

South African Literature: Deconstructing Patriarchal and Colonial Ideology in J.M. Coetzee's, *In the Heart of the Country*

Yahyaoui Hanane

Professor, Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, Department of English, Mohammed V University, Morocco
yahyaouihanane7@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper examines the silence and rebellion of the western female who is marginalised in the Afrikaner colonial and patriarchal culture in South Africa in the late 1970's. Through an analysis of J.M. Coetzee's, *In the Heart of the Country* (1977), I attempt to explore the gender dimension and therefore deconstruct patriarchal and colonial ideology. My aim is to interrogate the Afrikaner colonial culture through the point of view of a farmer's daughter who is deemed as a subordinated woman within the Afrikaner colonial formation. In effect, I elucidate and unravel the way the main protagonist challenges the patriarchal colonial culture by engendering a specific feminine discourse of language which concentrates on plurality and attempts to represent what has been repressed by masculine modes of writings. The paper eventually demonstrates the failure of the liberal humanist subject to achieve reciprocity with the other and therefore transcends the colonial ideology between coloniser and colonised.

Keywords: silence and rebellion, Colonial and patriarchal ideology, the western female, marginalised, Afrikaner colonial culture, feminine discourse, failure to achieve reciprocity.

INTRODUCTION

Professor John Maxwell 'J. M.' Coetzee is a celebrated writer. He was born in Cape Town, South Africa in 1940. His early academic career reveals that his interests are wide-ranging and have remained diverse throughout his career. Attwell, in *Doubling the Point*, writes in his introduction that it includes "the full range of Coetzee's non-fiction, showing him as a linguist and stylistician, critic of metropolitan and South African literatures, translator, essayist in popular culture, reviewer, polemicist, and autobiographer"¹. Although J.M. Coetzee is from an Afrikaans origin, he speaks English rather than Afrikaans. Attwell argues that Afrikaner is not just a linguistic label, but an ideological term since it is founded by a political movement that was first, anti-British before it became anti-black, calling itself Afrikaner nationalism². People who spoke Afrikaans, but were not fully committed to the racial, cultural and political ideologies of the movement were not considered as Afrikaans. Coetzee acknowledges that although he is from an Afrikaner origin, he is not deemed an Afrikaner: "An Afrikaner... is a person whose first language is Afrikaans... I am not embedded in the culture of Afrikaner and have been shaped by that culture only in a perverse way"³. Coetzee's linguistic alienation is a result of the implications of colonialism in which a pre-colonial culture and language (Afrikaans) is suppressed by the British military conquest and replaced by the English language. Coetzee clearly distances himself from the

1. Attwell, David. Ed. *Doubling The Point : Essays and Interviews / J.M. Coetzee* . (London & New York, Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press. 1992) page 2.

2. Attwell, David. Ed. *Doubling The Point : Essays and Interviews / J.M. Coetzee*. (London & New York, Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press:1992) page 342

3. Attwell, David. *Doubling The Point : Essays and Interviews / J.M.Coetzee*. (London & New York, Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press: 1992) page 342

South African Literature: Deconstructing Patriarchal and Colonial Ideology in J.M. Coetzee's, *In the Heart of the Country*

Afrikaners and this might be one of the reasons why he left South Africa for England after graduating from the university of Cape Town with a Bachelor degree in English literature in 1960 and a Bachelor degree with Honors in Mathematics the next year.

In the United Kingdom, he worked as a computer programmer for four years with IBM, London. He left England and enrolled at the university of Texas to study in a graduate English program and teach English at the same time⁴. His PhD thesis was a computer stylistic analysis of the great literary works of Samuel Beckett. Coetzee left Texas in 1968 to take up a post as an assistant professor of English at the State university of New York at Buffalo⁵. Thus, Coetzee lived abroad in England and in the United States, as a young man and this gives him the opportunity to discover various issues rather than having the political situation in his own country forced upon him. This might explain why Coetzee has always seemed more distanced towards the struggle against apartheid, although he condemns it openly on many occasions.

However, he eventually had to return to South Africa as he was repeatedly denied permanent residency in the United States. He started teaching English Literature at the University of Cape Town and therefore became the Distinguished Professor of Literature. In 1974, his first book called '*Dusklands*' was published. The novel has two storylines - one is on the psychological effects of Vietnam War on people involved in it and the other is on the 18th century South Africa. In 1977, he got his novel '*In the Heart of the Country*' published. This book won many awards such as South Africa's principal literary award and the CNA, the Central New Agency Prize. It was also published in the UK and the U.S. In 1980, Coetzee's book '*Waiting for the Barbarians*' was published, which received a lot of international attention. It was chosen by Penguin publication as one of the 'Great Books of the 20th Century'. In 1983, his book, '*Life & Times of Michael K*' was published. It won Britain's Booker Prize award. It is a story of a man's journey from Cape Town to his mother's rural birthplace, set in the heart of Africa. In 1986, Coetzee published, a novel called '*Foe*'. It is a novel based on the work of Daniel Defoe '*Robinson Crusoe*'. It is set on the same island that Crusoe inhabited.

In the 90s and 2000s, Coetzee produced literary work like: *Life & Times of Michael K* (1983) and *Disgrace* (1999), both winners of the Booker Prize for Fiction; and *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons* (2003). More recent novels are *Slow Man* (2005) and *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007). In 2013, '*The Childhood of Jesus*' was published. It is his latest literary work and before the release he gave the reading from the book at the University of York, England, but he did not reveal the name of the book that time. J. M. Coetzee also writes non-fiction. *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (1988) is a collection of essays on South African literature and culture, and *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews* (1992) is a collection of essays and interviews with David Attwell. His books *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life* (1997); *Youth: Scenes from Provincial Life II* (2002); and *Summertime* (2009) form a trilogy of fictionalized memoirs. *Summertime* was shortlisted for the 2009 Man Booker Prize for Fiction and the Commonwealth Writers Prize (South East Asia and South Pacific region, Best Book) and the Australian Prime Minister's Literary Award. In 2002, Coetzee migrated to Australia South Australia, where he has an honorary position at the University of Adelaide.

