

**Masks of Confession: Looking Behind the Confession of White Male Narrators in
*Shooting an Elephant and Disgrace***

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“Take up the White Man's burden--
In patience to abide,
To veil the threat of terror
And check the show of pride;
By open speech and simple,
An hundred times made plain
To seek another's profit,
And work another's gain.”

- Excerpt from *The White Man's Burden* (1899) by Rudyard Kipling.

It has been debated for over a century as to how one should receive Kipling's *The White Man's Burden*. Should it be read literally as a bold manifesto or as an ironic and cautionary tale, a satire, a modest proposal? Can it be both? Perhaps, such a proposal is meant to function as a mirror for the reader, reflecting how it is each reader sees the world and his or her place within its power structure. Central to the poem and these interpretations is the power dynamic of the hegemonic discourse of colonialism. The subaltern is whoever exists outside the hegemonic discourse, usually signified in colonialism through the oppositional self/other binary as the other. Confessional narratives pose challenges to the terms of difference inscribed through this power dynamic. As a form, the confessional mode seeks to undermine the hegemonic discourse by having one of its beneficiaries—in this case, the white male narrator—indicate the superficial nature of colonialism's discursive structure. The confessional mode is used to essentialize the self and the other as both subject to the will of the hegemonic discourse.

However, this othering of the self creates a disturbing sympathy for the self—here signifying the white male imperialist—as having an experience equivalent to that of the other—here signifying the subaltern native.

In this essay, I will explore the confessions of white male narrators in George Orwell's *Shooting an Elephant* and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*. Each work utilizes the confessional mode differently: *Shooting an Elephant* is a traditional confession expressing guilt while *Disgrace* is in many ways anti-confessional, a self-conscious critique of the white male narrator. I will argue that the confessional mode as used by Orwell and Coetzee do not succeed as challenges to the hegemonic discourses they address but, in fact, in many ways, reinscribe them and as such becomes an exercise of power by the respective white male confessants. This failure is a result of the confessional mode being used to shift responsibility from the self-narrator, the maintenance of colonial tropes, and ultimately a challenge that amounts to an inversion of power instead of the more potent subversion of the hegemonic discourse of colonialism.

In his 1985 essay "Confession and Double Thoughts: Tolstoy, Rousseau, Dostoevsky", Coetzee declares that "One is in danger of not being one's self when one lives at a reflective distance from one's self" (268). *Shooting an Elephant* uses a first person narrator reflecting upon a time when he was a sub-divisional police officer in Moulmein, Burma. The narrator confesses "All I knew was that I was stuck between my hatred of the empire I served and my rage against the evil-spirited little beasts who tried to make my job impossible" (235). The retrospective nature of this statement, its tone and tension repeated throughout the text, creates a rhetorical distance between the offender and the offense characteristic of the confessional mode. Confession by its nature is a

reaction to an offense not a prevention of that offense. To speak out retroactively when one's power to effect change may have been diminished barely constitutes a challenge to the overall power structure that the sub-divisional officer claims to hate. Thus, the question must be asked, what is the confessant's motivation in this expression of guilt?

In *Shooting an Elephant* there is a significant lack of context with regards to the narrator's confession. In narrative, characters are moved to act through interaction or conflict with themselves, others, God, etc. In *Shooting* we do not know the motivation of the narrator. The reader is made completely unaware of how much time has passed since the incident, the location of the speaker or his position at the time of confession in the colonial power dynamic. The story itself is an explanation of the narrator's enlightenment about "the real motives for which despotic governments act", namely being willed to shoot the elephant by the expectant gaze of the native others. This however is not the motivation for the confession. It is part of *the* confession itself. Coetzee's view of confession in the secular mode of the novel does not leave much room for a text's self-aware criticism to be taken too seriously as he asks "how can an author tell the difference between himself and the self-deceived confessant" (273)? Thus, even a confession, which by definition is the expression of a hidden truth, is subjective. One example Coetzee gives of an inauthentic voice is "when the confessant lapses into the language of the Other" (268). Orwell uses many subaltern words throughout the text such as "dahs", "bazaar", describing the elephant as having gone "must", and referring to himself as a "sahib". The suggestion is that the confessant is not speaking for himself but that someone else is speaking through him. In this case, it is likely that this someone else is the colonial discourse. The cooptation of the term "sahib" demonstrates a restructuring of

