor meant to dissolve the violence of Apartheid racial dynamics while individuals affected by that violence watch and seem unconvinced. If we consider drama as the literary genre that demands a complete suspension of disbelief, the fact that this play fails to elicit that in its audience comes down to how it presents Apartheid dynamics.

granted the rights and protections of citizenship before the dissolution of legalized Apartheid, are those who belong to the original sovereign colonial power of Europe— white individuals. Black individuals, who only recently received the full status of citizenship in the eyes of the law, and can thereby be thought of as naturalized citizens, are closer to their previous status of rightlessness than to the positions occupied by their white counterparts. Ironically, and crucially, the citizens being treated as naturalized citizens are descendants of the original indigenous residents, while citizens who claim birthright are descendants of European colonizers.<sup>26</sup> This tenuous relationship between the status of rightlessness and the status of naturalized citizenship occurs due to the fact that both positions can never lay claim to an origin which would, in effect, prove their belonging to a sovereign power that equates human rights with ethnic homogeneity.

Thus the violent dynamics in the novel still predicate on the racial difference that amounted to certain civil rights belonging only to the white population of the nation. For example, David wonders, “Against this new Petrus what chance does Lucy stand? Petrus arrived as the dig-man, the carry-man, the water-man. Now he is too busy for that kind of thing” (151). Here, David acknowledges Petrus’ changing status in regard to his economic mobility— now that he has been granted full civil rights, opportunities are now afforded to him which would have been impossible without them. However, David apprehends this with an overt sense of regret; he dwells on Petrus’ newfound equality with a sense of loss. This feeling comes up again when he reflects, “Once [Petrus] was a boy, now he is no longer. Now he can play at being one, as Marie Antoinette could play at being a milkmaid” (152). Here,

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<sup>26</sup> An illogical relation that, of course, mirrors the situation in modern-day Israel.

the text indicates the fundamental flaw in believing the inequalities and violence of Apartheid to have ended in post-Apartheid South Africa; in David's eyes, as a white South African citizen and therefore as an original member of the population the sovereign power of the state protects and deems valuable, Petrus' new mobility does not indicate that he (and by extension, other black South Africans) had the capacity to so in the first place. Instead, it points to the fact that the new political system of his country accomplishes little to efface the stringent division between those who belong and those who do not— it operates instead only as 'official' granting of equal humanity. The racism that informs David's assumptions and observations has only been subverted in the most technical sense.

In describing the operation of National Socialist divisions in twentieth century Germany, Agamben identifies a crucial method through which to read the role of citizenship in *Disgrace*: "The judge, the civil servant [...] no longer orients himself according to a rule or a situation of fact. Binding himself solely to his own community of race [...] such a person moves in a zone in which the distinction between life and politics, between questions of fact and questions of law, has literally no more meaning" (172). When civil rights are granted according to only perceived difference or non-belonging, the alleged relation between fact and law has little effect.<sup>27</sup> *Disgrace* demonstrates that this racially motivated violence carries over even once Apartheid has officially been overturned. This can most clearly be seen in one interaction between David and Lucy, when David again pleads with her to disclose the identity of Pollux to the state police. He asks her, "Why should I be sensible? Really, Lucy, from beginning to end I fail to understand. I fail to understand why you did not lay real

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<sup>27</sup> That relation, of course, is the assumption that law responds only to facts, to real transgressions, and not to assumptions or prejudices.