South African Literature in the late 1970's attempts to account for the silence of blacks imposed by the power establishments and the dominant discourse under the system of apartheid. The experience of the latter has demonstrated that different kinds of silence exist: this includes the deprivations and distortions of the rights, the enslavement of indigenous people, torture, abuses in the name of Christianity, miscegenation

4. Attwell, David. *Doubling The Point : Essays and Interviews* / J.M. Coetzee. (London & New York, Cambridge Mass : Harvard University Press: 1992) page 50

5. Attwell, David. *Doubling The Point : Essays and Interviews* / J.M. Coetzee. (London & New York, Cambridge Mass : Harvard University Press: 1992) page 19

South African Literature: Deconstructing Patriarchal and Colonial Ideology in J.M. Coetzee's, *In the Heart of the Country*

between Afrikaners and their slaves or servants and finally the marginalisation of women in both black and white societies. The writer's imperative is, therefore, to excavate and interrogate the silence, exploitation and marginalisation of the other. This is the idea André Brink conveyed when he said 'La parole sert à corriger le silence'⁶. Writers, such as J.M. Coetzee sought to represent history and the oppression of blacks and women although it was not permitted by the media⁷. When black writing in South Africa ended by 1965 as black writers were either silenced through exile or death, white writers such as J.M. Coetzee appropriated postmodernism as a literary technique in order to transcend the South African scene and the conventional English realist novel. Coetzee managed to articulate a decisive critique of the west through the use of postmodern critical aesthetics. The postmodern and postcolonial textual innovations allow him to deconstruct the racist misconceptions and stereotypes and at the same time reveal to the western audience their own tacit ideological structures and programs. Coetzee shows some affinities with Lacan, Foucault, Derrida and Hegel. He deploys the Hegelian master-slave dialectics in *Foe*, *Dusklands* and *In the Heart of the Country* (1977) so as to criticise colonialism and to show that it is premised on oppression and subjugation. In this way, Coetzee unmasks the underlying racist structures of the discourse of colonialism. He replaces, therefore, the Eurocentric European thought by creating a vision of a pluralistic, decentered and multifarious world. The situation of marginalised societies and cultures becomes an unprecedented source of creative power from which the voices of the peripheries are heard and acknowledged by the imperial centre.

Coetzee's oeuvre deals with the cultural and political discourses of South Africa in the 1970's and 1980's. Behind the narrative subjects of each of Coetzee's novels: *Magda*, *Jacobus Coetzee*, the magistrate, lies an implied narrator who reveals the South African culture and the national situation. Edward Said associates texts with their worldliness; texts are 'worldly' in the sense that they reflect the historical context of each society and culture⁸. In this paper, I attempt to explore the gender dimension and therefore deconstruct patriarchal and colonial ideology. My aim is to interrogate the Afrikaner colonial culture through the point of view of a farmer's daughter who is deemed as a subordinated woman within the Afrikaner colonial formation.

Coetzee seeks to re-invent South African history in which women is excluded from official South African political discourses. He, therefore, chooses a female narrator who shares with the reader her private experiences and visions and sheds new light on the historical function and awareness of Afrikaner women who are marginalised in South African history. In the context of this paper, the silence exercised by the Afrikaner culture relate in particular to the western female marginalisation in which she is confined and excluded from male activities, the binary oppositions imposed by a harsh patriarchal Afrikaner culture, her rebellion and attempt to transgress the social structures by engendering a feminine discourse, and ultimately her failure to transcend the colonial ideology. This paper is divided into three sections: in the first section, I scrutinise *Magda's* confinement and her oppression under the patriarchal Afrikaner ideology. In the second section, I revisit theoretical frameworks of French feminists that have provided insights into deconstructing patriarchal ideology. In the third section, I attempt to demonstrate the liberal humanist subject's failure to communicate with the other and therefore achieve reciprocity.

6. Attridge, Dereck and Rosemary Jolly. Ed *Writing South Africa, Literature, Apartheid and Democracy*. (New York, Cambridge, 1998), 15

7. It is worth noting that J.M. Coetzee's novels are elusive because of his abstinence to speak directly about the South African context. Although his fiction condemns the colonial regime, the racist structure of apartheid, none of his fictions were banned.

8. Said, Edward. *The World, the Text and the Critic*. (United States of America & Massachusetts & Cambridge Harvard University Press, 1983) page 4.

MAGDA'S CONFINEMENT AND HER OPPRESSION AS A WOMAN

In J.M. Coetzee's, *In The Heart of the Country* (1977), Magda is depicted as a female subject who equates her oppression with the fact that she is a woman. She, therefore, repudiates the Afrikaner patriarchal system and the order it articulates. Before indulging in the discussion of the novel, I will start by a brief theoretical framework which shows the way woman enters the realm of femininity.

In *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* : Freud Reich, Laing and Women,⁹ Mitchell shows that the girl goes through two significant stages so as to enter the realm of femininity. The first stage starts with the child's initial relationship with the mother which is characterised by the oral satisfaction gained by the sucking of the breast. In the second stage, the child wishes to take the place of the father and thus to be her love object in a perfect union with the mother. A third party, however, enters to disrupt the mother-infant relationship: the father who alone can provide the phallus for the child. In the case of the girl, she must accept that she is without the phallus and is thus compelled to abandon her mother - love in favour of a father - love. In fact, it is only through the latter relationship that the girl can have access to the phallus and to satisfaction. At that time, the girl's development is disrupted by her sense of castration, her lack and therefore awareness that she is without a phallus.

The crucial point is at this stage the girl receives her identity as a feminine subject and is obliged to repress those aspects of her which are restricted to masculinity. In fact, both men and women behave according to their sexual identities and to the laws governed by their societies which set up certain rules for masculinity and femininity. Additionally, the Oedipus Complex is a patriarchal myth in which the boy learns the laws of the father and the girl is assigned to her feminine role:

Femininity is therefore a repressed condition, that can only be secondarily acquired in a distorted form. It is because it is repressed that femininity is so hard to comprehend both within and without psychoanalytic investigation¹⁰

It is interesting that in this view, femininity is a cultural construct that the girl represses in her unconscious. She acquires her gender identity when she is first seduced by her father. She learns that she is castrated of the phallus and therefore the father who introduces to her this notion during the stage of the Oedipus complex. As such, the girl solves the dilemma of the Oedipus complex and enters the realm of femininity.