the terms of difference for the subaltern as the white imperial officer must be given this term of respect in their native language. The fact that the narrator uses this language without a sense of irony or inhibition further demonstrates his othering of the self as subject to discursive colonialism.

Although Coetzee's novel *Disgrace* is present tense and not technically reflective there is a narrative distance that problematizes its treatment of the confessional mode. The third person narration provides the *opportunity* for scrutiny of the truth as told by the main character, David Lurie. However, *Disgrace* presents a third person narrator that does not dutifully scrutinize David Lurie's truth. The relationship between the narrative voice and Lurie's is unclear and at best suspect as an objective relationship. The narrator says of Lurie, "let him stop calling her poor Bev Shaw. If she is poor, he is bankrupt" (*Disgrace*, 150). The narrator is not simply presenting the story; the voice is making judgements, not in its own right but on behalf of David Lurie. The narrator's assessment that Lurie is "bankrupt" suggests third party criticism but the narrative voice is merely relaying Lurie's self-aware irony. It seems, since the voice is so intimately entwined with Lurie's mind that the voice is perhaps a layer of Lurie's own consciousness, the layer that is confessing. Coetzee says in his essay that in secular confession, self-doubt and self-awareness penetrate deeper and deeper in infinite regression. *Disgrace's* narrative voice functions like one of those layers speaking out in confession, telling the reader things Lurie does not consciously say to others in the text.

Regardless of the third person structure in *Disgrace* the story is told from David Lurie's perspective, problematizing the narrator's critical view of Lurie. The narrative voice is not omniscient with respect to its knowledge of other characters and thus its keen

awareness of Lurie's inner thoughts and feelings suggest collusion while at the same time distancing itself from Lurie. This provides an aesthetic where the narrative voice may be complicit with the truth Lurie tries to provide. In both *Shooting an Elephant* and *Disgrace*, the lack of narrative distance between the narrator and the text diminishes any chance for objective criticism. There is an interesting interplay between the intimate nature of the confessant's voice and the distance this proximity affords him to claim in justifying his sins.

Confession, as Coetzee asserts in his essay, is not simply admitting an act but also admitting something wrong in the self. It is this latter admission that calls attention to the viability of confession as representative of the truth. Whereas admission of an act may be verified by fact the admission of something wrong in the self can only be verified by that character, by that same confused and corrupted self. Having a perpetrator admit to an offense functions as a sign of respect to the wounded community and its social order. Through an acknowledgement of wrongdoing the offending will is realigned with what the offended person or community considers an acceptable standard. Such a confession reaffirms the moral standing of the community and its characterization of what constitutes proper behaviour. However, confession also offers the confessant an opportunity to capitalize on the wounded community's desperate desire for truth. He can admit to his offense, benefiting from the sociopolitical function of confession, while never truly having to believe it. Confession thus empowers the white male narrator through its ability to contextualize a sin, complicating the moral basis upon which such a characterization is made. Orwell's entire essay contextualizes the narrator's brutal act. The "I" as the confessant "self" is also the "eye". The confessant is the witness to the

event as well as the most valid interpreter of his motivation for committing the sin. What can be overlooked, though equally important however, is finding the motivation for the confession by the confessant. Both the “I” and the “eye” of the confessing self are subject to that self’s manipulation.

