

Iterative Mimicry as Writing Back: Role Reversion in Coetzee's *Foe*, *Disgrace* and *Life and Times of Michael K*¹

Elham Naeef*²

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Abstract

This Article investigates John Maxwell Coetzee's three well known novels, *Foe* (1986), *Disgrace* (1999) and *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983) to analyze the colonial pattern of the marginal characters. The theoretical framework is based on Bhabha and Spivak concentrating on the economy of the male identity in post-colonial context. From Bhabha, notions like mimicry, hybridity and change and from Spivak the subaltern's inaudibility of voice are appropriated. Derrida's idea of iterability is also applied. The intention is to follow the instances of mimicry and examine if Coetzee's literature manages to have political and ethical significance, as Spivak believes. It was concluded that resistance in Coetzee's novels is an iterative moment signifying through recurring role reversions in the colonial discourse. Coetzee's novels do not conclude with actualization of political betterment, yet the iterative quality of his significations invites us to reread his novels and reconsider the political and ethical questions. The ultimate meanings of his novels in the mind of the reader is inviting him to make political decisions, though seemingly metaphorical and apolitical.

Keywords: Coetzee, Mimicry, Iterability, Bhabha, Spivak.

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² MSc student in Shahid Beheshti University; e.naeef@student.unsw.edu.au

Introduction

Numerous studies have been conducted on various postcolonial aspects of Coetzee's novels, some especially considered the ideas of mimicry introduced by Homi Bhabha (1987). There have been also controversies on whether Coetzee is a political or an apolitical writer. In this research contradictory treatments of Coetzee's novels are discussed to reconcile the tensions between proponents and opponents of political activism of the author. To achieve this, Bhabha, Spivak and Derrida's ideas are incorporated.

Homi K. Bhabha, introduces central concepts such as hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence, difference and sly civility into the post-colonial discourse to address the path to resistance against cultural imperialism. He believes that imperial discourse is never as secure as it claims to be. According to Bhabha (1994), culture and hence identity is hybrid, i.e. mixed, impure and always on the process of becoming. The liminal spaces are the sites for the introduction of the emerging cultural meanings (differences) as a result of which the fixed stereotypical representations are prone to be telling what they are not supposed to. Difference brings about complexity, irony and ambivalence.

The colonial discourse seeks to represent the colonial object as extremely similar to the colonial Subject, but never exactly like him. This situation contains anxiety, since the colonial discourse needs its grotesque copy to remain significant and operative. The colonial Other however mimics the discourse and thus japes this seriousness by a sense of comic and irony. To clarify his ideas on mimicry, Bhabha appropriates the famous division between metaphor and metonymy. Identity tries to operate in terms of metaphor, while mimicry is metonymic and never reaches to any full presence and is always a never-ending series of substitutions. This ruptures the colonial discourse and menaces "the narcissistic demands of colonial authority" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 88), intriguing in the colonized the hope of agency.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is another scholar who, beside many postcolonial and feminist concerns, focuses on the inclusive term subaltern. The term is adapted from the Marxist critic, Antonio Gramsci by which he means the "pre-hegemonic, not unified groups, whose histories are fragmented, episodic and identifiable only from a point of historical hindsight" (Rivkin & Ryan, 2004, p. 1036). "Subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up" (Gramsci, 1972, p. 55). Consequently, "even when they appear triumphant, the subaltern groups are merely anxious to defend themselves" (Gramsci, 1972). What is worth mentioning in his definition of the term is that he considers it as a contained part in the power bloc to which he belongs. Spivak (1988) re-defines the term by stating that the subalterns are "irretrievably heterogeneous" (p.284). Thus for Spivak, the subaltern includes the marginal and disempowered groups in class, gender, race, language, nationality, culture, religion and any other aspects. The subaltern is the not-hegemonic. Since Spivak (1990) is against categorizations and unifications, she defines subaltern as "everything that does not fall under strict class analysis" (p.141).