An implication of this view is worth-considering here. In Magda's case, in the novel, although she has acquired femininity as a cultural construct, she questions and attributes her oppression to the fact that she is a woman. Therefore, she recognises herself as inferior within the patriarchal order, an absence which can be fulfilled in union with a male. In this context, Magda acknowledges :

I move through the world not as knife blade cutting the wind, or as a tower with eyes like my father, but as a hole, a hole with a body draped around it (...)I am a hole crying to be whole. I know this is in one sense just a way of speaking, a way of thinking about myself, but if one cannot think of oneself in words, in pictures, then what is there to think of oneself in? I think of myself as a straw woman, a scarecrow not too tightly stuffed, with a scowl painted on myself to scare the crows and in the centre a hollow, a space which the field mice could use if they were very clever. But this is more than a picture, I cannot deny it, I am not ignorant of anatomy, I am not incurious about my constitution, I am among other things a farm girl living in the midst of

9. Mitchell, Juliet *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* : Freud Reich, Laing and Women , (London & New York: Pantheon Book Publishers, 1974), 404

10. Mitchell, Juliet *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* : Freud Reich, Laing and Women , (London & New York: Pantheon Book Publishers, 1974), 404.

South African Literature: Deconstructing Patriarchal and Colonial Ideology in J.M. Coetzee's, *In the Heart of the Country*

the hurly-burly of nature, (...) not unaware that there is a hole between my legs that has never been filled, leading to another hole never filled either. If I am a O, I am sometimes persuaded, it must be because I am a woman ¹¹

The reader of this passage cannot miss the rebellious tone that characterises it. Magda voices her own anxiety and repudiation of patriarchy as she considers that it is biology, which determines woman's position within the social order rather than her mental abilities. In other words, Magda equates her servitude and powerlessness within patriarchy with the fact that she is a woman. Magda feels oppressed by the law of the father and this is precisely which explains her state of female absence. Moreover, Magda's internal conflict lies between what she desires and what a conventional and colonial society expects of her. Magda's sense of lack shows her alienation from direct communion with the world. This incompleteness and lack is due to Magda's frustrations and repressions which seem to have disrupted her integration with the surrounding natural world. Indeed, Magda aspires to a world of ecstasy, in which she will express her sensations and desires, a world far from her stern and distant father and the servants who do not reciprocate her desire for an exchange of words. The idea is conveyed to the reader, for she thinks that 'Perhaps if I talked less and gave myself more to sensation I would know more of ecstasy. Perhaps, on the other hand, if I stopped talking I would fall into panic, losing my hold of the world I know best'¹²

Her self is, therefore, divided between what she desires and the rules she has to abide by within a patriarchal and colonial society. Magda's situation as a woman implies a position of powerlessness and servitude in relation to the powerful language of the Oedipal father. For instance, in the father's speech, Magda is not named, but is merely a child. In the following passage, she repeatedly reflects upon her status as a child:

Now those booted feet come up the passage. I close the door and push against it. I have known that tread all my life, yet I stand with mouth agape and pulse drumming. He is turning me into a child again! The boots, the thud of the boots, the black brow, the black eyeholes, the black hole of the mouth from which roars the great NO, iron, cold, thunderous, that blasts me and buries me and locks me up. I am a child again, an infant, a grub, a white shapeless life with no arms, no legs, nothing even to grip the earth with, a sucker, a claw¹³

Clearly, the father-daughter relationship is delineated as a relationship of domination. The novel challenges the ideology of the good daughter harmoniously inserted into a nuclear family bonded by love and therefore shows its impossibility within these conditions of patriarchal oppression. Magda is confined to the house and is compelled to remain on the farm to serve her father. She, therefore, finds herself to be the oppressed half of an unequal relationship of power. Magda's confinement to the house is a consequence of her subservient position and her exclusion from that activity monopolised by men in the sexual division of labour :

I should have been a man, I would not have grown up so sour, I would have spent my days in the sun doing whatever it is that men do, digging holes, building fences, counting sheep. What is there for me in the kitchen ? The patter of maids, gossip, ailments, babies, steam, food smells, cat fur at the ankles - what kind of life can I make of these ?¹⁴

11. J.M. Coetzee. In *The Heart of the Country* (London & New York: Martin Secker and Wardburg Publishers, 1977) , 41.

12. J.M. Coetzee. In *The Heart of the Country* (London & New York: Martin Secker and Wardburg Publishers, 1977) , 41.

13. In *The Heart of the Country*, page 51.

14. In *The Heart of the Country*, page 21.

South African Literature: Deconstructing Patriarchal and Colonial Ideology in J.M. Coetzee's, *In the Heart of the Country*

The passage foregrounds Magda's exclusion from male activity which is farming since it is her father alone who controlled the farm and his household. Hence, unskilled in the male tasks of farming and business, the reader sees Magda at the end of the novel, with the death of her father, unable to manage the farm. Magda's exclusion from male activities, therefore, causes the farm gradually to collapse through neglect as the farm animals die or run away.

Additionally, Magda is placed in a situation of radical interiority, the 'one who stays in her room reading or writing or fighting migraines'.¹⁵ Magda's suffering and oppression is also caused by her perception of her separation from the exterior world. She stares out into the wilderness from the confines of her house:

Into the evening, as the shadows first lengthen and then cover everything, I stand at the window. Hendrik crosses the werf on his way to the storeroom. The massed twitter of birds in the riverbed rises and wanes. In the last night, the swallows swoop to their nest under the eaves and the first bats flit out... what are pain, jealousy, loneliness doing in the African night? Does a woman looking through a window into the dark mean anything? I place all ten fingertips on the cool glass...If I am an emblem then I am an emblem. I am incomplete, I am a being with a hole inside me ...I am dumb...I live inside a skin inside a house. There is no act I know of that will liberate me into the world. There is no act I know of that will bring the world into me. I am a torrent of sounds streaming into the universe, thousands upon thousands of corpuscles weeping, groaning, gnashing their teeth¹⁶

The passage demonstrates Magda's sense of lack 'I am incomplete' which reveals her isolation. This profound sense of loss has disrupted her integration with the surrounding natural world. Magda is, therefore, the subject of a patriarchal colonial culture and it is this culture which she condemns. Her father not only destroyed the sensuous love Magda experienced with her mother, but also placed her within the enclosed private property of the settler's farm to live a life of isolation from community. Her desires are therefore to restore that lost experience of affection and to regain an innocent unity with the human and natural landscape.