In his essay, Coetzee quotes Rousseau’s view of confession as providing an objective view of the self, reciting self-experience without interpretation. In a literary sense this is a description of the kind of realism Coetzee tries to achieve in *Disgrace*. A confessant can gain respect and even admiration for telling the awful truth. Such appeal extends to its literary mode where confession is also granted an inherent legitimacy, an aesthetic of authenticity that is earned not through raw reflection but through representations made with carefully crafted words. As Sue Kossew discusses in her essay “The Politics of Shame and Redemption” David Lurie is “all too aware of his own guilt and in this confessional mode, there is some sense of repentance that could disarm the reader’s moral outrage” (158). Early on in *Disgrace*, David Lurie justifies his advances on his student Melanie through charm, telling her that “a woman’s beauty does not belong to her alone...she has a duty to share it” (*Disgrace*, 16). Later on when he expresses desire for Desiree he comments on her name as if it were a trap, as if it is somehow her fault or the fault of her parents for giving her the name of desire, justifying his inappropriate thoughts. These are two examples of how Lurie uses rhetoric to justify his confession and charm his way out of accountability. The text, especially David Lurie’s rationalizations, complicates the sense of immorality behind his “rape” of Melanie Isaacs. The term rape is purposely placed in quotations here because the status of his abuse of Melanie Isaacs is not technically classified as such. The formal charge laid

out is sexual harassment. Again, the text is debating the tools of social classification, challenging its codes by persuading us that there are other ways of viewing the incident. The ambiguity of this challenge leaves room to sympathize with Lurie. His confessions open up this space. Such confession comes through the narrative voice, where Lurie's initial encounter with Melanie is described as "Not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core" (25). It is true, according to Lurie and the narrator that Melanie did not put up a fight. However, if Lurie's agency here is governed by his desire and Melanie's passivity by her lack of desire it cannot be considered consensual. It is an abuse of power by Lurie exploiting both age difference and the student/teacher relationship.

Kossew calls Lurie a "repulsive/attractive 'serpent' corrupting innocence while excusing his actions via confession" (159). The religious analogy of the serpent is appropriate for a novel concerned with the flaws of secular confession. Coetzee concludes in his essay that for confession to achieve absolution the infinite regression of self-doubt and self-awareness must be curbed by the existence of faith and grace. This is why secular confession leads to rationalizations. If Lurie is the devil, the serpent as Kossew suggests, how can his confession mean anything in a secular world? Secular confession, as Coetzee suggests, is inherently flawed precisely because a lack of faith leaves no foundation upon which to base an acknowledgement of something wrong in the self.

Kossew's critique can be applied to Orwell's tale as well, for both stories include confessions by the self, the imperialist white male, attempting to both justify his actions by shifting responsibility to his sociopolitical context and to dull the consequences of his

offense by an admission of wrongdoing. The sub-divisional officer recalls as “soon as I saw the elephant I knew with perfect certainty that I ought not to shoot him” (239). Not only does this expressed reluctance and claim of hatred towards the empire cushion the impact of his role in the murder of an innocent, it suggests his innocence was murdered. His subordinate position and subjection to the empire felt through the gaze of the subaltern masses gathered around him coerced his eyes to take aim and his finger to pull the trigger. The implication is that it was not his fault and he is actually a victim. The self versus society dynamic is a universalizing conflict, an othering of the “self” as it essentializes him as a powerless subordinate. This process allows sympathy if not empathy from the reader and the offended community. Like David Lurie’s use of charm, instead of dehumanizing the self in relation to the other and its treatment of the other, confession can humanize the self, it charms the offended system of belief, feeding its ego by appeasing its desire for confession. Confession is an act of negotiation between the offended community and the confessant and subsequently both sides must compromise. The attempt at sympathy or empathy forgets or ignores the difference the system created, a difference that exists even in the act of confession. Confession is a breaking of silence. This is an opportunity not afforded the subaltern, who, having committed no crime beyond what can simply be termed difference, is nonetheless ascribed as offensive at the core of his or her racially codified essence.

