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The Ethics of Proximity in Literature:

An Ethical Reading of Immediacy in

J.M. Coetzee's *Age of Iron* and *Foe*

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Abstract

In this project, I present a reading of ethics and politics in John Maxwell Coetzee's *Foe* (1986) and *Age of Iron* (1990) based on Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy on proximity. By deploying the ethics of proximity into the ethical reading of the relationships between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil in *Age of Iron* and between Susan and Friday in *Foe*, a sense of resistance towards the political dimensions of violence is established. The consciousness of life in South Africa are an inevitable background presence in both of the novels. In *Age of Iron*, the political context of apartheid incorporates the discursive modes of systematic rule, racial classification and retributive violence and in *Foe*, the tracings of colonial oppression are detected in Friday's tortured body and the silencing of his figure in the text. In the ethical reading of the immediacy in the relationship between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil, a sense of ethical peace originating in the fellowship with the other human is distinguished, which destabilizes the dimensions of violence in the political context of apartheid. In *Foe*, I adapt Levinas' philosophy on proximity and language into the ethical reading of the contact between Susan and Friday in the island setting of the novel. In the relationship of proximity between these particular characters, a sense of pure communication is illuminated, which enables a sense of healing in the text.

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Table of Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	A Reading on Ethics and Politics in <i>Age of Iron</i> and <i>Foe</i>	1
1.2	J.M. Coetzee's Authorship	2
1.3	The International Reception of J.M. Coetzee's Fiction	2
1.4	The Ethics of Particularity <i>Age of Iron</i>	4
1.5	Political Silencing in <i>Foe</i>	6
1.6	The Social Dimensions of Levinas' Ethical Philosophy	7
1.7	The Ethical Implication of the Relation to the Other	8
1.8	Attridge's Ethics of Responsibility	9
1.9	Project Outline	10
2	The Theoretical Framework of the Project	12
2.1	The Ethics of Proximity in <i>Age of Iron</i>	12
2.1.1	The Ethical Experience of Responsibility	16
2.2	Levinas' Philosophy on Proximity and Language in <i>Foe</i>	19
2.2.1	The Metaphor of the Violated Body in Ledbetter's Narrative Ethics	21
2.2.2	Derrida's Criticism of Western Metaphysics	23
3	An Ethical Reading of Proximity and Peace in <i>Age of Iron</i>	25
3.1	The Dimensions of Violence in the Political Context of Apartheid	25
3.2	The Ethical Reading of the Fellowship with the Other	29
4	An Ethical Reading of the Original Language in <i>Foe</i>	41
4.1	The Metaphor of the Violated Body and the Silencing of Friday	41
4.2	The Ethical Reading of the Relationship of Proximity	48
5	Conclusion	55
	Works cited	66

1 Introduction

1.1 A Reading of Ethics and Politics in *Age of Iron* and *Foe*

John Maxwell Coetzee's work regularly explores the limits of understanding radical otherness and a number of critics have interrogated the ethical dimensions of Coetzee's work from readings of Emmanuel Levinas (Vold 99). One of the central literary critics working on Coetzee's writing from a Levinasian perspective is Derek Attridge, who insists that "[a] consistent aspect of Coetzee's technique is to deny any ethical guidance from an authoritative voice or valorizing metalanguage" (Attridge cited in Vold 100). According to Simon Critchley, the dominant trend in the reception of Emmanuel Levinas' work can be summarized in a single phrase: "ethics is first philosophy" (161). He clarifies how in Levinas' philosophy, the most ordained fact of human experience is the face-to-face relation with the other human (*autrui*), which is described in "*Paix et proximité*" in terms of peace and love (161). Further, he points out that a question that is often raised with regard to this conception of ethics is the following:

[w]hat is the relation between the experience of the face-to-face and the spheres of reason, law, justice and universality, which in the western liberal tradition at least, are at the basis of the organization of society, ensuring the legitimacy of institutions and underwriting the rights and duties of citizens? In brief, what is the relation between ethics and politics? (161)

In this project, I present a reading on ethics and politics by adapting Levinas' philosophy on proximity into an ethical reading of the relationships between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil in *Age of Iron* and between Susan Barton and Friday in *Foe*, both novels written by J.M. Coetzee in South Africa during apartheid. By incorporating the ethics of proximity into the ethical reading of the relationships between these particular characters, I demonstrate how the political dimensions of violence are challenged. The consciousness of life in South Africa is an inevitable background presence in both of the novels. In the political context of apartheid in *Age of Iron*, the discursive modes of systematic rule, racial classification and retributive violence are incorporated, and in *Foe*, the tracing of colonial oppression is revealed in Friday's violated body and the silencing of his figure in the text. In the ethical reading of the immediacy distinguished between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil, a sense of ethical peace is

transfigured, and in the contact between Susan and Friday, a language infused with the ethical experience of sensibility is illuminated. The intention for my project is to establish how the ethical reading of the proximity distinguished in the relationships between these particular characters motivates a sense of resistance towards the political dimensions of violence in the novels.