The narrative's progress focuses upon Magda's attempt to liberate herself from her father's domination. It opens with her father's arrival at the farm, bringing home a second wife. Magda's perceptions of the new woman are dominated by an intense jealousy. She is obsessed by the sensuousness of her body and the sexual pleasure she enjoys with her father. Taking cue from Freud's theories, Mitchell argues that once the female child is separated from the mother, she transfers her sexual attachments to her father and the mother thus becomes a rival to the child. When the female child grows up, the girl's sexual devotion to her father is suppressed, enabling her womanhood to be achieved through marriage.

However, in *In the Heart of the Country* (1977), Magda is kept by her father as the dutiful child though she is an adult. Magda is, therefore, denied all sensual experience and deprived of all exterior activity since she is isolated in the farm. She is confined in the farm and is compelled to obliterate her desires. Her relationship with her father is constantly subjected to the fatal dialectic of the father-daughter relationship. Within the Lacanian paradigm, Magda has not been granted access to the father's world once separated from the world of the mother. Thus, the father creates the absence of the mother through his interdiction to be the mother's complement of the child. Unable to be admitted to the father's world, Magda says:

My father creates absence. Wherever he goes he leaves absence behind him. The absence of himself above all- a presence so cold, so dark, so remote as to be itself an absence, a moving shadow casting a blight on the heart. And the absence of my mother. My father is the absence of my mother, her negative, her death¹⁷

15. In the Heart of the Country, page 35.

16. In the Heart of the Country, page. 9,10.

17. In the Heart of the Country, page 37.

South African Literature: Deconstructing Patriarchal and Colonial Ideology in J.M. Coetzee's, *In the Heart of the Country*

It is worth-noting that Magda fails to communicate and achieve her father's recognition. One can see in this description that her father who can bestow upon her the necessary recognition of her adulthood. Magda demands recognition that will give her "a name, a place in the family constellation, an original signifier of self and subjectivity"¹⁸. She calls upon her father, saying :

Do you not see that it is only despair, love and despair, that makes me talk this way? Speak to me! Do I have to call on you in words of blood to make you speak? what horrors more do you demand of me? must I carve out my beseechings with a knife on your flesh? Do you think you can die before you have said Yes to me ?¹⁹

As the passage demonstrates the killing of the father represents the attempt to subvert the power of the Father as representative of the law. The killing also functions in the novel as a resistance to the repressions and restrictions of the father's interdictions- the great No. In addition, Magda attempts to speak a new language, to effect a metamorphosis or new birth out of the language of the father. Having axed the father, Magda says: "Until this bloody afterbirth is gone there can be no new life for me"²⁰. According to Magda, the death of her father and the authority he embodies, will allow her to start a new life and therefore liberate her from the patriarchal system. Thus, the killing of the father stands for a refusal of the conservative ideology of the father and its implications.

The Afrikaner oppression springs from the fact that she lives in a family structure which is patriarchal. Although, she rejects the feudal language of the father and the order it articulates, She is compelled to submit to her father's authority and remain the subservient child. In the figure of Magda, we perceive a narrating self who experiences a severe psychic injury or loss of the self, "a sense of loss which will not be transcended into something else, but perversely explores its own mechanism, its own productivity"²¹. Accordingly, I will argue that Magda represents the Afrikaner woman who lives within the Afrikaner authoritarian system in the pastoral rural world of the farm ; she cannot liberate herself since there are certain patriarchal norms which are set for the Afrikaner woman and therefore keeps her in an inferior position unable to evolve beyond masculine power and authority.

DECONSTRUCTING PATRIARCHAL REPRESENTATIONS

Patriarchal ideology tends to create binary oppositions between men and women. French Feminists account for women's inferiority and therefore challenge patriarchal representations. They attempt to construct a different mode of writing referred to as 'écriture féminine' in which women will be able to represent themselves. In a similar way, I try to argue that in Coetzee's novel, Magda writes her own story and therefore engendered a feminine discourse, which allowed her to subvert the Afrikaner patriarchal language.

Feminists such as Irigaray, Helen Cixous and Catherine Clement²² argue that woman's inferiority springs from the fact that she is outside the domain of patriarchal representations and Freudian psychoanalysis. According to them, the concept of the Oedipus complex and the castration complex simply foreground the unbridgeable differences between the two sexes. In this sense, the implications of the privileging of the phallus are obvious for women. This conceptualisation implies that all social actions are unequal sexually speaking.

French Feminists tried to construct a different type of discourse and to elaborate different theories to challenge Freud's phallogocentric ideas and to acknowledge that there is a female component to it, which has been

18. Lemaire, Anika, *Jacque Lacan*. (London : Routledge and Kegan Paul Publishers, 1977), 83.

19. *In the Heart of the Country*, page 71, 72.

20. *In the Heart of the Country*, page 15.