At its heart, *Disgrace* is a novel about self-awareness. The text itself is self-aware with regard to its critique of truth seeking and the role of secular confession as an effective tool in that effort. The board set up by the University to stage an inquiry into Lurie’s sexual harassment charge is less interested in the truth he has to offer than what

they want to present as the truth. Lurie does not make excuses for himself. The board continually asks Lurie if he wants time to think things over or if he wants to seek representation. Lurie, frustrated with the entire system replies, “I can represent myself perfectly well” (*Disgrace*, 49). It is almost as if the system is set up to stop him from falling too far despite the fact he insists he wants no help. Of course, Lurie also refuses to apologize and makes a point of emphasizing his admission of sexual harassment is a plea and not a confession of guilt. He admits to the act but not to something wrong in the self. This perverse resistance to confession can be read as allegory, as the text’s critique of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its desire for confession.

David Lurie’s refusal to apologize to the board or sign a confession to that effect and his lack of true guilt regarding his transgression illustrates how secular confession is a flawed representation of the truth. The board’s insistence on a signed confession, regardless of whether Lurie means it, demonstrates how the confession is an end in itself not a means towards the actual truth. Confession has a sociopolitical function as a representation of the truth it seeks in order to reinforce the moral fiber of the offended community. It may be apt to suggest that the TRC’s pursuit of individual confessions undermined the systemic nature of apartheid, but replacing a corrupt system such as apartheid does not dissolve its legacies. In this respect, you cannot punish a system. Apartheid’s legacies linger in individuals as well and individuals can be punished. To set such a precedent can instill in people a recognition that they can exercise their own set of values in times when the system may ask or require them to do something they feel is immoral. This moment of individual values being exercised is the precise moment described in *Shooting an Elephant*. However, afraid to exercise his values the narrator

chooses to perpetuate the system. It can be argued that this sense of individualism can prevent further systemic forms of oppression by discouraging uncritical collusion.

However apt *Disgrace*'s critique, Lurie is a rapist who on principle does not feel he should admit he did something wrong when it does not feel that wrong to him. The text stages the larger ethical battle in its critique of the TRC through a grotesque anti-hero. Lurie is a complex figure and he does accept the fact that he does not deserve leniency or to live out his life in peaceful exile. This indictment of the self is also an indictment of the whole society. For South Africa, so composed of guilt, it is perhaps hard to take the first step towards true reconciliation. While this may in fact aid the novel's attempt to disrupt ideas of oversimplified truth and its pursuit, Lurie's resistance seems self-righteous at best. It is selfish of Lurie to withhold the apology that may let the community heal. He refuses to supply a placebo on the principle that the medicine is a lie and disregards the healing power of such medicine. Instead the debate addresses the frame of mind that will accept such a lie. *Disgrace*'s anti-confessional components do provide an important critique of confession as representative of truth. However, Lurie's silence and refusal to participate also reinscribes his power as a white male.

Shooting an Elephant also constitutes this display of power as there is no consequence at all for the narrator. Both Lurie and the sub-divisional officer gain a kind of redemption, albeit individual, despite the publicity of their shame. While it is true that Lurie's life gets more destitute after he is outcast, he is still able to find redemption and the society he offended is deprived of that knowledge. It is not just Melanie he offended but the University and the community at large. He never personally apologizes to Melanie Isaacs, but to her family. For her father, Mr. Isaacs, a religious man, Lurie's

apology isn't enough and he wants to know what happens after Lurie says he's sorry. As Coetzee says himself in his essay, "Whether the confessant yields to the new truth about himself depends on the nature of his commitment to his original confession" (273). Both Lurie and the sub-divisional officer shift responsibility for their crimes and avoid its consequences through their secular confession of the literary mode. This is a re-inscription of the hegemonic discourse within whose context the imperial, white male self is exempt from that system's punishment.