charges against them, and now I fail to understand why you are protecting Petrus. Petrus is not an innocent party. Petrus is *with* them” (133). Here, David connects law with assumption, not fact, and uses Petrus’ ambiguous connection to Lucy’s rapists as justification for the perpetuation of violence against him in the form of police involvement. Lucy recognizes this fallacy, and the prejudice that informs it, and retaliates: “As for Petrus, he is not some hired labourer whom I can sack because in my opinion he is mixed up with the wrong people. [...] If you want to antagonize Petrus, you had better be sure of your facts first” (133). Though she and David both occupy the privileged status of white South African citizens, and therefore, as the beneficiaries of the sovereign colonial power that established the nation in the first place, the differences between them make it possible for her to perceive the errors in his thinking. Lucy belongs to a generation that primarily witnessed the end of Apartheid, and therefore must adjust to the social changes that occur after its abolition. Her gender, moreover, places her in a social position that is caught between the privilege her whiteness affords her and the disempowerment her gender elicits. Her body, which is continually used by David as a site on which the political dynamics of the novel occur, figure her as disempowered by the same sovereignty that grants her power based on the color of her skin. Of course, as a white woman, Lucy still has the capacity to harbor racial prejudice and behave in a racist capacity. However, she seems able to recognize that the same hegemonic social constructions that have *completely* disempowered black South Africans also *partially* disempower her.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> This partial disempowerment, of course, also comes into play when consideration of Lucy’s sexuality is foregrounded—though a complete consideration of her sexuality would benefit this analysis enormously, constructing a thorough interpretation of its impact lies outside the current scope of this project.

One of the last moments in the novel that indicate the sense of belonging or non-belonging used in Apartheid still exists occurs in a final encounter between David and Petrus. Upon returning to the South African country after a brief stint in Capetown, David discusses the future of Lucy's land with Petrus, who directly offers to marry Lucy in order to protect her from the violence she experienced previously. Reacting to the fact that Petrus already has not one, but two wives, David replies, "This is not something I want to hear. This is not how we do things.' *We*: he is on the point of saying, *We Westerners*" (202). Even if he does not articulate this thought directly to Petrus, the implication is palpable. Polygamy, even if only offered to protect David's child and grandchild, disgusts him because it seems so adverse to the normative customs of the white South African culture he resides in—the thought indicates Petrus' inherent otherness and non-belonging to that culture, and therefore underscores the foreign quality that gave European powers justification to systematically oppress and dominate the black populations of the South African colony. Important to note, of course, is that Petrus still behaves in a way that we should consider misogynistic. Though the color of his skin has rendered him less powerful than any white person, the privilege his gender still manages to afford him manifests in moments like this, where he is demonstrably sexist. This division occurs slightly earlier in the conversation as well, when Petrus discusses Pollux with David and says, "He [Pollux] is a child. He is my family, my people." Upon hearing this designation, David thinks, "So that is it. No more lies. *My people*. As naked of an answer as he could wish. Well, Lucy is *his people*" (201). The colonial divisions between belonging and non-belonging echo in this interaction—in spite of whatever civil or legal status the abolition of Apartheid provides for Petrus and for the rest of the black South

African population, David still extrapolates Pollux's violent behavior to Petrus' people as a whole. Accordingly, he justifies the physical violence he inflicts on Pollux because Lucy belongs to *his* people.

The relationship between citizenship and statelessness can be glimpsed at different intervals when *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace* are compared. A more overt similarity between the novels pertaining to a criterium of belonging or non-belonging, through inclusion or exclusion, occurs however, when consideration of Agamben and Arendt's description of the paradoxical status of rightless individuals and their location in the political realm is foregrounded.

**“To have them dig, with their last strength, a pit large enough for all of them to lie in, and leaving them buried there forever and forever”:** The Camp in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace*

Both Arendt and Agamben use the example of the refugee to outline precisely what the dimensions of the paradoxical status of rightless individual looks like—a paradox stemming from the equation of human rights with national rights. Arendt uses the example of survivors of the extermination camps in the Second World War to describe how

The conception of human rights [...] broke down at the very moment when those who professed to believe in it were for the first time confronted with people who had indeed lost all other qualities and specific relationships— except that they were human. [...] The world found nothing sacred in the abstract nakedness of being human. (299)

In other words, even those individuals who professed to believe in the absolute certainty of universal human value found themselves unable to apply that value to the masses of stateless, and therefore rightless, individuals pouring into their countries after the Holocaust. Instead, these populations only merited consideration in the form of resentment, or total abjection. They completely lost their essential value once that value became the only relation they possessed.