What is common to both of these postcolonial critics is that the subaltern cannot speak because personal identity can be manipulated by political structures. Bhabha in his *The Location of Culture* states that “language of theory [is] merely another power ploy of the culturally privileged Western elite to produce a discourse of the Other that reinforces its own power-knowledge equation” (p. 20-21). He questions the function of such “elite” and “committed” theory when there is frequently a gap between who is known by the theory and what is known by it. However, both critics have consensus on literature’s political agency as a cultural representation. Thus post-colonial literature is able to challenge and resist the colonial discourse in an act of fort/da to introduce hybridities of ideas and values.

Life and Times of Michael K, Coetzee’s fourth novel, is about the life of a simpleton harelip gardener who lives in Cape Town. The novel starts with the narrator’s revelations about K’s early days when we learn his mother did not really care for him. One day a letter arrives telling about K’s mother’s bad health condition. K packs all his things and goes to take care of her. His mother asks him to return her to her birthplace, and K accepts. His mother dies on the way to Prince Albert. He is given her ashes which he always keeps with himself. K continues his passage to the farm. He is picked up by the police and sent to Jakkalsdrif where he reaches the realization that free camps are for exploitation of people’s cheap labor. The second chapter is narrated by a medical officer at the camp who becomes interested in Michaels (the doctor’s spelling of his name). The doctor prepares the situation for Michael’s escape and he escapes. At the end of the novel, K returns to the same apartment he had tried to escape some time ago in Cape Town, thinking about going back to the farm. Michael rejects domination, categorization and institutionalizations and does not opt for ‘cohabitation’ as a resort and thus the novel does not offer a feasible solution to the intricate life in South Africa. This solution is later posed in *Disgrace*.

Three years later, Coetzee writes *Foe* which is an inventive re-writing of *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719) which is about the experience of the shipwrecked eponymous protagonist in an island over which he attempts to dominate and gain mastery. Coetzee simultaneously dismantles Defoe’s intention (1720) and introduces a feminine perspective. The novel is told in four parts. Part one is about the island where Susan is entrapped when she wanted to find her lost daughter, and then the ship wrecks, and she finds herself in Crusoe’s (Cruso’s) island, confronting the cannibal Friday. One year passes and then a ship appears at the island. They are rescued. Cruso, not feeling well, dies on the way back, and Susan is left with Friday. Part two is again about Susan’s letters to Foe when they settle in lodgings. Susan goes by the name Mrs. Cruso. Meanwhile a girl appears who introduces herself as Susan’s daughter. Yet Susan does not recognize her. The letters continue and finally in part three Foe appears. The two try to teach Friday speech and when they fail they turn to writing which only ends in unintelligible signs and letters. The last part of the book is narrated by an unknown narrator in two sequences, each of which concerned with the same thematic issues, yet presenting it in different words. The last chapter is linguistically blurred.

More than a decade later, Coetzee wrote *Disgrace* which is about David's unresolved conflicts leading to his learning the arbitrary nature of social hierarchies. The novel happens in Cape Town. David is a self-focused English professor who, having twice divorced, thinks he had solved the problem of sex. Basically, David is solving his problem by visiting prostitutes, tourists, students and even colleagues who only worsen his problem. Believing that "a woman's beauty does not belong to her alone... [and] she has a duty to share it" ... "more widely" (Coetzee, 1999, p.16), David has an undesired relationship with his student named Melanie. Melanie's boyfriend enters the story and David's public disgrace starts. After the disclosure of this relationship, he loses his academic position and has no other choice but to escape the scene for a while and visit his daughter. His daughter, Lucy, is living on a farm where a gardener named Petrus helps her in managing the farming.

One day three colored men appear and they rape her and set fire on David. However, Lucy refuses to tell the police about the rape incident. This scene seems parallel to the rape scene of Melanie. Later it is revealed that one of the rapist is related to Petrus. The father-daughter relationship worsens, and David leaves again for Cape Town. David again returns to Eastern Cape when he is told about Lucy's pregnancy. He is even more shocked when Petrus proposes to marry Lucy and Lucy accepts. More shockingly, she passes her land to Petrus and becomes his bywoner (African word for tenant). At the end of the story, David is having a relationship with the unpleasant Bev and starts putting down dogs. Both of these disgusted him at the beginning.