21. Dovey, Teresa, *The Novels of J.M. Coetzee. Lacanian Allegories*. (Johannesburg: AD. Donker publisher, 1988). 156.

22. Irigaray , Luce . *Speculum of the other Woman*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), page 49.

South African Literature: Deconstructing Patriarchal and Colonial Ideology in J.M. Coetzee's, *In the Heart of the Country*

marginalised and therefore needs to be linguistically accounted for and articulated. Elizabeth Wright writes that: "Feminism examines the process whereby woman is given or refused access to discourse, and at the same time inaugurates a new way of thinking, writing and speaking"²³. Indeed, feminism attempts to construct an alternative discourse since it is the language associated with the male imaginary and symbolic orders which is incapable of representing woman's desire and her sexuality. In this context, Irigaray writes in response to Freud's definition of femininity:

The little girl does not submit to the facts easily. she keeps waiting for it "to grow", and believes in that possibility for improbably long years. Which means that no attempt will be made for the little girl – nor by the mother ? nor by the woman ? to find symbols for this "nothing to be seen", to defend its goals or lay claim to its rewards. Here again no economy would be possible whereby sexual reality can be represented by/for woman. She remains forsaken and abandoned in her lack, default, absence, envy, etc and is led to submit, to follow the dictates issued univocally by the sexual desire, and law of the man. Of the father in the first instance ²⁴

Irigaray adopts a particular stance to demonstrate that woman's subordinate position is due to her lack of control over representation and it is in fact this inability of woman to represent her sexuality that Irigaray attempts to challenge. Accordingly, Irigaray attempts to imagine an emotional or intellectual space in which woman is no longer defined in relation to man and in which she will be able to represent herself and therefore articulate her body. Moreover, Feminists have resorted to a special way of writing to challenge the oppressive male writing in which one meaning prevails. These writings are in fact referred to as *écriture féminine* in which different views form meaning. Helene Cixous in the "Laugh of the Medusa" views the possibility of female textuality in terms of the woman taking control over the signifier:

If woman has always functioned "within" the discourse of man, a signifier that has always referred back to the opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes or stifles its very different sounds (...), it is time for it to disclose this within, to explode it, turn it around and seize it; to make it hers ²⁵

One can see in this passage that Helen Cixous urges women to take control of the power of the patriarchal system in order to escape its confining effects. Thus, *écriture féminine* encompasses different modes writing in order to disrupt patriarchal discourses and therefore enable women to envisage viable representations of themselves. Luce Irigaray's approach is similar to that of Cixous's in that she herself deploys different modes of writing. Although she avoids committing herself to any theory which will place her in an authoritarian position similar to that of male theorists, she endeavours to formulate a concept which counters Freud's insistence on castration. Irigaray insists on the difference inherent in female genitalia and female desire. She states in relation to Freud's concept of castration:

The fact of castration has to be understood as a definitive prohibition against establishing one's own economy of the desire for origin. Hence, the hole, the lack, the fault, the castration that greets the little girl as she enters as a subject into representative systems. This is the indispensable assumption governing her appearance upon the scene of "presence", where neither her libido nor her sex/organs have any right to any truth except the truth that casts her as less than, her side, backside of the representation thereby perpetuated²⁶

23. Elizabeth, Wright. "Thoroughly Postmodern Feminist Criticism" in Teresa Brennan, ed. *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*. (London & New York: Routledge, 1989), 151.

24. Irigaray, Luce. *Speculum of the other Woman*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), page 49.

25. Helen Cixous and Catherine Clement. *The Newly Born Woman*. (London: I.B. Tauris & CoLtd Publishers, 1986), page 257.

26. Irigaray, Luce. *Speculum of the other Woman*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), page 83.

South African Literature: Deconstructing Patriarchal and Colonial Ideology in J.M. Coetzee's, *In the Heart of the Country*

Irigaray demonstrates that the little girl is disadvantaged since she does not possess the sexual organ which is valorised and is subjected to the symbolic order in which the phallus is the transcendental signifier, thus leaving her completely outside the domain of representation. She, therefore, finds herself in a system where she can only be represented in contrast to the central position of the male as the "hole", "the lack", and the "fault".

women's subordinate position and particularly Magda's oppression is due to the fact that she cannot represent herself within the patriarchal system. In effect, feminists such as Cixous and Irigaray generate an alternative discourse referred to as 'écriture féminine' in which woman will be able to express her desire. These writings, as I have discussed, concentrate more on plurality and strive to represent what has been repressed by masculine mode of writings.

Coetzee's novel, *In the Heart of the Country* (1977), challenges the Afrikaner oppressive language which marginalises the female identity; it rather alters the patriarchal language by allowing the woman to speak. Indeed, Magda the female protagonist, writes her own story and therefore challenges patriarchal representations. She attempts to find a new language and a new mode of discourse. Her narration subverts patriarchal discourse and Afrikaner language in its anti-linear and anti-rational construction. Her discourse reveals a bridge between logic and irrationality. In her final meditation, Magda explained all the details of her story and the reasons for which she did not escape from the farm and return to civilisation, and what exactly has happened during the course of her history. She, therefore, narrates her story and finds an alternative language to male discourse.

In effect, Coetzee's narrative offers another construction of the sexual other, it recognises her alterity and enables her to articulate her speech from the position of marginality she occupies. In this sense, the space of the margin is a hybrid space which allows Magda continually to destroy barriers of race, sex and gender. She therefore creates an open vision embracing change and fluidity rather than fixity. For Laura Di Michel, to choose the margin does not mean to withdraw into marginality, as she comments:

I make it a definite distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and marginality one chooses as a site of resistance- as a location of radical openness and possibility. This site of resistance is continually formed in that segregated culture of opposition that is our critical response to domination...We are transformed...as we make radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world²⁷.

The passage demonstrates that marginality is a site of resistance, a postcolonial space which enables Magda to narrate her stories and to reinstate her voice which was repressed and silenced. This is, in fact, the highest position that can be granted to the female protagonist. She is depicted as a successful writer and storyteller who challenges patriarchal modes of representations and assumes a role originally entrusted to a male.

Magda's unusual and fluid account resembles l'écriture féminine as defined by French Feminists. The latter describes feminine discourse as subjective and instinctive and associates rational and representational discourse with male discourse. Additionally, feminine discourse is a language of the mind and the body, conveying both ideas. Irigaray's and Cixous's emphasis is more biologically bound to the female body as I have mentioned earlier. Magda's lyricism and imagery further exemplify her feminine discourse and therefore explore the body as a means to communicate with her father and the servants, Hendrick and Anna. In addition, Magda's poetry attempts also to capture the instinctive and go beyond language. In the novel, Magda explores the possibility of reaching the other through bodily identification:

27. Michel, Laura Di. 'Identity and Alterity' *The Post- colonial Question: Common Skies Divided Horizons*. Ed. Iain Chambers & Lidia Curti. (London & New York. 1996). page 168.