Lurie's daughter, Lucy says to him, "You behave as if everything I do is part of the story of your life. You are the main character, I am a minor character...I am not minor" (198). Despite the self-aware commentary the text makes here, it also reminds Lurie, and the reader, that as the white male he is in control of this narrative. This commentary does not dissolve or resolve the use of the female silence trope in the text as Lurie remains empowered in the hegemonic discourse despite its changes and self-awareness. The structure of this re-inscription is reinforced by each text's maintenance of colonial tropes that serve the power dynamic of the hegemonic discourse.

The first trope is the otherness of the other especially in relation to the self. In *Shooting an Elephant*, racial coding of the self/other binary opposition is maintained despite the confessional mode of the narrator and his attempt to redefine the white male in a weak subject position. In his essay, "Not at Home in Empire", Ranajit Guha states that any claim that Orwell's tale of the elephant shooting is an advocacy essay for liberalism neglects its intense racial coding. Guha claims Orwell's essay "has no room in it even for the standard liberal view of racial tolerance. It is peppered with phrases that speak explicitly of [the narrator's] disapproval of the Burmese not only for the colour of

their skin but for what he obviously perceives as their cultural and moral inferiority” (Guha, 489). The narrator refers to the subaltern as having “sneering yellow faces”, as cheering with “the devilish roar of glee” after he shoots the elephant, and he calls a fresh corpse a “a black Dravidian coolie” (237). The sense of inferiority and immorality juxtaposed in each reference illustrates that even for a man with hatred for the empire in its despotic rule, characterization through race or otherness remains. Guha continues his critique claiming Orwell’s “racial loathing is laced with a violence which loses none of its ugliness even in the confessional rhetoric as he writes how ‘with one part of my mind I thought of the British Raj as an unbreakable tyranny...[while] with another part I thought that the greatest joy in the world would be to drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest’s guts’” (Guha, 489). Orwell’s tale is about the moment when one realizes one’s subjectivity and the superficial social structure that created it. But in that moment the narrator chooses to reinscribe the hegemonic discourse, again preserving it with violence by shooting the elephant. The choice of the white male to maintain his fantasy structure through violence, regardless of his confessions of guilt that illuminate the false foundation of that structure, is echoed in *Disgrace*.

In *Disgrace*, Lurie is established from the start as a man who “has, to his mind, solved the problem of sex rather well” (91). He frequents a prostitute named Soraya. However, when Lurie finds out Soraya has a domestic life with a husband and children his fantasy is shattered. He first tries to replace her with another prostitute from the same agency whose name is also Soraya. This replacement does not work out for him and sex becomes a problem. This sets in motion a desire that leads to his “rape” of Melanie Isaacs. It is a violent act, committed in order to maintain a sense of fantasy that he feels

he needs to satisfy despite the objections of his conscience. It is a relationship where Lurie is disconnected but firmly in control. Like the sub-divisional officer in *Shooting* who is forced to act by the other who challenges the power structure, Lurie acts when his other, Soraya, does not live up to her role in the fantasy life he has come to accept as his reality. The colonial discourse that uses the woman's body as a metaphor for male dominated conquest continues in the text.

The familiar colonial parlance is established early on in *Disgrace* with Soraya and Melanie Isaacs. The female body is treated as property discussed between males. The women of the novel are characterized throughout as silent others. Melanie is never heard from after her last encounter with Lurie. When Lurie initially apologizes for his treatment of Melanie it is not to her but to her father. Here we see two men discussing an infringement on sacred territory also known as Melanie's body. While Lucy is a much more vocal character she is also silent at crucial junctures. After Lucy is raped and she accepts she has to become part of her black neighbour's family for protection, a man named Petrus. David Lurie and Petrus discuss many of the terms of this arrangement. Lucy is consulted but does not negotiate the deal herself. Her body and the land she owns are intertwined as Petrus will get rights to her land as part of the deal. Lucy is not completely powerless as she maintains the possession and privacy of her home. This is a compromise that can be applied to post-apartheid South Africa that recognizes the debt owed to black South Africans while acknowledging the life whites have built for themselves in the country.