1.2 J.M. Coetzee's Authorship

Coetzee was born in Cape Town in 1940 and his upbringing was affected by cultural difference because of his situation as an English-speaking South African (Head 22). He is well known as a South African writer and both *Foe* (1986) and *Age of Iron* (1990) are recognized as his early fiction and were published in the late period of apartheid. The historical context of Coetzee's early fiction is the period in which the apartheid system was entering a phase of brutal consolidation: the two decades preceding the elevation to power of President F.W. De Klerk in 1989, the release of Nelson Mandela from prison in 1990, the extension of voting rights to Africans in 1991 and the dismantling of the apartheid regime with the landslide election victory of the Afrikaner National Congress in 1994 (Bewes 137). Coetzee lived and worked in the country until the end of the regime in 1990 and he witnessed the political difficulties of the transition to democratic government. The South African context permeated his writing until he emigrated to Australia in 2002. His novels have embodied a form of intellectual challenge to both the late-colonial violence and oppression of apartheid, and to the dangers of retributive violence in the period of transition to democratic rule (Head 22). As will become clear in the reading of my project, as a writer, Coetzee is distanced from the traditions of the late-colonial Afrikaner identity, with which the apartheid regime was affiliated.

1.3 The International Reception of J.M. Coetzee's Fiction

In *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event*, Attridge mentions that Coetzee's fiction is often associated with "postmodernism" because of its use of antirealist devices, its allusiveness and its metafictional components (3). According to Attridge, Coetzee's fiction is more an example of late modernist writing because his works follow Kafka and Beckett and because his novels raise questions about the practice of formal innovation and disruption, which begin in the modernist period (3). In Coetzee's writing, Attridge focuses on the technique of self-reflexiveness with its "foregrounding of its own linguistic figurative and generic operations, its willed interference with the transparency of

discourse as informing a new apprehension of otherness” (3). He claims that Coetzee has extended and revitalized modernist practices in the development of a mode of writing that allows the attentive reader to live through “the pressures and possibilities, and also the limits, of political engagement” (6). For Attridge, Coetzee’s handling of formal properties is tied with his works capacity to engage with the staging, confronting, apprehending and exploring of otherness and this engagement raises the most fundamental issues involved in any consideration of ethics and politics.

In “Constructions of Apartheid in the International Reception of the Novels of J.M. Coetzee”, Barnett points out that Coetzee’s novels are often valued to the extent that they escape the received conventions of politically committed literature (290). In reviews, Coetzee is positioned both as part of a tradition committed anti-apartheid writing, but also a writer whose work succeeds in escaping conventions of politically committed fiction and thus elevating itself to the status of “art” (291). According to Barnett, South African literature is often read in terms of a pre-existing set of understandings and characters are regularly placed into a drama based on racial division. Further, he says out that if characters are expected to accord to a racialized understanding of South Africa, then in turn this racialized lens is understood in polarized, binary terms. Accordingly, *Age of Iron* is understood to be a novel treating “the effects of apartheid on the psyches of both the oppressor and the oppressed” (294). Barnett suggests that such an understanding fails to register the ways in which the protagonists of Coetzee’s novels rarely belong to this sort of easy binary division. Rather, they tend to be figures on the margin of the racialized conflict that defined apartheid in the western imagination. He underlines that this exploration of the multiplicity of positions and identities in South Africa is one of the characteristics that recommends Coetzee’s novels as distinctively “post-apartheid” novels (294). Further, he points out that the most recent phase of the international reception of Coetzee’s fiction is connected to the emergence of post-colonial theories of culture, difference and identity. The textual inscription of ambivalence and ambiguity is identified as the exemplary feature of post-colonial literature. Barnett says that it is this sort of construction of literary “post-coloniality”, which elevates the writing of Coetzee, characterized as it is by its “overt inter-textual references to canonical novels, by tropes of allegory and mimicry, and by a studied ambivalence of narration”, into the canon of post-colonial literature (298).

In *J.M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing*, David Attwell introduces Coetzee’s first six novels as constituting a form of postmodern metafiction. He describes Coetzee’s oeuvre (up to *Age of Iron*) as a form of situational metafiction, with a particular

relation to the cultural and political discourses of South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s (1). Attwell describes how Coetzee leans towards a reflexive examination of the constitutive role of language in placing the subject within history. However, as a South African, he cannot avoid having to deal with his national situation. Attwell points out that every attempt in Coetzee's novels to hold South Africa at a distance by means of "strategically nonspecific settings or socially improbable protagonists", simply confirms the intensity and necessity of this struggle (3). Further, Attwell explains that it has often been remarked that Coetzee writes within a western European tradition. In South Africa, however, Coetzee writes as a citizen of the first world within the third and therefore, he addresses the problem of cultural authority (3). Attwell says that Coetzee's relationship with the European canon entails an accusation of complicity in a history of domination and that his response to this situation is to interrogate the specific form of marginality he represents. According to Attwell, in Coetzee's post-coloniality, he brings that situation to light and finds fictional forms wherein it can be objectified, named and questioned (4). The criticism presented by Attridge, Barnett and Attwell is relevant for contextualizing Coetzee as a writer and for establishing a framework of my inquiry of both of his novels. *Foe* is regarded as a highly literary work and postcolonial reworking of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. In my inquiry of this novel, the historical and political tracing of oppression is articulated in the reading of the mutilated Friday, who is a former slave in the novel. There are no direct references to apartheid or colonial history, but in the reading of Friday's mutilated tongue, a signification of historical oppression is signaled. *Age of Iron* is recognized as Coetzee's most realist novel because of its factual settings and factual details. Further, I introduce *Age of Iron* and *Foe* and I mention criticism that I think is relevant for contextualizing my inquiry of the novels.