South African Literature: Deconstructing Patriarchal and Colonial Ideology in J.M. Coetzee's, *In the Heart of the Country*

I want a home somewhere else, if it has to be in this body then on different terms in this body, if there is no other body, though there is one I would far prefer, I cannot stop these words unless I cut my throat, I would like to climb into Klein-Anna's body, I would like to climb down her throat while she sleeps and spread myself gently inside her, my hands in her hands, my feet in her feet, my skull in the benign quiet of her skull where images of soap and flour and milk revolve, the holes of my body sliding into place over the holes of hers, there to wait mindlessly for whatever enters them, the song of birds, the smell of dung, the parts of a man, not angry now but gentle, rocking in my bloodwarmth, laving me with soapy seed, sleeping in my cave²⁸

Magda, as the passage attests, is an epitome of the liberal humanist subject. Coetzee, as a postcolonial writer, subverts the traditional image of coloniser and colonised and deploys Magda as an anti-imperialist who wants to interact with the other and therefore eradicates differences of race and gender. She endeavours to resolve the tension between master and servant and therefore longs for a different kind of communication in which they will achieve harmony and unity instead of authority and power. It is worth-noting that this bodily identification with the servants Klein-Anna, which Magda describes and hopes to attain, demonstrates that each person whether male/ female or black/white confronts and displaces the other from his/her position of fixed identity and mastery and also eradicates discrimination of either man or woman; Magda is described not as the opposite force, but as a human being with equal characteristics.

In a similar passage, Magda writes as her father lies dying and invokes the sea as a place of peace and resolution; she attempts to transgress the social structures of parent and child and attain unity with her father:

Oh father, father, if I could only learn your secrets, creep through the honeycomb of your bones, listen to the turmoil of your marrow, the singing of your nerves, float on the tide of your blood, and come at last to the quiet sea where my countless brothers and sisters swim, flicking their tails, smiling, whispering to me of a life to come ! I want a second chance²⁹

In her poetry, Magda attempts to reconcile with her father and therefore expresses her willingness to eradicate the relationship of power which characterises the Afrikaner patriarchal system. She longs for a relationship which is devoid of authority in which both parent and child will reach a mutual understanding.

In *In the Heart of the Country* (1977), Coetzee criticises the western culture from a deconstructive position, a stance which pertains to postcoloniality. This is, in fact, a position which resolves the tensions between male and female and at the same time subverts the ethnographic images which stigmatise the other and turns him into an object of knowledge. By means of this strategy, the novel foregrounds the imbrications of race and gender and seeks to evade the ideological assumptions and power-relations in which they are inscribed. That is why, I consider that *In the Heart of the country* (1977) is a resistance to the dominant discourse which imposes its authority and ascendancy over woman and the other.

DECONSTRUCTING COLONIAL IDEOLOGY: MAGDA'S 'MONOLOGUE OF THE SELF'

Magda's feminine discourse promotes the exchange of dialogue over the rigid monologue. Her repeated attempts to communicate with the servants and create several conversations reveal her willingness to transcend the barriers of master and servant which exist in the colonial Afrikaner system. However, the main protagonist fails to communicate with the other.

Magda attempts to communicate with others, but she is trapped by the Afrikaner colonial structures. She, therefore, fails to establish a language of social intercourse and instead creates an imaginary narrative, which she constructs herself. She finds herself totally alone on the farm, trapped within 'this monologue of the self' increasing rather than overcoming her isolation:

28. In the Heart of the Country, page 108, 109.

29. In the Heart of the Country, page 71.

South African Literature: Deconstructing Patriarchal and Colonial Ideology in J.M. Coetzee's, *In the Heart of the Country*

For the day will come when I must have another human being, must hear another voice, even if it speaks only abuse. This monologue of the self is a maze of words, out of which I shall not find a way until someone else gives me a lead. I roll my eyeballs, I pucker my lips, I stretch my ears, but the face in the mirror is my face and will go on being mine even if I hold it in the fire till it drips. No matter with what frenzy I live the business of death or wallow in blood and soapsuds, no matter what wolf howls I hurl into the night, my acts, played out within the macabre theatre of myself, remain mere behaviour. I offend no one, for there is no one to offend but the servants and the dead. How I shall be saved? ³⁰

As the passage illustrates, one can see that Magda conveys her dissatisfaction since she lacks the recognition and confirmation of her adult subjectivity. 'The monologue of the self' shows Magda's radical enclosure of her words within language. With nobody to confirm her words, Magda expresses a feeling of scepticism towards herself. For Magda, the 'monologue of the self is a maze of words', a statement that alerts the reader to Lacan's emphasis upon the constitutive role of language in the construction of subjectivity. According to Lacan, the child's submission to the law of the father marks the child's admission to subjectivity in the sense that the subject is given a place in the social order. Lacan introduces the vital importance of language as a system in which subjectivity is articulated:

It is language which provides the possibility of subjectivity because it is language which enables the speaker to posit himself or herself as 'I', as the subject of a sentence. It is through the language that people constitute themselves as subjects³¹

Just as entrance into the symbolic shows the movement from nature to culture, language affirms the distance between the word and the thing it signifies since 'language is the precondition for the act of becoming aware of oneself as a distinct entity' ³². Language, therefore, establishes the distinction between exterior and interior, a singular subject distinct from the world into which he is inserted. This is, in fact, a division which is fundamental to Magda's experience:

My father is the absence of my mother, her negative, her death. she, the soft, the fair; he the hard, the dark. He has murdered all the motherly in me and left me this brittle, hairy shell with the peas of dead words rattling in it. I stand in the empty kitchen hating him³³

The intervention of the father results in Magda's construction of an enclosed self. Magda therefore constructs an interior world of her own completely separated from the exterior one. Magda's self is therefore fragmented and her 'I' that speaks exists only within language. For Lacan, the insertion of the subject into the symbolic order involves a splitting between the 'I' who speaks and the 'I' who appears in language:

I am what I think', therefore I am : divide the 'I am' of existence from the 'I am' of meaning. This splitting must be taken as being principle, and as the outline of primal repression, which as we know, establishes the unconscious³⁴

A division is opened up between Magda's conscious self and her unconscious one. That is, the self inscribed in language and the self represented in her discourse. Coetzee uses this notion to point to a division between Magda's 'monologue of the self', the conscious 'I' of the discourse and the 'I' beyond words. In her world of confinement, the reader notices a radical divorce between consciousness and the real. That is, a splitting between an imaginary narrative which she constructs herself and a real life under the authority of her father:

30. In the Heart of the Country, page 16.

31. Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice*. (London: Routledge, 1980), page 91.