Agamben also uses the status of the refugee to remark about how this position signifies the fictional understanding that in modernity, human rights can be separated from national rights, or that private life can be distinguished from public life. He states, “If refugees [...] represent such a disquieting element in the order of the modern nation-state, this is above all because [...] they can put the originary fiction of modern sovereignty in crisis by [...] causing the secret presupposition of the public domain—bare life—to appear for an instant within that domain” (131). Here, Agamben asserts that the figure of the refugee, the stateless or “displaced” person, breaks the fiction purported by sovereign power. That fiction, again, is the idea that sovereign power only applies to the public lives of those living under it — the refugee, precisely because of their rightless status, demonstrates how sovereign power impacts bare life even though it pretends to only apply to public, political life. In other words, he expands on Arendt’s description of refugees though specifying that refugees can be thought of as individuals who reside in a permanent state of exception. Refugees, outside of the borders of their nation, find themselves stripped of national rights, and therefore, of their human rights in general. They exist as examples of bare life, and reveal precisely how bare life, even though it is thought to be excluded from the public political realm, is included

within it. The state of exception, as delineated in the previous chapter, is the situation that results from the suspension of the normative juridical process—the rule of the juridical order suspends its own normative proceedings, which creates the exception and thereby creates the rule only through that exception. In the case of the refugee, an exception is created, but following Agamben’s formula, the exception it is still included because the rule constitutes itself as a rule through the exception.

After discussing the figure of the refugee as the individual who resides in a permanent state of exception, Agamben defines the camp as what the location of the pure state of exception looks like. This space is “*opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule*. In the camp, the state of exception, which was essentially a temporary suspension of the rule of law on the basis of a factual state of danger, is now given a permanent spatial arrangement, which as such nevertheless remains outside the normal order” (169). The camp emerges as the location of what would normatively be unlocalizable—it can only be created when the temporary element of the state of suspension ceases to become temporary and becomes permanent. The camp “is thus the structure in which the state of exception [...] is realized *normally*” (170). The state of exception becomes the rule once it is given a permanent location, and yet that location still does not fall under the normal juridical order. This of course indicates that within the space of the camp, the normal rights and protections afforded to those living under the consideration of the sovereign power do not apply. As the pure space of exception, the camp in fact becomes the location of the paradox between the supposedly sacred, universal value of human life, and the existence of violent processes of mass-execution. When residing in the space of exception, an individual ceases to possess any

civil or human rights that would differentiate their private, bare life from their public, political life. These understandings of the camp and the stateless— and therefore rightless— populations residing within it come into full relief when applied to *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace*.

In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the space of the camp comes into being once the first wave of barbarian prisoners are ushered into the open yard of the town's barracks: "We stand watching them eat as though they are strange animals [...] 'Let them stay in the yard,' I tell the guards. 'It will be inconvenient for us, but there is nowhere else'" (20). Pushed together in a space meant only for their containment, the barbarian prisoners are then subjected to a period of cyclical "interrogations," during which they are tortured by members of the Third Bureau of the Empire. They are understood by the townsfolk as individuals who exist in the same realm as animal life— they are not considered to be part of the political realm, which would bestow the rights and privileges afforded to them under the juridical process. However, precisely in light of their exclusion from the political realm, they still find themselves included within it, or subjected to the full might of sovereign violence, which is articulated in the military apparatus of the Empire through the infliction of physical torture.