1.4 The Ethics of Particularity *Age of Iron*

Age of Iron is set during apartheid in Cape Town, South Africa, and takes the form of a letter, written by the elderly Mrs. Curren to her daughter living in North America. Mrs. Curren is a retired classics lecturer and she has been opposed to apartheid all her life, but throughout the novel, she is confronted with the brutality of the system. The hounding by the police of her housecleaner Florence's son Bheki, the burning of a nearby black township and the murder by security forces of a refugee, seeking shelter in her house. The novel begins on the day Mrs. Curren's illness of terminal bone cancer has been diagnosed and when Vercueil appears seeking shelter outside of her house. Vercueil is an alcoholic vagabond, who becomes a kind of angel of death to her. He is her only companion and the one person, whom Mrs.

Curren confesses her mounting anger and despair. Coetzee gives 1986-9 as the dates of composition, which was a period when South Africa was governed under a State of Emergency, and the scenes of Township violence clearly evoke the unrest in Cape Town of 1986 (Head 67). In the novel, there are several uncharacteristically direct references to the historical and political context of apartheid, and this sense of the novel's embeddedness in its immediate history makes it Coetzee's most engaged novel in the narrow historical and political sense and the kind of intervention he has usually resisted (Head 67). In my inquiry of the novel, the historical and political context of apartheid is made up by the discursive modes of systematic rule, racial classification and retributive violence. In the political context of apartheid, interpersonal relationships are imbued with hostility and violence and a sense of resistance is enabled in the ethical reading of the relationship between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil. In the ethical reading of the immediacy distinguished between these characters, a bond of responsibility is illuminated, which destabilizes the discursive modes of systematic rule, racial classification and retributive violence in the novel.

In "Truth and Love Together at Last: Style, Form and Moral Vision in *Age of Iron*", Samantha Vice discerns the tension between politics and ethics in a reading of Coetzee's novel. According to Vice, in this novel, the ethical requires the sensitive discernment and appreciation of the significant features of each situation, while the political, on the other hand, requires the singleness of purpose, which is demonstrated by Bheki, John and their comrades, and the natural condition for this, they think, is that abstraction from particularity with which the impartial point of view is often associated (303). However, Vice points out that the real conflict of the novel is between a movement of *abstraction* that notices only generalities, on the one hand, and an insistence on detail and particularity on the other (303). She clarifies how the ethical is the realm of the individual, the particular, and that we may suppose, though it is never put in these terms, the web of partial connections and interests that attach individuals to one another and upon which our flourishing so largely depends (304). The sense of singleness of purpose, which Vice discusses in relation to Bheki's character and the comradeship of black opposition is relevant for my ethical inquiry of the political dimensions of violence in the novel. The setting of apartheid is made up by structures of violence, and in the ethical reading, I put emphasis on the particularity of the characters of Mrs. Curren and Vercueil and how their relationship is utterly particular and concrete in the novel. In the ethical reading of the contact between these particular characters, a sense of ethical peace is transfigured, which overturns the political dimensions of violence in the novel.

1.5 Political Silencing in *Foe*

Foe takes place in the second decade of the eighteenth century and reveals the retellings of Susan Barton to the acclaimed author Mr. Foe about her unusual life spent cast away on an island with a man called Cruso and his mutilated companion Friday. The novel begins when Susan is washed up on the deserted island after being shipwrecked in search of her daughter, who was abducted by an Englishman to the New World. After a short and uneventful sojourn on the island, they are returned to England and because Cruso dies on the return passage, Susan takes on the responsibility for Friday. She seeks out Mr. Foe in order to have her island story recorded, but she realizes that she needs Friday's help, whose tongue has been cut out. The novel is a postcolonial reworking of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (Head 62). In conventional accounts, *Robinson Crusoe* is a canonical English text known for embodying the great myth of western imperialism in the way it embraces the idea of "civilizing" unknown territories and indigenous inhabitants, as a form of heroic endurance. It is this taint of historical colonialism that serves Coetzee's purpose well, because he is able to observe a pointed historical correspondence: "*Robinson Crusoe* was published in 1719, which is also the era of early Dutch settlement in South Africa, the Dutch East India Company having established a settlement at Cape Town in 1652" (Head 62). This suggests an association between the origin between the English novel and the origins of colonialism in South Africa, both emanations of European imperialism with a common ideology of superiority (Head 62). However, Coetzee is never as simplistic as this. In an interview in *Doubling the Point*, he suggests that *Foe* is a tribute to eighteenth-century English prose style (Attwell 146).