In the following section, a brief review of the related literature on Coetzee will be presented to discuss the main argument of the article which is on the political significance of Coetzee's novels. Coetzee's characters write back the colonial discourse by role reversion and manage to mimic and rupture it through iteration.

Discussions

Regarding *Foe*, critics regarded the very act of rewriting a former novel, which was the representative of English colonization, as an act of mimicry. They viewed the novel from three main angles: Defoe, Susan and Friday. While Jane Poyner in *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual* (2006,a) points to the inherent ambiguous tension in the white woman's position (Susan) who is simultaneously a colonizer and a colonized, another famous critic of Coetzee, Attwell, discusses the inability of the silenced black (Friday) to communicate (1993, p. 4). Some viewed Susan's voice as contained within the broader patriarchal narrative (e.g. Mehrabadi & Pirnajmuddin, 2006), while others considered a resisting force for her (e.g. Atwell, 1993; Kossew, 1998; Spivak, 1991). The same befalls Friday. Friday is at times a hero of fighting against colonization of Foe and Susan (e.g. Denis Donoghue, 1987, Cody Mullins, 2009, and Marte Schallenberg, 2011), and at other times a colonized whose existence is defined by the colonizers (Attwell, 1993). The importance in each character's abil-

ity and probability to resist is in the actual relevance of political activism in the South African society. This controversy is addressed in this article.

In *Disgrace* Coetzee targets the post-apartheid era's complex and ambivalent situation where reconciliation is imperative. Critics like Bonnici (2001) regarded the novel as the allegory of South African history and hinted that allegory is an insufficient tool for such an urgent condition. Sue Kossew elaborates on David's emasculation from his intellectual power (1996), masculine power and fatherhood, while the colored like Petrus, Melanie, Soraya and Bev "finally [disturb] the power and difference on which that authority is based" (Wang & Tang, 2013, p. 293). Lucy Valerie Graham discusses Lucy's "unspeakable silence" in the rape scene, and concludes that she has no part in her own part of the story or, as Spivak states it, Lucy is an empty operator (2002, p. 22). Min Wang and Xiaoyan Tang in "The Road to Grace" refer to the colored's mimicry of the colonizer's violent sexual discourse. According to Wang and Tang, the mimic man gains independence and manages to appropriate the colonial discourse for his own purposes and make the master in turn a dog-man. Referring to Coetzee's postmodern style, and believing postmodernism is opposed to political activism, there are again disputes against him, especially when Spivak refers to Coetzee's pessimism against literature's impotency to convey social crises.

Life and Times of Michael was reviewed mainly with regards to Michael and the doctor. Here again, critics read Michael and the novel as an allegorical experience (e.g. Dominic Head). Condemning Michael's apolitical attitude to the upheavals, some of the reviewers considered it as an implication of oppression (on which Mullins brought a thorough discussion, e.g. Attridge (1996) in "Oppressive Silence"), yet others regarded Michael's silence as an instance of insubordination (Cody C. Mullins, 2009). Marte Schallenberg (2011) describes Michael as a passive substantiality who cannot "generate a certain kind of power or authority" (p. 34). Jane Poyner believes that though his resistance is not active, "one way to resist the apartheid's system of classification and segregation is not to recognize it at all" (2006,b, p. 70). Yet Dominic Head (1997) articulates Michael's antiheroic position as anti-institutional whose "persistent, minimalist philosophy" (p. 61) enables him to endure.

It seems that almost all of Coetzee's characters, at least at some points, have been charged with being apolitical. Ignoring the fact that the novel struggles for the marginal's voice, *Foe* is criticized for its withdrawal from a contemporary relevant era. The novel was thematically considered politically irrelevant at its release. Nadine Gordimer (1984, p. 6) questions Coetzee's putting passive characters and abstract allegory at the heart of his novels and challenges such a questionable position to be taken up in South Africa by a writer. She believes *Life and Times of Michael K* does not possess the energy of the will to political resistance against evil (ibid).