At first, most residents of the frontier town find the barbarians to be harmless, and even worthy of pity. However, the longer they reside in the barrack yard, "all together, we lose sympathy for them. The filth, the smell, the noise of their quarrelling and coughing becomes too much" (22). Here, because the prisoners reside in a space that marks their exceptional status, included through their exclusion in the juridical schema of the Empire, their bare life ceases to become considered valuable, and therefore worthy of protection and

sympathy. Instead, as Arendt puts it, “If a tribal or other ‘backward’ community did not enjoy human rights, it was obviously because as a whole it had not yet reached that stage of civilization, the stage of popular and national sovereignty” (291). The barbarian prisoners are not considered to belong within the folds of the juridical imperial realm, and this lack of consideration stems from their very identity as barbarians— as backwards, foreign savages understood to be relics from a bygone era. It never occurs to the constituents of the Empire that the prisoners in the yard do not have access to the provisions that would allow them to clean themselves, or engage themselves in any activity besides waiting for their eventual turn in the torture chamber.

This dynamic between individuals thought to naturally belong to a lower order of life — to the category of bare life— and the space of the camp as the location of the pure state of exception is also depicted in *Disgrace*, though in a less overt capacity. The first wave of barbarian prisoners in *Waiting for the Barbarians* illustrate more obviously, perhaps, the emergence of the camp as the space in which the pure state of exception becomes permanent, becomes the rule. In *Disgrace*, any iteration of the camp is significantly more secret, and therefore, potentially more insidious. This correlates with Agamben’s understanding that in modernity, the paradigm of political life, has ceased to be the city (or the polis) and has instead become the camp itself:

The state of exception, which was essentially a temporary suspension of the juridico-political order, now becomes a new and stable spatial arrangement inhabited by the bare life that more and more can no longer be inscribed in that order. The growing

dissociation of birth (bare life) and the nation-state is the new fact of politics in our day, and what we call *camp* is this disjunction. (175)

In modern political organization, then, the disparity between bare life and political life, which relies on the dissociation between bare life and the nation-state, is understood to be more severe than ever. In reality, however, at no other point in time has bare life been so completely ingrained in political life. In classical political thought, the city is the center of political life precisely because it signifies the division between bare life and public, political life. The camp, which exists perpetually in this modern political schema, indicates the illusory quality of this supposed division most acutely. For Agamben, “The camp as dislocating localization is the hidden matrix of the politics in which we are still living, and it is this structure of the camp that we must learn to recognize in all its metamorphoses into the *zones d’attentes* [holding areas] of our airports and *certain outskirts of our cities*” (176, added emphasis). In other words, the camp still exists in a tangible way outside of the context of refugee camps or even the extermination camps first instituted in Europe during the Second World War.

This new center of political life can be glimpsed in *Disgrace*, when the three black South African home invaders work their way into the Lurie’s home by asking to use their phone because a woman in their community is in labor. David and Lucy, after establishing the name of this community, “Exchange glances. Erasmuskraal, inside the forest concession, is a hamlet with no electricity, no telephone. The story makes sense” (92-93). This hamlet, residing on the outskirts of even the rural town Lucy and David live in, functionally takes on the status of the space of the camp in Agamben’s terms. These men belong to a



homogenously black South African community that in spite of the dissolution the Apartheid system, still does not receive the basic utilities the state should provide to all of its citizens. In this capacity, Erasmuskraal subtly signifies a space in which the permanent state of exception reveals itself in a nation that believes it has restored equitable human rights to all of its legal residents. This hamlet can be seen as excluded from consideration of the sovereign nation-state of South Africa even through something as seemingly innocuous as insufficient technological or infrastructural connection to the rest of the country. In that capacity, this community completely lacks accessibility to the country outside of itself, but is still considered to belong to that country. It is included through its exclusion, and the population living within it signify the fact that the sense of belonging or non-belonging that originally instituted Apartheid has not actually been dissolved in practice, but only in theoretical terms. *Disgrace*, in this sense, illustrates the permanence of this violence of inclusion or exclusion in the normative juridical proceeding of the sovereign nation-state, in spite of the attempt to undo or correct the violence of the Apartheid system. Those living within it, perhaps because of their lack of access to modern technologies, are assumed to exist closer to the realm of bare life, and their standard of living is allowed to continue, cementing the permanent quality of the camp Agamben describes.