Much of *Disgrace*'s representation of post-apartheid South Africa is negotiated through the body. As discussed earlier, confession is a mechanism partially designed to

reinforce a damaged community's moral structure. Thus, the confessional mode is by definition a process of making the personal political. The silence surrounding infringements of the body in the novel, illustrate the distinction between the private and the public sphere. Lucy's womb is a political powder keg: she is having a child of mixed race conceived through a gang rape. She considers it a private matter and fights her father's protests to keep it that way. Despite Lucy's desire to keep things private her entire existence in the novel is consumed by politics. Her wish to stay on her land despite the threat of rape is a political act despite its fatalism. She accepts the conditions of the environment she has inherited just as easily as people accept poor weather in their hometown.

Of equal concern to the politics of Lucy's decision is the ambiguity of Lurie's position on the idea of the personal as political. Lurie has sex with Melanie Isaacs on his daughter's bed. This scene illustrates the abuse of his power, in the student/teacher relationship, as a bond so sacred to abuse it is to amount to incest. Melanie is never heard from and instead of confessing publicly about his crime, Lurie prefers to handle things privately, apologizing to an individual, Mr. Isaacs. After Lucy is raped, Lurie tries to console her saying "It was history speaking through them...A history of wrong...It may have seemed personal, but it wasn't. It came down from the ancestors" (*Disgrace*, 156). However, Lurie insists repeatedly that Lucy report the rape and charge the rapists. He even confronts the youngest rapist and becomes very suspicious of Petrus's role in the entire event. This desire for individual confession and punishment is in opposition to his view that history is to be blamed not the individual offenders.

When speaking about her rape, Lucy says to David, “You don’t know what happened” (134). Even though, on the textual level, she does not want the personal to be political, at the level of subtext this debate between Lucy and David shows the personal as political in its connection with David’s silence towards the University as a metaphor for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Later, Bev Shaw tells David he can’t understand what Lucy went through. The narrator illustrates the tension and the growing awareness of David and his ability to sympathize while not allowing him to empathize: “...he does understand; he can, if he concentrates, if he loses himself, be there, be the men, inhabit them, fill them with the ghost of himself. The question is, does he have it in him to be the woman”(Disgrace, 160)? David, the self (white male), cannot empathize with the raped woman. Thus she is silenced. While it is perhaps appropriate and respectful of the other not to pretend to be able to speak for them, this does not stop Coetzee from using the colonial trope of the female body as territory to communicate his story.

Kossew quotes Coetzee’s definitions for cynicism and grace: “Cynicism: the denial of any ultimate basis for values. Grace: a condition in which the truth can be told clearly, without blindness” (Kossew, 156). Since *Disgrace* posits a continuing cycle of violence, represented through Lucy’s rape and her acceptance of its possible continuation, it is by Coetzee’s own definition cynical even though its attempt to reflect South Africa may be by his definition a kind of grace. Kossew cites Rushdie’s book review of *Disgrace* where he suggests that the narrative voice and the author collude in David Lurie’s “self-justification so that the novel ‘merely become[s] a part of the darkness it describes” (161). At the heart of this darkness, of this cynicism is the trope of

female silence constructed by the white male narrator, exemplified by Lucy's explanation for her rape.

Lurie says to Lucy that if she stays, she will be raped again. Lucy replies, "...what if that is the price one has to pay for staying on? Perhaps that is how they look at it; perhaps that is how I should look at it too. They see me as owing something. They see themselves as debt collectors, tax collectors. Why should I be allowed to live here without paying? Perhaps that is what they tell themselves" (*Disgrace*, 158). This is perhaps the most cynical assertion of the book, that not only will the violence continue in a never ending cycle of revenge, but that battle will continue to be fought over the silent female body. Such a suggestion is not an original statement by Coetzee. The key issue here is that this confession by the text about such a reality does not challenge the prevailing hegemonic discourse. It merely inverts the groups within that binary power structure but the oppression of that system remains. The suggestion that this rape will continue as a natural punishment again shifts responsibility away from individuals and leaves its characters powerless in relation to the system they have inherited. The cycle of revenge leaves no basis for values and *Disgrace's* representation of redemption suggests that all any individual can hope for is his or her own salvation through acceptance of their position in life. Lucy accepts her fate as property of Petrus and Lurie accepts his fate as a "dog man", unwanted and near the end of his life. An outcast. This inversion is a problematic feature of the confessional mode as it creates an othering of the self, inverting the power structure instead of making any gesture towards dismantling it.