Using the idea of iterability from Derrida's terminology would help us defend Coetzee against these charges. Derrida believes performative speech acts produce events. When Coetzee's colonized characters mimic the colonizer, they

manage to broach a counter-discourse which enables his marginal characters to write back into the colonizer's own discourse by trying to subvert it while reproducing. Though many times Coetzee approaches an allegorical or postmodern writing which is often critiqued as apolitical, depicting mimic men enables him to "present the failure of imagination before the problem of how to integrate the disposed black men into the idyll ... of African pastoralism" (Coetzee, 1988, p. 71-71). Coetzee's continuous literary struggles with the marginals depict his desire for political transformation.

Contrary to apolitical charges against *Foe*, the novel tries to problematize the predefined marginal's character. In *Robinson Crusoe* we could clearly visualize Friday. We could know how he felt and what he did. However in *Foe*, Friday casts doubt on all our certainties about his true nature. This doubt goes on so much that we are even faced with the questioning of his substantiality. The iteration of a former novel is Coetzee's attempt at producing a new event by challenging the previous one. There is singing session in the novel where Friday is asked to sing. When he rejects, they call him a cannibal. Later in the novel, when Friday seemingly obeys Cruso's order of singing, the master says it is the "voice of *man*" (Coetzee, 1986, p. 28, my emphasis); This incident can be decoded like 'the cannibal is taught the voice of [hu]man', implicating that before acquiring the voice, he was less than a man. Nonetheless, it is revealing to pay attention to the following lines after this occurrence:

Cruso motioned Friday nearer. "Open your mouth," he told him, and opened his own. Friday opened his mouth. "Look," said Cruso. I looked, but saw nothing in the dark save the glint of teeth white as ivory. "La-la-la," said Cruso, and motioned to Friday to repeat. "Ha-ha-ha," said Friday from the back of his throat. He has no tongue," said Cruso. Gripping Friday by the hair, he brought his face close to mine. "Do you see?" he said. "It is too dark, .. said I. "La-la-la, .. said Cruso. "Ha-ha-ha," said Friday. I drew away, and Cruso released Friday's hair. "He has no tongue," he said. "That is why he does not speak. They cut out his tongue." (Coetzee, 1986, p. 29)

Spivak (1991) points to the importance of letter H in the novel and reads it as "the letter of muteness" (p. 14), or "the failed echolalia of the mute" (p. 15). Turning Cruso's "la-la-la" to his "ha-ha-ha" can be a laugh at the colonizer. Possibly Friday is laughing and mimicking Cruso by an echolalia which is partial, like Bhabha's idea of partial presence. Tongue is speech and language, and language is contained with masculine power and discourse. Cruso repeats a couple of times that "he has no tongue", and Friday laughs. Friday is laughing at Cruso's impotent authorial gesture of superiority.

Contrary to Benita Parry's argument in "Speech and Silence in J. M. Coetzee" (p. 43), Friday's silence is not an indicator of inferiority (1998). The narratology of the story reveals that the total structure of *Foe* undermines the value of storytelling as the novel is centralized on the presence of a marginal character. Silence is rather a weapon against the authority that controls speech. Coetzee proves this by referring to the incidents when Susan also, as a marginal, uses this technique. "Finding it as thankless to argue with Foe as it had been with Cruso, [she] held [her] tongue, and soon he felt asleep" (Coetzee, 1986, p. 223).

Arguing with the male authorities is impractical. Thus Susan keeps silent and they sleep (sleeping can be read as disempowerment and death). The following day Susan is asked by Foe to keep on teaching Friday his writing lessons. After some efforts which proved useless, Susan ponders:

“Could it be that somewhere within him he was laughing at my efforts to bring him nearer to a state of speech? ... Somewhere in the deepest recesses of those black pupils was there a spark of mockery? I could not see it. But if it were there, would it not be an African spark, dark to my English eye?” (Coetzee, 1986, p. 225).