The transition of the camp as the paradigm of modern political life occurs in *Waiting for the Barbarians* as well, when the town is confronted with the formation of a permanent refugee settlement at its border. When an entire community of river people flee to the frontier town, the town's residents, at first, allow them to seek shelter and protection within the town itself. This sympathy, however, dissipates when the refugees

Began to put up their thatched shelters against the wall on the side of the square near the walnut trees, and their children grew bold enough to sneak into kitchens and steal. [...] Feelings then turned against them [...] The soldiers took action, shooting their dogs on sight and [...] tearing down the entire row of shelters. For days the fisherfolk hid out in the reeds. Then one by one their little thatched huts began to reappear, this time outside the town under the north wall. (144)

The “temporary” space of the refugee camp within the walls of the frontier town, then, has not actually been effaced at all. On the contrary, what has occurred is that the camp space has merely been moved from the center of the frontier town and resituated just outside its northern borders. In this way, *Waiting for the Barbarians* not only illustrates the creation of the camp space itself, but simultaneously depicts how the camp does not ever wholly disappear, but instead is moved to a location where it cannot be easily recognized. The same process can be seen in *Disgrace*, though the reader encounters the space of the camp only *after* that attempt to obscure the existence of the camp has already been ingrained.

This is precisely why the camp is much more difficult to recognize in the context of *Disgrace*— the attempt to obscure the existence of such spaces, which serves the interests of a sovereign power that relies on the distinction between private and public life that the camp disrupts, has already occurred. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, on the other hand, the reader witnesses the dual process of the creation and subsequent relocation of the refugee camp. It is moved from the center of town, a location which elicits revulsion and fear from the subjects of the Empire, to a location just “outside” of the town. Even though they are supposedly “outside” of the frontier town, the river folk are still permitted to participate in the

commercial aspects of the town's economic system, but because "they have no experience of money, they are cheated outrageously, they will part with anything for a thimbleful of rum" (144). Here, the dimensions of the camp as the pure space of exception can be glimpsed; though the refugees are technically excluded from the juridical-political sphere of the frontier settlement, they are included through that exclusion, a dynamic illustrated by this new economic system that seems to allow them to participate while in reality barring them from participation in an equitable capacity. In this way, the new refugee settlement in *Waiting for the Barbarians* doubles the established, homogeneously black hamlet in *Disgrace*. Both populations reside in a localizable state of exception— though they are radically excluded from the normative processes of their respective juridical spheres, they are still included because those juridical systems rely on their exceptional status in order to maintain the norm. Additionally, both populations, in light of their exclusion from the normative sphere, are perceived to be close to absolute bare life, of life that does not necessarily carry any inherent value or rights.

The townsfolk' perceptions of the new community of refugees in *Waiting for the Barbarians* double those of the white residents of the South African rural community toward the residents of the black hamlet in *Disgrace*. Both groups believe those within these camp spaces are closer to the bareness of non-human life than the position of political, public, and specifically human life. However, these camp spaces also indicate the fact that sovereign power directly refers to the bare life it pretends to have no ability to impact. The space of the camp, in both narratives, thus disrupts the previously understood division between life and politics, and emerges or already has emerged as the new center of the political schema in

both narrative contexts. Agamben writes, “There is no return from the camps to classical politics. In the camps [...] the possibility of differentiating between our biological body and our political body— between what is incommunicable and mute and what is communicable and sayable— was taken from us forever” (188). Both the residents of the hamlet and the prisoners in the barrack yard reside in a pure state of exception— the camp, which signifies the inclusion of bare life in the political realm through its supposed exclusion. They shatter the perception that the city offers— the absolute separate relationship between the private body of bare life and the public body of the political realm. The Magistrate, after observing the dynamics of what occurs in the barbarian prison camp, reflects that “It would cost little to march them out into the desert [...] to have them dig, with their last strength, a pit large enough for all of them to lie in, and leaving them buried there forever and forever, to come back to the walled town full of new intentions” (27). What the Magistrate describes here is genocide, and what he apprehends is the fact that once the camp emerges, return to a political system that existed before its creation becomes absolutely impossible. The only method he can find in this moment that would achieve a return to normalcy, to the separate spheres of the private and political, becomes nothing less than the mass-extermination of the rightless individuals that reside in that space of pure exception, which historical precedent has already proven will not work to restore the illusion of previous political organization.