This type of power inversion is at the heart of Orwell's tale. The narrator says he does not want to shoot the elephant but feels compelled to by what he calls "the real

motives for which despotic governments act” (235). When he finds the elephant he notices a crowd of Burmese followed him and he is surrounded by their gazing yellow faces that expect him to act how they believe white men act. The inscription of the power dynamic between self and other rests in this moment as he pleads, “my whole life, every white man’s life in the East, was one long struggle not to be laughed at” (236). The burden of colonialism is placed on him, the white man. Orwell is trying to point out that the white man must make sacrifices as well for colonialism where he sacrifices his individual sense of values in service of the hegemonic discourse. This inversion of power through the gaze of the silent other is reminiscent of Foucault’s discussion of the Panopticon, an architectural structure where prisoners are separated into individual cells in a peripheral ring facing a guard tower in the middle. The key to this structure is the power dynamic it creates. The structure exercises an awesome display of power through a simple principle: the prisoners can be viewed at all times by the guard in the tower but they can never see the guard. Thus, the Panopticon’s power lies in its ability to force the prisoners to behave in continuous fear despite the fact they are not continually watched. As Foucault says, “visibility is a trap” (*Discipline and Punish*, 200). This sentiment is exploited in *Shooting an Elephant*, but in reverse. Orwell’s narrator is the tower guard but the tower is removed and the prisoners can all see this power they have been conditioned to fear. However, his visibility disempowers him; it is a trap and the narrator is compelled to prove himself worthy of their fear as a representative of the white imperialist self regardless of what his individual self believes.

Orwell’s narrator becomes an author of the hegemonic discourse responsible for reinscribing the power dynamic through an exercise of its violent power. The violence

that was not necessary to control the prisoners/subaltern is needed when the tower is removed and the narrator fills that need. As Foucault states, the Panopticon is a “machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates [the other] should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearer” (*Discipline and Punish*, 201). Foucault understood the mutual dependence of the Panopticon’s power dynamic. Orwell’s narrator exists in the moment when that dependence is open to question, where the machine is vulnerable. But, as a cog in the machine, even a self-aware cog, the narrator chooses to reinforce the apparatus, to exercise a power that usually exists independent of him in order to maintain the viability of that illusion. Under the pressure of the expectant gaze, the narrator realizes “that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys”, that he “wears a mask, and his face grows to fit it” (238). This moment can be seen as one of growth from boyhood to manhood as defined in the colonial context. The subaltern other crowded around him is waiting for him to prove his manhood/whiteness. He carries a phallus, the elephant gun. At the moment where he is challenged he shoots the elephant, over and over again, unloading his ammunition. The suggestion here is that the narrator is forced by the hegemonic discourse to fill that mask of violence despite his liberal guilt.

As the tower is removed from the guard he becomes an object in the eyes of the inmates, of the “other”. Becoming an object of their gaze is what makes the narrator aware of his subjectivity and the so-called burden associated with it. This is an othering of the “self” where the narrator essentializes his position and that of the other as both subject to the will of the empire. His confession of his subjectivity, of the illusion of power and the power of illusion is an inversion of the power dynamic. Of course, such an

othering of the self is not an equal inversion, just as David Lurie's silence about his act as the rapist cannot be equated with Lucy's silence as a rape victim. Lurie also experiences a fall from the tower, or as Mr. Isaacs says to him, "how are the mighty fallen" (*Disgrace*, 167)! Lurie then thinks how he does not feel mighty but "obscure and growing obscurer. A figure on the margins of history." Here, Lurie others himself disregarding the abuse of power that led him to his self proclaimed obscurity. To equate either of these white male narrators with their subaltern counterparts is to ignore the essential difference that lingers in their subject position.