In "Oppressive Silence: J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* and the Politics of Canonization" Attridge states that it was in *Foe*, Coetzee made canonic intertextuality a fundamental principle: "the novel's manner is to fuse together, the biography of Daniel Defoe and those of several of Defoe's fictional characters" (169). In the article, Attridge asserts that the unproblematic notion of a canon is complicit with a mode of literature and criticism, which dehistoricizes and dematerializes the acts of writing and reading while promoting a myth of transcendent human truths and values (171). However, he states:

mode of fiction that exposes the ideological basis of canonization, that draws attention to its own relation to the existing canon, that thematizes the role of race, class, and gender in the processes of cultural acceptance and exclusion, and that, while speaking from a marginal location, addresses the question of marginality would have to be seen

as engaged in an attempt to break the silence in which so many are caught, even if it does so by literary means that have traditionally been celebrated as characterizing canonic art. (171)

According to Attridge, a more careful reading of Coetzee's novel shows these qualities. He says that *Foe*'s most telling challenge to the literary canon is its representation of non-representations, of the silence, which is constitutive of canonicity itself. Then he points out that all canons rests on exclusions, the voice they give to some can be heard only by virtue of the silence they impose on others. To be made aware of this exclusion, is to be reminded of the violence implied in canonization, in the construction of cultural narratives, in the granting of voice to one individual or one group, necessary and productive as that process is. In enforcing this awareness, Coetzee's novels engage directly with the contemporary struggle of South Africa, doing so, not primarily as political argument, vivid reportage or moral allegory, but as an exploitation of the traditions and potencies of the novel understood as a central form in western culture (pp.181-82).

Attridge ends his reading on *Foe* with a utopian thought: "[i]t would be that the canonization – however partial and uneven of Coetzee's novels, along with other texts fictional and otherwise that question the very processes of canonicity itself, will slowly transform the ideology and the institutions from which the canon derives its power, so that new and presently unimaginably ways of finding a voice, and new ways of hearing such voices, come into being" ("Oppressive Silence" 186). In this project and in my inquiry of the novel, I put emphasis on how Friday's figure is a victim of colonial oppression and how signs of historical oppression are explicated in the assumptions of eurocentrism and logocentrism associated with Susan's understanding of language. I disclose how the indications of his tortured body and the silencing of his character represent the violence of the text and how his violated body points the reader towards the narrative's ethic. In the ethical reading of the novel, by introducing Levinas' philosophy on proximity and language, I suggest that a language determined by the ethical experience of sensibility is illuminated in the contact between Susan and Friday, which enables a sense of healing in the text.

1.6 The Social Dimensions of Levinas' Ethical Philosophy

The social dimensions of Levinas' ethical philosophy relate to the ethical reading of both of the novels, and particularly in the character of Mrs. Curren and the contact between her character and Vercueil in *Age of Iron*. In *Discovering Levinas*, Michael L. Morgan

introduces Levinas as a phenomenologist of human experience, whose goal is to reveal frequently ignored and occluded dimensions of social existence (296). The social dimensions of his thinking concern responsibility as a blending of obligation and reciprocity. Morgan says that if Levinas is right, social life has this dimension: “each of us is infinitely responsible to each and for each and every other person. That is a fact about social existence, indeed the most basic fact about it, and it is a fact that unites a call and a response” (296). Morgan explains that what this means is that “an ought” precedes every experience we have, every decision, act and so forth (296). According to Morgan, Levinas says that each of us must respond to the utter particularity of each other person because that particular person, indeed every particular person, makes a claim, which calls for acknowledgement and acceptance. Levinas’ point is not about ethical theories, but rather about life insofar as it is ethical or religious or valuable and significant for us (297). Morgan also Levinas’ understanding of the encounter between the self and the other person is concrete and particular. It is not an idea or a concept nor a type of action or event. It is concrete reality, an occurrent event: it occurs. Furthermore, it occurs utter particular: “The self is a particular person, and the face-of-the-other is a particular revelation of a particular person” (Morgan 61). In the ethical reading of Coetzee’s novels, I put emphasis on the implication of particularity by focusing on the characters of Mrs. Curren and Vercueil and Susan and Friday. I focus on the particularity of each of these characters and the particularity of the relationships between these characters. The contact between these characters is concrete and particular. The ethical implication of the face-to-face relation motivates a sense of resistance towards the political dimensions of violence. The underwriting of the fact of the ethical relation is implied in the ethical reading of the novels.