**“As for recognizing it, he will leave that to the scholars of the future, if there are still scholars by then. For he will not hear the note himself, when it comes, if it comes”:**

**Physical Violence, Sovereign Violence, and the Violence of Citizenship and Statelessness  
in J.M. Coetzee’s Fiction**

Throughout this project, I have examined three mechanisms of violence in *Disgrace* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*: physical violence, sovereign violence, and the violence of citizenship and statelessness. I argue that such an examination can provide a way to think through how fiction can demonstrate the necessary relationship between them, and to process that relationship when it occurs outside of the fictional realm. These mechanisms beget each other, work in conjunction with each other, and ultimately arise from constructed hierarchies between individuals that result in the differentiation between politically empowered and disempowered populations. Physical violence cannot occur in isolation from sovereign violence, and neither can it occur without relation to the violence of statelessness and citizenship.

This same sense of dependency extends to the relationship between all three categories of violence I examine in this project. The bodies these mechanisms of violence act upon correlate to the supposed differences between normatively recognizable life— valuable, inviolable life— and life unworthy of protection, life that is able to be violated, life that is unrecognizable as life. Comparing these novels also offers a glimpse into how the dynamics of violence attached to their individual historical moments shifts across spatial and temporal boundaries. Both novels directly and indirectly work to represent the violence of South Africa's legacy of Apartheid. *Waiting for the Barbarians*, written while Apartheid remained legal in the country, uses ambiguity and allegory to interface with the reality in South Africa at the time of its publication. In this capacity, the novel exemplifies a distinct ability of literature to represent real situations in unexpected and extraordinarily effective ways. *Disgrace*, written in the immediate years after the Apartheid system dissolved, represents

how the specific violence of that system continues to impact individual lives in South Africa, and the unexpected ways its residual effects work to reify the dynamics that led to its implementation in the first place. Though Apartheid does not legally exist in a technical sense, it maintains a visceral influence that continues to operate in the lives of the South African population.

I examine the physical violence that results from the difference between recognizable and unrecognizable life, terminology from Judith Butler I apply to both texts. When life is recognized as life, the infliction of physical pain becomes extremely difficult to justify. When life is not recognized as life, the infliction of physical pain needs little or no justification whatsoever. A comparative reading of these novels reveals that justified physical violence can only occur when certain individuals have been disempowered— this disempowerment occurs because they have been individually and collectively placed outside the norms of hegemonically organized power structures. The power structures in both novels, and in modern political schemas, are organized around the norms of whiteness, masculinity, heteronormativity, and anthropocentrism, which necessarily means that individuals who do not explicitly belong to those norms are more vulnerable to justified inflictions of physical violence.

I examine how gendered differences disempower the Barbarian Girl and Lucy Lurie and how racial differences render the barbarian and black South African populations vulnerable to the physical violence they experience. In both examples, these external differences lead to the physical violence experienced by these characters needing either little justification or no justification whatsoever. Both the Magistrate and David Lurie experience a

reconfiguration of their powerful subject position to a position of disempowerment—this reconfiguration is signalled by their own experience of physical violence. Both characters witness and even contribute to the physical suffering of Othered characters in the novels, and their inaction indicates the significant capacity in which complicity is considered in Coetzee’s fiction. Namely, that when powerful individuals choose not to intervene when physical violence is inflicted on less powerful individuals, they unwittingly contribute to the possibility that the same brutality can and will be inflicted on them. In other words, Coetzee’s texts demonstrate that once the infliction of physical violence on *particular* bodies is permitted, there is nothing standing in the way of physical violence being inflicted on *every* body.