Disgrace does honour some difference when Lurie admits he cannot pretend to know what happened to Lucy because it would be hard for him to imagine being the woman getting raped. His experience only allows him to imagine being the rapist. In *Shooting an Elephant* however, the terms of signification are inverted in ways that ignore this difference. The inversion of the Panopticon through the removal of the tower creates an opportunity for the narrator to redefine the signifier and the signified. The narrator engages in rhetoric that is largely anti-imperial in its sentiment by questioning the authenticity of the colonial "self". He indicates how hollow and superficial the entire power structure is that defines both the self and the other. However, this confession is no challenge to the power structure because the inversion of that dynamic takes place for an audience who already benefits from that power. Orwell also suggests the Englishman is silenced through the oppressive empire while the other in his essay never speaks a word.

A real challenge to the power dynamic would be a confession to the other. This would arm the other with evidence to dispute their essential inferiority. Orwell also fails to do this when the narrator chooses to shoot the elephant. A refusal to do so would have

provided the other a reason to question the superiority of the self. The other is the audience that needs to be addressed more openly, that needs to be empowered by the truth behind the illusion of how they have been defined. This is ignored both through the confession and the real time action. Instead, Orwell's audience is the colonial self, and thus, any inversion of power is only conceptual. The signified self is thus reinscribed and this confession is merely an exercise of power as the signified other is not made privy to the process of signification. Violence is used as the language to turn the white male narrator into a metonym for superiority. Violence is the rhetoric used to link the signifier (white male) to the signified (dominant). The narrator describes himself as a "sahib" to the subaltern, appropriating a native term of respect. The inversion of power, the othering of the self can thus be read as superficial in that the white man's struggle is to come to terms with his responsibility as the power holder while the subaltern must overcome his/her powerlessness.

Orwell and Coetzee describe flaws in the fantasy of hegemonic discourse. Orwell criticizes the idea of white superiority as it is understood in the discourse just as Coetzee critique's confession as inviting injustice instead of creating justice. Both point to the self-destructive aspects of such popular delusions. Race, sex, gender, etc. are all identities used to divide those inside and outside the hegemonic discourse. The existence of the subaltern is a position of subordination defined by the hegemonic discourse by identities such as race. In a colonial and post-colonial context personal identity is political precisely because identity was defined by the imperialist project as a societal organizing principle characterized by dominance and subordination.

However, it is not to say that nothing significant can be taken from Orwell or Coetzee if one were to disagree with this essay's argument. Through their subject positions, both

works display an anxiety of the white male that is of particular note in the confessional mode of colonial/post-colonial literature. Ranajit Guha says that despite Orwell's invalid liberalism in *Shooting an Elephant*, the essay does demonstrate the moment of the white male's anxiety, his confusion under the weight of the empire. While neither Guha nor this essay would argue such confusion justifies the actions of these individuals, their anxiety does constitute a sign of weakness in the power dynamic. As each of these white male narrators trembles, it is either the genesis or continuation of doubt rippling through the hegemonic discourse. It is a sign of change, or at least the prospect of change. As Guha says, in Orwell's essay liberal imperatives were "singed by anxiety and then brought back, however momentarily...From that moment the raj would no longer be the same to it again. For it had caught a glimpse of freedom in the flash of time's passing, and had known if only for the duration of a blink, the possibility of not being home in empire" (493). In this imperial subject position, the individual took a breath. The face behind the mask became self-aware. If the confessional mode can provide anything, it can express the white man's burden; the depth of the struggle for dissolving destructive terms of difference by representing how confession works, as Kipling wrote, "To veil the threat of terror/And check the show of pride;/By open speech and simple".

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