32. Lemaire, Anika. *Jacque Lacan*. Page 4.

33. In the Heart of the Country, page 37.

34. *Jacque, Lacan. Ecrit 1*. (Paris : Du Seuil, 1996), 37.

South African Literature: Deconstructing Patriarchal and Colonial Ideology in J.M. Coetzee's, *In the Heart of the Country*

There was a time when I imagined that if I talked long enough it would be revealed to me what it means to be an angry spinster in the heart of nowhere. But though I sniff at each anecdote like a dog at its doo, I find none of that heady expansion into the as-if that marks the beginning of a true double life. Aching to form the words that will translate me into the land of myth and hero, here I am still my dowdy self in a dull summer heat that will not transcend itself. What do I lack? I weep and gnash my teeth. Is it mere passion? Is it merely a vision of a second existence passionate enough to carry me from the mundane being to the doubleness of signification (...) Do I truly want to get beyond myself?³⁵

One can see in this description that Magda is a prisoner of her monologue and is trapped within language since she represents the dilemma of a narrating self who can neither realise the independent existence of the self, nor transcend the self. She is constantly trapped in the ongoing dialectics of the linguistic utterance. Magda, therefore, laments her condition and says "words are coins. words alienate. Language is no medium for desire, desire is rupture, not exchange. It is only by alienating desire that language masters it...The frenzy of desire in the medium of words yields the mania of the catalogue"³⁶. For Magda, language is a social medium of exchange to communicate with other people, but desire is simply possession. She rejects the pastoral world of the farm in which reciprocity fails and therefore becomes dependent on language. For example, she imagines that she lives outside human society, in what she calls her former state of "unthinking animal integrity"³⁷. She also sees herself inhabiting a world outside consciousness, for she acknowledges that "This is what I was meant to be : a poetess of interiority, an explorer of the inwardness of stones, the emotions of ants, the consciousness of the thinking parts of the brain. It seems to be the only career, if we except death, for which life in the desert has fitted me"³⁸. She, therefore, creates an imaginative space so as to evade the colonial and hierarchical world of the farm.

The title of the novel itself gives further credence to Magda's divided self and her mode of narration. The notion of 'the heart of the country' is translated, in Coetzee's novel into the notion of a novelistic discourse which arises out of the heart of the divided and desiring self. The latter is aware of the divided condition, which sets it apart from the natural world. The reference is here obviously to Magda who endeavours to overcome the pain of her isolation by means of an analogy between nature and consciousness.

Magda strives to create a story with a "beginning, a middle, and an end"³⁹. She attempts to transcend her alienation and creates fairy tales and legends. She also creates another form of storytelling and therefore rejects psychological explanations of her condition. Her imaginative narration represents a mode of writing which attempts to explain her own life in the frontier world of the farm. However, she remains locked within monologue and articulates her need for community when she says that 'it is not speech that makes man man but the speech of others'⁴⁰. Each segment of Magda's discourse stands for a separate moment of narration. Hence, we find Magda saying: "These words of mine come from nowhere and go nowhere, they have no past or future, they whistle across the flats in a desolate eternal present, feeding no one"⁴¹. Her constant attempts to project a dialogue with the servants simply failed and she is again caught within the monologue of language. Indeed, Magda endeavours to bridge the gap of master-servant and create instead a medium in which reciprocity exists: "the medium- the median- that is what I wanted to be! Neither master nor slave, neither parent nor child, but

35. In the Heart of the Country, page 4.

36. In the Heart of the Country, page 26

37. In the Heart of the Country, page 40

38. In the Heart of the Country, page 35

39. In the Heart of the Country, page 43

40. In the Heart of the Country, page 67.

41. In the Heart of the Country, page 114.

South African Literature: Deconstructing Patriarchal and Colonial Ideology in J.M. Coetzee's, *In the Heart of the Country*

the bridge between so that the contraries should be reconciled”⁴². Magda exemplifies the role of the liberal humanist who attempts to achieve connection and relationship with the servant, Anna who lives with her in the farm house, but she simply fails. For example, Magda dreams that Anna will become the elder sister who can give her wisdom and share the secrets of life with her when she says: “I would like to stroll arm in arm with her of a Saturday night ... whispering and giggling like a girl, showing myself off to the country beaux. I would like to hear from her, in a quiet corner, the great secrets of life, how to be beautiful, how to win a husband, how to please a man. I would like to be her little sister”⁴³. However, Magda cannot escape the colonial mentality and the master/slave dichotomy since she is a member affiliated to the Afrikaner system. Magda’s relationship with Anna is hindered by the stereotypical norms of Afrikaner farm life. This is clearly revealed when she relegates Anna to an inferior position when she orders Anna to spend the night in the house with her, on a mat on the kitchen floor. The equality that Magda offers is insufficient and therefore she fails to attain harmony and true communion with Anna.

The writer, J.M. Coetzee, shows that Magda could not transcend the language of hierarchy and distance and the language of inequality and separation. For example, Magda is not named in the father’s speech, and is not able to pronounce the You to the father. By the same token, Hendrik and Klein Anna, the servants, are not able to call Magda by her name, or pronounce the You in response to her I. It is worth-noting that the Afrikaans language provides terms of address which forbids the use of the intimate you by a subordinate and requires the use of a title in its place. This usage is regarded as significant since those in the subservient position cannot pronounce the You, and thus cannot confirm the existence of those in the position of mastery. It is revealing that all Magda’s conversations with Klein Anna are false dialogues since it is Magda who speaks and Klein Anna remains silent. They are more monologues than dialogues.