However, this conclusion leads to a second vital consideration; *whose* interest does the infliction of this physical violence serve? Anxiety about identifying the perpetrator of the physical violence in both texts permeates the narratives. Both of the narrators in *Disgrace* and *Waiting for the Barbarians* simultaneously work toward recognizing the structure at work behind the physical violence they witness and experience, and shrink from that recognition. This speaks to the insidious nature of the second mechanism I examine in the context of Coetzee’s fiction: the violence of sovereign power. Each novel represents sovereign violence at a different point: *Waiting for the Barbarians*, written before the dissolution of the Apartheid system of South Africa, centers on the height of the sovereign violence that justifies the perpetration of physical violence; *Disgrace*, written after the dissolution of Apartheid, focuses on how the system residually impinges on individuals living in South Africa. Though the paradoxical logic of sovereign violence operates in both

novels through collapsing the ability to distinguish between categorical distinctions of violence and law, they individually illustrate the eternal character of sovereign violence through representing it at different points in its cycle.

After focusing on the individual logic of sovereign violence in both texts, and how they connect with each other in the context of the Apartheid and post-Apartheid periods, I then move to examine how the temporal fluctuation in both texts rest on the constructed difference between hegemonically powerful and hegemonically disempowered populations. When each protagonist interfaces with disempowered populations, they experience an overt sense of temporal displacement. When the Magistrate and David Lurie interface with the barbarian and black South African populations, or travel into spaces these populations occupy, they experience a sense of traveling backwards in time, of being transported into the past. This sense of temporal fluctuation correlates directly with how civilization, progress, and modernity are normatively attributed to colonizing powers, and how foreignness, barbarity, and backwardness are normatively attributed to the populations being colonized. In a sense, the effects sovereign power has on the movement of time and space gesture toward the last mechanism of violence examined in the final chapter: the violence of citizenship and statelessness.

*Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace* both depict the pernicious violence of citizenship and statelessness, though again, from distinct perspectives. Both novels illustrate the violence that occurs when one group is thought to belong and another is not. Both novels use the division between human and non-human life to articulate how certain disempowered populations are rendered unrecognizable as human because of their perceived proximity to



non-human life, or life as such. Additionally, both texts use comparison between non-human lives and disempowered human lives to reveal how these categories efface any recognition of the universal value of all life. Disempowered characters are continually dehumanized by powerful characters precisely because their actions and appearances are understood to render them closer to the natural, non-human world. This way of understanding life centers on the specific fiction purported by sovereign power; in order to perpetuate itself, sovereign power relies on the division between bare life, or life as such, and political life, or the realm that separates the human and non-human. It pretends to refer only to political life, to those for whom it provides protection and rights, when in reality, its original referent is bare life itself. The subordination of disempowered populations is in part achieved through considering them as more reminiscent of natural, non-human life, and yet the fact that they are still subordinated by sovereign power reveals the illusion that this power only relates to political life and not to bare life.

This division between bare life and political life informs the criteria through which power is applied to certain individuals and removed from others. Both novels illustrate that though the universal value of human life is purported by certain characters, actual value is only given to individuals who share the same racial or ethnic origin as the population already in power. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, this is most overtly demonstrated through the dynamics between the imperial subjects of the frontier town and the barbarian population excluded from juridical consideration. That exclusion leads to the mass imprisonment and torture of the barbarian population, who assume the status of stateless individuals when inside the borders of the Empire. Their inherent non-belonging along ethnic and racial lines

results in the justification of physical violence that is perpetrated against them. Sovereign imperial violence, then, is articulated through the infliction of physical violence against those who are excluded from the protection of the Empire based on an understanding of inherent belonging or non-belonging. In *Disgrace*, the criteria used to give power to some and revoke it from others resembles the status of naturalized citizens in relation to native citizens.