Friday’s mimicry of the colonial discourse and counter-discourse is palpable when the colonizers, e.g. Susan and Foe, attempt to teach him writing after failing to teach him speech. Susan says that Friday is “writing of a kind” (Coetzee, 1986, p. 237), with letters which looked like “rows and rows of the letter o tightly packed together” (Coetzee, 1986, p. 237). First of all Friday is “writing of a kind”, which may not be exactly the kind which Susan intends. Then Foe says that Susan must teach him ‘a’ tomorrow, and that “it is a beginning” (Coetzee, 1986, p. 238). As Spivak elucidates, letters ‘o’ and ‘a’ are of significance, because the “narrative ends, with the promise of a continued writing lesson that never happens. One can of course say that Foe is wrong. It is not a beginning unless one forgets the previous forgetting; and o could conceivably be omega, the end” (Spivak, 1991, p. 15). Afterwards, Spivak mentions that in *Robinson Crusoe* O is “Friday’s Pidgin translation of his native word for prayer” (Spivak, 1991, p. 15). It can be concluded that Friday is speaking with his own words, which are dark to their English eyes.

Friday “so doggedly holds his silence” and remains like a “hole in the narrative”. He frustrates all imperial means because he does not want to be linguistically and thereby identically written by the colonizer’s discourse. Perhaps because through Susan’s situation, he has seen the consequences of being narrated; that it ends in doubting one’s own identity and existence (examples in *Foe*, p. 61, 67 and 205). One can conclude that speech is not lost to him and his silence is intentional to teach back his teachers the lessons they ought to learn. He wants to be a narrator himself, as in *He and His Man* (2003) he starts speaking. By iteration, the novel’s two endings try to highlight the paradox of simultaneity of sameness and difference.

Thematically, *Disgrace* is an allegory of South African history. It is about the whites falling from grace and that is where the need of reconciliation between blacks and whites is imperative. While David, symbolically, refuses to apologize for the history of colonization of the blacks by the whites, his daughter tries to reconcile by not charging the rapists against the law. These father and daughter are contrasting; while David is self-focused, Lucy is world-focused. David cares only for his own desires. The apathetic teacher does not even take care of his beloved or even his own daughter until he has fallen from grace and has no other place to go other than his daughter’s house. On the other hand, Lucy cares for the nature, for her apathetic father and even for her rapist enemies.

Once early in *Disgrace* David murmurs with himself that “the one who comes to teach, learns the keenest of lessons” which is foreshadowing of his future lessons. After the affair with Melanie, the boyfriend intrudes in David’s class and tries to challenge his Eros-led idea of a relationship. The boyfriend ‘menacingly’ says he knows about the affair. David asks him to leave. The boy repeats, mimicking him that “it is time for [him] to leave” (Coetzee, 1999, p. 30). He reappears at the end of the story where this sense of menace is still present. This dark force orders him to “stay with [his] own kind” and “find [himself] another life” (Coetzee, 1999, p. 194). At that “night of revelations” (Coetzee, 1999, p. 194) he sleeps with a drunken girl, younger than Melanie. Later on in the novel we see this professor is sleeping with low class women of his most undesired type (the ugly fat peasant Bev).

The first time David meets him, Petrus introduces himself as “the dog-man” (Coetzee, 1999, p. 64). Wang and Tang elaborate that David initially enjoyed Petrus’s companionship only because then he was humble, calling himself a dog-man. After this rape incident and Petrus’s gaining the land ownership, when David asks Petrus to manage the farm, he replies, “[i]t is too much, too much” (Coetzee, 1999, p. 153). Essentially and previously, Petrus was doing the same job; nevertheless, when he gains the ownership of the piece of land, everything differs. Later in the novel, we notice that it is Petrus who orders David (in case of plumbing for instance) what to do and what not to do (Coetzee, 1999, p. 136). David, who was ever the master turns to be a helper (i.e. secondary and servant) to Petrus. As Lucy mentions, they “can’t order Petrus. He is his own master” (Coetzee, 1999, p. 114). Initially Petrus was a dog-man. Near the end of the novel, by helping Bev in killing the dogs, David contemplates that he himself is the one who became a ‘dog-man’. *Disgrace* represents the mimicry of a marginal to reverse the imperial intentions. Through iteration, David starts changing and his iteration is consisted on repeating the same and becoming different.