1.7 The Ethical Implication of the Relation to the Other

In *The Singularity of Literature*, Attridge conceptualizes an ethical understanding of the relation to the other. He explains how otherness is produced in an active or event-like relation: “a particular act that prescribes a notion of relating” (29). According to Attridge, there is no “absolute other” if this refers to a wholly transcendent other, unrelated to any empirical particularity (29). He states: “[t]here is an implication of relation- or a relating – between me, as the same, and that which, its uniqueness, is heterogeneous to me and interrupts my sameness. If I succeed in responding adequately to the otherness and singularity of the other, it is the other in its relating to me – always in a specific time and place – to which I am responding” (30). The purpose of responding to the otherness of the other person is to

remodel the existing norms whereby we understand persons as a category and in that refiguring enables a manner of responding to the other (33). In Attridge's ethical account on literature, he focuses on the relationship between the literary work and the reader, and the reader's sense of responsibility. In this project, I further develop his approach by focusing on the ethical implication of the relationships between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil and Susan and Friday. The ethical reading of the novels are established when the figures of otherness, Vercueil and Friday are in contact with Mrs. Curren and Susan. I explore the ways in which Mrs. Curren and Susan are constituted by their relationships with Vercueil and Fridays in the novels. A sense of responsibility is implied in the ethical relation to the other, which is constitutive of Susan and particularly of Mrs. Curren's character.

1.8 Attridge's Ethics of Responsibility

In *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event*, Attridge promotes Coetzee's writing to raise questions on current debates within literary studies and more widely in the case of ethics. Attridge says that the impulses and acts, which shape us as ethical beings, impulses and acts such as respect, love and trust can prefigure as natural elements in literature:

An implicit claim is [...] that the impulses and acts that shape our lives as ethical beings – impulses and acts of respect, of love, of trust, of generosity – cannot be adequately represented in the discourses of politics, philosophy, or theology, but are in their natural element in literature; and this is not so much because literature works are capable of mimicking our daily existence and the choices it presents us with, but rather because they are capable of taking us through an intense experience of these other-directed impulses and acts. (xii)

According to Attridge, the inventive literary work should therefore be thought of as an ethically charged event. He explains how the ethical force of literature lies embedded in the aspect of unpredictability. In doing justice to a literary work, we as readers, encounter the singular demand of the other. He promotes Coetzee's fiction because it "both stage, and are, irruptions of otherness into our familiar worlds, and raise the question: what is our responsibility to the other" (xii)? Attridge says that the characters who encounter such irruptions evince a responsibility, and that also the responsibility is in question in the novel's own response to otherness, including that which is other to the tradition of fictional writing in

Western culture and in our responsibility as readers, as citizens, as living beings (xii). He mentions that Coetzee speaks of the fiction writer's sense of "responsibility towards something that has not yet emerged", and Attridge suggests that the process of creation is subject to a similar obligation (Coetzee cited in Attridge xii). I will extend Attridge's reading by claiming that the ethical experience of responsibility is revealed in the reading of the relationships between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil in *Age of Iron* and between Susan and Friday in *Foe*. In the ethical reading of the contact between these particular characters, the implication of proximity is the inauguration of responsibility, sensibility and trust. My reading of the novels focuses on ethics, as I will show how the ethical implication of proximity destabilizes the political dimensions of violence in the novels.

1.9 Project Outline

In this chapter, I have contextualized Coetzee's fiction and the social dimensions of Levinas' philosophy in order to outline the inquiry of my project. In the second chapter of the thesis project, I introduce the theoretical framework for establishing the ethical reading of the political dimensions of the novels. I introduce Levinas' philosophy on proximity and conceptualize his understanding of responsibility and alterity, and I describe how I intend to deploy his understanding of proximity into the ethical reading of the relationships between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil in *Age of Iron* and between Susan and Friday in *Foe*. In the project's theoretical framework, I outline a more comprehensive approach to Levinas' ethical philosophy by introducing secondary scholars, such as Simon Critchley, Michael L. Morgan and Desmond Manderson. I introduce Attridge's literary criticism and his emphasis on responsibility and trusting the other when I present the ethical reading of Coetzee's *Age of Iron*. For the ethical reading of *Foe*, I present an account on Levinas' philosophy on proximity and language, and I introduce Mark Ledbetter's narrative ethics. I will also introduce Jacques Derrida's terming of logocentrism, which is associated with Susan's understanding of language in the political setting of the novel.

In the third chapter, I introduce Coetzee's *Age of Iron* and the ethical reading of the relationship between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil. The ethical relation distinguished in the contact between these two particular characters establishes a sense of resistance towards the novel's political setting where human relationships have become destructive because of systematizations of rule, racial classification and retributive violence. In the ethical reading of the relationship between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil, a structure of ethical peace rooted in the Biblical formula of the responsibility for the other is established, which destabilizes the

political dimensions of violence in the novel. In the fourth chapter of the master's thesis project, I introduce an ethical reading on Coetzee's *Foe*. The violated body of Friday's character both represents a sign of colonial oppression and the narrative's ethic. The political setting is made up by the metaphor of the violated body, and the principles of eurocentrism and logocentrism associated with Susan's understanding of language. Friday's figure is silenced in the dominant setting of the novel, and the silencing of his character represents the violence of the text. In the ethical reading, an original language inaugurated by proximity is illuminated in the contact between Susan and Friday enabling a sense of healing in the text.