In her isolation, Magda turns to communicate with the ‘Sky Gods’ as a substitute for human communication and an attempt to find a language not mediated by social divisions, as she says: “I also hear voices, it is my commerce with the voices that has kept me from becoming a beast. For I am sure that if the voices did not speak to me I would long ago have given up”⁴⁴. In addition, the vehicles of the Sky Gods “look like narrow silver pencils with two pairs of rigid wings, and fly from north to south on the first and fourth days and from south to north on the second and fifth days”⁴⁵ which suggest that they are aeroplanes on bi-weekly passenger flights between Cape town and Johannesburg. They function as heralds of the technological revolution and signal a threat to pastoral values in the form of encroaching industrialization and urbanization. The words from the sky gods are drawn from the discursive tradition of Hegel, Blake and Nietzsche who articulate the philosophical dicta to which Coetzee’s novel addresses itself.

Arguably, aeroplanes address Magda from the sky in the Spanish language quoting, for example, Hegel and Lacan and Magda answers by arranging white - washed stones to write out broken Spanish words across the desert, which could be read from the sky. Firstly, the scene helps to define the relation of the novelist to his subject. It is a relation of fundamental distance. In fact, the distance between the aeroplane in the sky and Magda standing in the desert may be construed as the distance between modern, industrialized society and the antique rural culture of Magda. It is worth - noting that the novel is written in the late twentieth century within that age of the aeroplane. It is also a cultural distance and an attempt to analyse a frontier world, which has now disappeared. Secondly, the words that the sky gods speak, essentially serve to point out to the reader that the reality of the text is a fictional construction.

42. In the Heart of the Country, page 133.

43. In the Heart of the Country, page 134.

44. In the Heart of the Country, page 125.

45. In the Heart of the Country, page 126.

South African Literature: Deconstructing Patriarchal and Colonial Ideology in J.M. Coetzee's, *In the Heart of the Country*

In the failed project of Magda, Coetzee seems to say that a knowledge of that frontier individualism can be explained from a position of critical distance from it. In this context, the flying machines, which look like narrow silver pencils with two pairs of rigid wings can be related to the notion that a history can be comprehended at its denouement. In addition, Magda does not receive passively the words of the voices from the sky, but she answers back sometimes agreeing with, but more often questioning and criticizing their analyses. It is worth noting that the distance between novelist and subject is emphasized since Magda perceives things differently from the author/ novelist. This point is emphasised by the series of words she constructs out of stones and which are read by aeroplanes. The words, written in broken Spanish, represent her attempt to explain her own life.

Magda realises that as a farming woman, she belongs to a world different from the urban dwellers. Magda's rebellion, therefore, remains within the world of the farm. The latter, in fact, pertains to the Afrikaner rural culture and is threatened by the progress of capitalist industrialisation and urbanization. The rural world becomes de - populated as the sons and daughters leave to seek their fortunes in the cities. Magda, however, is the one who was left behind and is condemned to live her life on the frontier. Born into a frontier culture of anarchic individualism, she is the embodiment of both its values and degeneration. Magda's language, the language of the "heart", is connected to the Afrikaner system in which the individual can be an agent and is also bound up with Magda's imaginary determination to be the author of her own life.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, this paper has examined the emergence of the displaced subject, who is not one of the primary agents of colonisation, but who lives in the conditions created by such agents and therefore endures the subjectivity this position entails. Magda in Coetzee's, *In the Heart of the Country* (1977), is such a displaced subject who attempts to find a voice under patriarchal and colonial conditions. Throughout the chapter, the analysis reveals the way she repudiates the patriarchal and colonial language which oppresses both the woman and the native and relegates them to an inferior position. In addition, the encounter between white South African settler and the native fails as Magda does not achieve reciprocity with the other. Despite her huge efforts to bridge the gap and therefore reach mutual understanding and harmony, she couldn't transcend colonial barriers which impede social relations in the pastoral world of the farm as I have tried to illustrate throughout the chapter.

REFERENCES

1. Attwell, David. Ed. *Doubling The Point: Essays and Interviews*/J.M. Coetzee. (London & New York, Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press. 1992).
2. Belsey, Catherine, *Critical Practice*. (London: Routledge, 1980).
3. Cixous, Helen, Clement, Catherine. *The Newly Born Woman*. (London: I.B. Tauris & CoLtd Publishers, 1986).
4. Coetzee, J.M. *In The Heart of the Country* (London & New York: Martin Secker and Wardburg Publishers, 1977).
5. Dovey, Teresa, *The Novels of J.M. Coetzee. Lacanian Allegories*. (Johannesburg: AD. Donker publisher, 1988).
6. Irigaray, Luce, 'This Sex which is Not One', In *New French Feminism*. Ed by. Elaine Marks and Isabelle De Coutivron. (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1981).
7. Luce Irigaray. *Speculum of the other Woman*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985).
8. Lacan, Jacques, *Ecrit 1*. (Paris : Du Seuil, 1996).

South African Literature: Deconstructing Patriarchal and Colonial Ideology in J.M. Coetzee's, *In the Heart of the Country*

9. Lemaire, Anika. *Jacque Lacan*. (London : Routledge and Kegan Paul Publishers, 1977).
10. Michel, Laura Di. "Identity and Alterity in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*". In *The Postcolonial Question: Common Skies Divided Horizons*. Ed by Iain Chambers & Lidia Curti. (London & New York: Routledge, 1996).
11. Mitchell, Juliet, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism : Freud Reich, Laing and Women* (London & New York: Pantheon Book Publishers,1974).
12. Said, Edward. *the World. the Text and the Critic*. (United States of America & Massachussets: Cambridge Harvard University Press, 1983).
13. Wright, Elizabeth. "Thoroughly Postmodern Feminist Criticism" in Teresa Brennan, ed. *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*. (London & New York: Routledge, 1989).

Citation: Yahyaoui Hanane, "South African Literature: Deconstructing Patriarchal and Colonial Ideology in J.M. Coetzee's, *In the Heart of the Country*" *American Research Journal of English and Literature*, vol 4, no. 1, 2018, pp. 1-15.

Copyright © 2018 Yahyaoui Hanane, This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.