What is evident is a role reversion in the colonial discourse. Petrus is usurping from David not only his authorial position, but also his fatherly entity. At the time when Lucy asks David to leave her alone, it is the “Fatherly Petrus” (Coetzee, 1999, p. 162) who will protect her. By taking his positions, Petrus becomes like him, while at the same time he is very dissimilar from him (in many respects like Petrus’s thickened English). David did not hate Petrus from the first sight. Actually, in the early days, he thought of him as a friend. However, later he detests him (Coetzee, 1999, p. 152) and Petrus becomes a foe (Coetzee, 1999, p. 152). Wang and Tang elaborate on this thematic puzzle by stating that David initially enjoyed Petrus’s companionship because then he was humble, calling himself a dog-man. While later he gains independency and mastery over English language and farming skills which is to David’s revulsion. In case of the latter, David does not know anything and feels inferior which endangers his superior master position (Wang and Tang, 2013, p. 295). Turning back to Bhabha, Petrus’s discourse contains an ambivalence which menaces David. Since Petrus is a partial presence who is becoming like the colonizer, but not exactly identical to them. Once, the land, English language, power, and grace belonged

to Afrikaners, now Petrus possesses all of them. It is David who is gradually losing all of them.

David hates Pollux (one of Lucy's rapists) as well. According to him, Pollux is a thug. Yet we cannot trust David's narrative because his narration is blatantly subjective. His own constant 'gaze' at women is described by the positive term 'desiring', while Pollux's 'peep' is defined by the negative term 'lascivious'. When Petrus and David introduce the issue of Pollux marrying Lucy, David rages and is "on the point of saying, We Westerners" (Coetzee, 1999, p. 202). David tries to insist on the incompatible polarity of Pollux and himself, the Savage and the Westerner. David's hatred for Pollux is not essentially due to his rape of her daughter (as he has never been a caring father). The revulsion is mainly because the boy is somehow like himself; the menacing resemblance (uncanny) to David. Coetzee carefully names the boy Pollux to hint at the mythological dimensions to be attributed to the twins: Castor/David and Pollux. They are both rapists, the former is mortal, while the latter, immortal. Melanie's boyfriend, Petrus and Pollux are all mimic men to David's colonial discourse who teach him the keenest lessons: that the one who comes to exploit, is exploited worst. According to Sue Kossew (1996), David is emasculated. This essential colonizer is emasculated from his intellectual power, masculine power and fatherhood, while the colored like Petrus, Pollux, and Melanie, "finally [disturb] the power and difference on which that authority is based" (Wang & Tang, 2013, p. 293). David as an embodiment of the white masculine discourse has gone to the dogs.

The eponymous character in *Life and Times of Michael K* is a harelip monstrous figure whose malformed physical attributes reproduces fear of contagion. The novel is subdivided into three parts. In the second chapter, the narrative shifts to a medical officer working in a rehabilitation camp to which Michael is taken. Contrary to other characters' idea of Michael being of a simple nature, the doctor is fascinated by his specific pioneering characteristic. He eventually sets for Michael's escape.

The doctor makes a distinction between Michael's will and Michael's body. In a long confession, that he makes about Michael he says "You acquiesced in your will (excuse me for making these distinctions, they are the only means I possess to explain myself), your will acquiesced but your body balked" (Coetzee, 2004). One way to read this differentiation (which the doctor himself acknowledges to be vague) is that for him, Michael's will is, unlike his body, ambivalent. The doctor points out that "the body contains no ambivalence" (Coetzee, 2004). He is a doctor and colonizing the people's body is his job. Nonetheless, now he is confused by this patient whose "body was going to die rather than change its nature" (Coetzee, 2004) and whose will is ambivalent (to his colonial intentions).

Though the doctor points out that in fact K "did not resist at all" (Coetzee, 2004, p. 84), he 'appeals' Michaels/Micheal to "yield" (Coetzee, 2004, p. 84) (his story and thus his identity). When faced with his adamant resistance against storytelling, he enters into the narrative and tells the second chapter himself. The fact that Chapter One and Chapter Three are narrated by someone else, yet

the second chapter by the doctor, reveals that the doctor attempted to colonize his story and his identity. At first, he thought Michael is just another patient like others but the narrative ends with the confession of the failure of such attempts. So he starts his "story" by quoting the fabrications that this less than forty kilo malnourished patient was "running a staging post for guerillas operating out of the mountains... growing food, though obviously not eating it" (Coetzee, 2004, p. 66). The next page he says that one's mind boggles at such a story about this man. Since this man is either "too stupid or innocent" (Coetzee, 2004, p. 66) or "an idiot" (Coetzee, 2004, p. 66). However, Chapter Two ends with a different Michaels. The doctor confesses that "whenever [he] tried to pin [him] down, [Michaels] slipped away" (Coetzee, 2004, p. 85).