In the final chapter of the project, I present a summarized analysis of the ethics of proximity distinguished in the ethical reading of the relationships between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil and Susan and Friday and I compare the novels in connection to my in-depth inquiry of Levinas' ethical philosophy. In *Age of Iron*, the ethical reading of the immediacy distinguished in the relationship between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil challenges the dimensions of political violence associated with the setting of apartheid. A sense ethical peace is grounded in the contact between these characters in the text, and in *Foe*, the relationship of proximity is illuminated in the contact between Susan and Friday, particularly in the island setting of the novel. A language based on sensory experience is recognized in the ethical reading of the contact between Susan and Friday, which enables a sense of healing in the text. In the conclusion, after comparing how the ethics proximity is distinguished in both of the novels and how the ethical reading of the contact between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil and between Susan and Friday enables a sense of resistance towards the political dimensions of violence, I attempt to disclose how the sense of immediacy illuminated in the ethical reading of the relationships between these particular characters can open for a broader discussion on the ethics of literature.

2 The Theoretical Framework of the Project

2.1 The Ethics of Proximity in *Age of Iron*

In *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Emmanuel Levinas says that the absolute and proper meaning of proximity presupposes “humanity” (81). He claims that the comprehension of approach, neighborhood and contact is resting on proximity. Then he explains how proximity signifies a sense of restlessness outside the place of rest and that the most accurate understanding of the term relates to the experience of the embrace:

[Proximity] overwhelms the calm of the non-ubiquity of a being, which becomes a rest in site. No site then, is ever sufficiently a proximity, like an embrace. [...]
Proximity, as the ‘closer and closer’, becomes the subject. It attains it superlative as my incessant restlessness, becomes unique, then one, forgets reciprocity, as in a love that does not expect to be shared. Proximity is the subject that approaches and consequently constitutes a relationship in which I participate as a term, but where I am more or less than a term. (82)

Levinas’ designation of how proximity is comprehended through the experience of the embrace is reflected in the ethical reading of the relationships between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil and Susan and Friday. The experience of the embrace is signifying of the contact between these characters in both of the novels. In the chapter on *Age of Iron*, I will disclose how the experience of the embrace implicates a sense of proximity that establishes a structure of peace in the setting of apartheid where the systematization of rule, racial classification and retributive violence reflect dimensions of violence in the novel. The depiction of the element of the embrace is also a part of the ethical reading of *Foe*, but I will focus on how it is related to Levinas’ understanding of language and sensibility. By introducing Levinas’ ethical philosophy on language and sensibility, I will disclose how the experience of the embrace illuminates a sense of healing in the political setting of the novel. Friday’s violated body represents a sign of colonial oppression and by illuminating Levinas’ ethical philosophy on proximity and his understanding of language and sensibility, a sense of healing is enabled in the text. The violated body of Friday’s character represents a sign of historical oppression in the political setting, and I will argue, by introducing Levinas’ ethics on proximity and his understanding of language and sensibility, a sense of healing is enabled in the text.

For Levinas, proximity is the proper signification of subjectivity. He describes proximity as extending the subject in its very subjectivity, which is both a relationship, and a term of this relationship. Proximity is the immediacy of a skin and a face (86). Levinas' philosophy on proximity signifies the principle of the-one-for-the-other, and he claims that it is in proximity that every commitment is made. He holds proximity as an immediacy older than the abstractness of nature. Proximity is contact with the other and to be in contact is neither to invest the other and annul his alterity, nor to suppress oneself in the other (86). Levinas also explains how proximity is a disturbance of time:

Proximity, suppression of the distance that consciousness... involves, opens the distance of a diachrony without a common present, where difference is the past that cannot be caught up with, an unimaginable future, the non-representable status of the neighbor behind which I am late and obsessed by the neighbor. This difference is my non-indifference to the other. Proximity is a disturbance of the rememrable time. (89)

I focus on the immediacy between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil in the ethical reading of *Age of Iron*. Mrs. Curren's acknowledging and acceptance of Vercueil is constitutive of her sense of self in the novel. The first encounter between these two characters takes place in the first passage of the novel when Mrs. Curren has been diagnosed with terminal bone cancer, and I disclose how the proximity represents a disturbance of time. Both Mrs. Curren and Susan encounter Vercueil and Friday in the first passages of the novels and the ethical structure of proximity is introduced in the immediacy between the characters with the indication of the principle of the one-for-the-other in the texts.

In *Alterity and Transcendence*, translated by Michael B. Smith, Levinas presents a volume consisting of twelve texts, and in this thesis project I relate "Beyond Dialogue", "The Proximity of the Other" and "Peace and Proximity" to the ethical reading of *Age of Iron*. In "Beyond Dialogue" Levinas talks about the beginning of philosophy by referring to a philosophy of dialogue that cannot be an ethics. He explains how the original dialogue is situated "beyond the dialogue" in that it testifies to "the search of a proximity beyond ideas exchanged a proximity that persists after dialogue has become impossible" (87). In "The Proximity of the Other", Levinas claims that all thought is subordinated to the ethical relation and to the infinitely other in the other person (98). He asserts that before the conception of the human, there is an attentiveness for the other: "[t]he transcendental I in its nakedness comes from the awakening by and for the other" (98). In *Age of Iron*, I focus on the ethical relation

between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil and I disclose how the proximity is determinative of the contact between these particular characters and the character of Mrs. Curren in the novel. The proximity to Vercueil's character is constitutive of Mrs. Curren's sense of self.