Though the black South African population technically possesses the same civil rights as their white counterparts, the very fact that they have only recently acquired these rights leads to the perpetuation of the residual violent dynamics of Apartheid, a system which was only made possible through the criteria of citizenship based on racial difference. That racial difference, ultimately, makes the difference between empowered and disempowered life because it extends to how certain populations are thought to belong and certain populations are thought to not belong to original European colonizers.

Finally, the criteria of belonging and non-belonging informs how each text represents the new political paradigm of the camp. The camp, as the space which locates the unlocalizable state of exception, reveals that the division between political life and life as such no longer bears any connection to reality. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the space of the camp is exhibited in the space where barbarian prisoners and refugees are placed— they are put into a physical space that represents how the sovereign power of the Empire includes them first and foremost through excluding them. The barbarian populations are removed from the juridical proceeding of the Empire, and are thus stripped of any rights they may have as humans, but the Empire still retains its ability to inflict violence upon them. In *Disgrace*, the camp is more or less removed from view— only cursory references to the

outskirts of cities and primarily white rural communities indicate that a large portion of the black South African population still reside in a permanent space of exception. These references indicate that though the black South African population technically has the same civil rights as the white South African population, the physical space they occupy in the nation removes any accessibility they may have to the rest of the country. They are technically included as citizens in South Africa, and yet, are excluded from many of the same mechanisms of infrastructure and technology that would allow them to exercise those rights. In both contexts, these texts reveal that the space of the camp has become the new center of political life precisely because it disrupts the fiction that sovereign power does not refer originally to bare life itself. The politicization of life is fully realized in both the barbarian prison and refugee camps and in the hamlets where the black South African population is primarily concentrated. Thus, both novels work to reveal the connection between physical violence, sovereign violence, and the violence of citizenship and statelessness. The physical pain inflicted in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace* can be understood as a manifestation of the tension between the structural apparatus of sovereignty and the precariousness of citizenship and statelessness.

Though both texts illustrate these connections, neither offers a distinct or viable solution to the tangles presented by the connections between these three modes of violence. In the final moments of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the Magistrate reflects, “To the last we will have learned nothing. In all of us, deep down, there seems to be something granite and unteachable. No one truly believes [...] that the world of tranquil certainties we were born into is about to be extinguished” (165). *Disgrace* ends on another note of apparent hopelessness. David Lurie, in a final point of reflection, wishes that “from amidst the welter

of sound there will dart up, like a bird, a single authentic note of immortal longing. As for recognizing it, he will leave that to the scholars of the future, if there are still scholar by then. For he will not hear the note himself” (214). Of course, given David Lurie’s position as a white man, this “authentic” note actually reifies the violence of Apartheid, and this statement is therefore loaded with elements of violent nostalgia. Both of these points, however, also seem to gesture toward the original paradox between the supposed universal value of life, both human and non-human, and the legacy of atrocity that invalidates that life, and any claims that advocate for its unconditional protection.

Moreover, both of the reflections made by fictional protagonists uncannily speak to the same anxieties we experience in our reality. The twenty-first century is a moment where considerations of the value of human life carry unprecedented importance, when the global political schema continues to move recklessly in the direction of reactionary nationalism, which leads to the implementation of new restrictions on economic, physical, and political mobility, interaction, and survival. The questions posed by these novels, questions pertaining to the recognition of life and a commitment to preserving it, have never been more important to consider. Hopefully the explication of these forms of violence in their fictional manifestations can contribute to an understanding of how wide-spread inconsideration and violation of the beauty of life happens. At the very least, I hope this examination has demonstrated the particular power of literature to present an insightful, nuanced, and exquisitely devastating perspective on the darker aspects that come with being human. What comes next, if the conclusions this project has offered prove salient, is this hope; that scholars of the future, if scholars have a place in the admittedly bleak prospects we

collectively face, can provide a way to recognize a non-violent note of shared longing. A longing to live, and keep living. To envision a reality where difference does not lead to the violence that permeates the conditions of our mutual experience.

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