He cannot conclude if he is resisting or submissive. Once he thinks Michaels is "not a pole-vaulter" (Coetzee, 2004, p. 85), now he confidently shouts that "he must be a pole-vaulter" (Coetzee, 2004, p. 85). On a more general level, he cannot conclude about his true identity. Chapter Two ends with doctor's unanswered demand that if he is veracious and he has understood Michaels, Michaels should take up his right hand and if he is wrong, Michaels should hold up his left hand. Yet, Michael does not allow them to define him and then make a 'maquette' of him, since he does not care for being commemorated. In fact, the only thing he cares for is his pumpkin seeds and his gardening. Michael resists the colonizer's categorizations and definitions. The novel started with the doctor's attempt at colonizing K's story (and identity), but ends in his doubting his own identity as he started with the idea that there is nowhere outside the war, but eventually questions his own existence in the war and desires to leave and follow K.

Michael K is an unhappy monstrous performative representation whose inappropriate body enacts iteration. On the surface we are faced with a harelip simpleton gardener who cannot take care of himself, but different semantic layers of the story reveal his performative role in generating difference via repeating the same pattern. K's serious influence on the colonizers exists simultaneously with the non-serious theatricality of his colonized character. By stubbornly insisting on repeating the same gardening discourse, K broaches a difference into the officer's identity. Iteration in *Life and Times of Michael K* leads to initiating the hope of political change as a result of mimicking the imperial gestures while not recognizing it at all.

Conclusions

There are critics who condemn Coetzee for being apolitical (e.g. Andre Brink, Lewis Nkosi, Nadine Gordimer, David Atwell, Michael Chapman and Benita Parry). They denounce Coetzee for his supposedly intellectual pose and believe he never wholeheartedly engaged in the anti-apartheid struggle. Yet there are many other critics who endorse the professor's genuine way of resistance (the instances are noted above). However, they were separate readings focusing only on separate novels. A gap was found linking all these reviews explicating

the overall pattern in Coetzee's novels to conclude that literature can contain articulatory significance in the colonial struggles but to do so, it should be iterative.

What is common to these three novels and some of Coetzee's other novels, is that they all deal with a story being tried to be narrated or withheld, and in either case, it is a procedure linked to colonization. Either the case is similar to that of Susan or Melanie who are yearning to narrate or it may be like that of Lucy, Friday and Michael, yearning to withhold. The colonial subject mimics the colonial discourse by making him understand the fictitious nature of imperial attitudes. Evidently, there is a role reversion in all these patterns. According to Derrida, a formulae can survive and signify if repeated on accurate citations. Coetzee propagates political activism by continuously depicting marginal characters who teach back the teacher (Michael), exploiting the exploiter (Melanie and Petrus) and defining the definer (Friday).

Resistance in Coetzee's novel is an iterative moment signified through recurring role reversions. According to Derrida, iterability is the deferring moment in a literary text where the correspondence between a text and its meaning proves illusive. In *Life and Times of Michael K* and *Foe*, Coetzee dedicates more presence to the seemingly absent entities in his texts. Though the stories of these male characters (Petrus, Friday and Michael among others) are not eventually transparently and faithfully represented, the overall structure of Coetzee's fiction repeats unique marks, generating signifying re-marks of role-reversion. The colonial subjects unique acts of mimicry is repeated throughout Coetzee's 'strange institution called literature' to include other signifiers. Friday may be considered a silent man, just as Michael. Petrus can be thought as a pervert. Yet the iterative nature of mimicry in Coetzee's novels incites newer significations, those which are not conventional. Thus the coded utterances in his contexts prove his intentional act of resistance to be effective. Coetzee's novels do not conclude with actualization of political betterment, yet the iterative quality of his significations invites us to reread his novels and reconsider the political and ethical questions.

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