I focus on Levinas' "Peace and Proximity" when I disclose how the ethical reading of the contact between these characters configures a sense of ethical peace in the novel. Critchley introduces "Peace and Proximity" by explaining how Levinas' view of western philosophy is associated with the domination of totalizing forms of politics and the reduction of the ethical to the political. The concern of the transition from ethics to politics is explained through the theme of Europe, and what Levinas refers to as "the crisis of Europe" (Levinas cited in Critchley" 161). This crisis is the consequence of an ambiguity at the center of the European liberal tradition, where the attempt to establish a political order of peace on the "Greek wisdom" of autonomy, solidarity and reciprocity becomes a guilty conscience that recognizes how this political order has often legitimized the violence of imperialism, colonialism and genocide. Critchley points out that at the end of the article, it becomes clear that Levinas does not want to reject the order of political rationality, but rather, criticize the assumption that political rationality is the only measure for addressing political problems. He explains how Levinas aims to show how the order of the state rests upon the irreducible ethical responsibility of the face-to-face relation (161). According to Critchley, Levinas argues that the European political order should presuppose another order of peace, located in the fellowship with the other human, an order based on sociality and love. Levinas suggests that Europe's unique attachment to Greek heritage should be supplemented by a Biblical tradition and the acknowledgement of peace as responsibility to the other (162).

In Levinas' "Peace and Proximity", he focuses on the ethical structure of peace as being rooted in the responsibility for the other:

The relation with the other and the unique, which is peace, comes to require a reason that thematizes and synchronizes and synthesizes, that thinks the world and reflects on being; concepts necessary to the peace of men. Responsibility for the other man is, in its immediacy, certainly prior to all questions. (142)

The ethical structure of the face-to-face relation is irreducible to comprehension and inaugurated by human proximity. Levinas asserts that the ethical structure of peace comes from the responsibility for the other. In my ethical reading of *Age of Iron*, I will disclose how Levinas' understanding of peace as related to the responsibility for the other is illuminated in

the relationship between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil towards the end of the novel. In the political setting of the novel, the dimensions of violence are associated with Afrikaner Nationalism ideology and the militant resistance of the black youth. I incorporate Levinas' philosophy into the analysis of the relationship between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil and I disclose how the ethical reading of the contact between these two particular characters manifests a sense of ethical peace rooted in the responsibility for the other. I argue that the ethical reading of the order of peace disclosed in the contact between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil destabilizes the political dimensions of systematic rule, racial classification and retributive violence in the novel. I disclose how a sense of ethical peace is distinguished in the relationship between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil, which is rooted in the Biblical tradition of the responsibility for the other.

The ethical imperative of responsibility is constitutive of Mrs. Curren's sense of self in the novel. In order to clarify the distinction between proximity and responsibility in my ethical reading of the contact between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil, I introduce Manderson's *Proximity, Levinas and the Soul of Law*. I also refer to Manderson's view on Joseph Libertson's philosophy on proximity when I discuss the connection between proximity and human dependency in the novel. According to Manderson, Levinas' writing is marked by his insistency on proximity as something non-conceptual and nonintentional and by his connecting the neighbor, *le prochain*, with this kind of approach (101). Manderson refers to Libertson's argument of proximity as neither a communion with others, in the sense of a social origin for responsibility such as correlated with distributive justice, nor our separation from others as an individualistic origin for responsibility, such as related to corrective justice. According to Manderson, both Levinas and Libertson claim that proximity involves a critique of these alternative modes of understanding responsibility (102). To approach someone is not to re-present them, but to preserve something of their unique and non-representable alterity. Proximity stands for this intimate but unassailable distance and the ethical obligation it places on us. On the other hand, relationships of proximity constitute us as human beings: they do not "collide with freedom, but invest it" (Libertson quoted in Manderson 102). The responsibility arises from the particularity of a relationship. According to Manderson, Levinas does not perceive proximity as a responsibility to the whole world, but a responsibility to those whom we experience as a face or a touch. Manderson argues that for Levinas, proximity is in fact the origin of responsibility. Proximity is the experience that enables us to behold responsibility and that is its role in ethics and law. Proximity does not limit responsibility: "it augurs and inaugurates it" (103). In the novel, I disclose how the imperative of responsibility

is inaugurated by a sense of immediacy between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil, and how a reckoning of human dependency is illuminated in the ethical reading of the contact between these two particular characters in the text.

2.1.1 The Ethical Experience of Responsibility

In Levinas' thinking, responsibility is set forth as the determinative structure of subjectivity ("Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence" xiii). According to Lingis, Levinas holds responsibility as a form of recognition. This form of recognition is not a cognitive act of identifying, re-presenting, or re-cognizing the other. Responsibility is effected in expressive acts by which one expresses oneself and exposes oneself to the other: "[r]esponsibility is enacted not only in one's offering one's properties or one's possessions to the other, but in giving one's own substance for the other. The figure of maternity is an authentic figure of responsibility" ("Otherwise than being or Beyond Essence" xiii). Levinas' designation of responsibility as the determinative structure of subjectivity is incorporated into Mrs. Curren's character. The ethical experience of responsibility is set forth as determinative of her sense of self in the novel. The imperative of responsibility is significant for establishing how the ethical reading of the contact between her character and Vercueil destabilizes the political context of apartheid. In the ethical reading, I explore ways in which Mrs. Curren exemplifies a figure of maternity, and how in her character, an authentic figure of responsibility can be disclosed. In *Foe*, the figure of maternity is illuminated in Susan's character when she caresses Friday's body on the return passage to England. Rather than focusing on the ethical implication of responsibility in the ethical reading of *Foe*, I disclose how the experience of the caress distinguishes a language of sensibility.

In the introduction of *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Lingis clarifies Levinas' understanding of responsibility. For Levinas, responsibility is a response to the imperative addressed in the concrete act of facing. Responsibility is in fact a relationship with the other, in his very alterity. Then a relationship with alterity as such is constitutive of subjectivity (xiii). Lingis explains how alterity is not given to a comprehensive initiative; the structure of alterity is experienced through sensibility. One is passive with regard to the approach of alterity, the subject sustains its impact without being able to assimilate it, and one is susceptible to being affected, being exalted and being pained (xvii). He points out that while Levinas conceives the being-affected by material being in positive terms such as sustenance, over and beyond information, it is especially as pain and outrage that he conceives the impact of alterity (xviii). Further, Lingis explains how being exposed to alterity

is the very experience of immediacy. The subject is exposed to alterity before it can gather itself up and take a stand and this closeness without a distance, is what Levinas calls proximity:

The other, my neighbor (*le prochain*) concerns, afflicts me with a closeness (*proximité*) closer than the closeness of entities (*prae-ens*). The relationship with alterity, which is what escapes apprehension, exceeds all comprehension, is infinitely remote, is, paradoxically enough, the most extreme immediacy, proximity closer than presence, obsessive contact". (xix)

In *Age of Iron* and *Foe*, the structure of alterity is associated with the characters of Vercueil and Friday. Vercueil is a vagrant, who seeks shelter outside of Mrs. Curren's house, and Friday is a former slave with a tortured body. When Mrs. Curren and Susan encounter these characters, they are both subjected to being pained and being exalted. Susan is exposed to alterity when she learns that it was Friday's former slaveholders, who cut out his tongue. Friday is a silenced figure in the novel, which also represents a structure of alterity in the text. Vercueil is an alcohol-dependent vagrant, who challenges Mrs. Curren's habits of orderliness, cleanness and her principles on moral responsibility, obligation and charity. Both of the female protagonists are exposed to alterity in the very experience of immediacy in the relationships with Vercueil and Friday. I disclose how the structure of alterity is constitutive of Mrs. Curren and Susan in the ethical reading of the novels.

The most well-known Coetzee commentator who relies on Levinas' philosophy in his analysis of Coetzee's fictions is Derek Attridge. According to Dominic Head, in *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event*, Attridge demonstrates, with reference to Coetzee, how his theory of responsible reading is based on an understanding of the "literary work as an event in which the reader brings the work into being, differently each time, in a singular performance of the work" (102). According to Head, this reinstates the idea of the literary effect, and gives place to the unpredictability of literary language (102). Attridge explains how Coetzee's novels can be read as a project of acknowledging alterity, a project that addresses the political and social problems of South Africa, no less urgent since the end of apartheid in 1994 and widely pertinent in its confrontation of the ethical demands of otherness ("Ethics of Reading" 13). He says that figures of alterity return in Coetzee's novels and that usually these figures belong to a subordinated group perceived from the point of view of a western liberalist discourse (13). I find Attridge's analysis important as I move on to

discuss *Age of Iron* and *Foe*. Mrs. Curren and Susan are associated with the western liberalist discourse and Vercueil and Friday are interpreted from their point of view in the texts. Vercueil's character seems to be outside structures of social and political life, and Friday is silenced in the dominant setting of the novel. Both of these characters reflect an aspect of radical otherness in the novels. Neither Vercueil nor Friday is assimilated into the dominant discourses of the novels. Their characters are irreducible to comprehension. In *Foe*, the structure of alterity is reflected in the figure of Friday. The mutilated Friday is a Negro and a former slave, and the companion of Crusoe on the island. The sign of historical oppression is signified in his violated body, and in the reading of this particular novel, I claim that the figure of the suffering body grounds an authorial presence, which enables a sense of resistance towards the western liberalist discourse associated with Susan's character in the novel. The authority of the suffering body is an undeniable power in the text.

J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event is a book that gathers together Attridge's essays on Coetzee, in context of an overarching argument that illustrates the principle of reading established in *The Singularity of Literature* (Head 102). In *The Singularity of Literature*, Attridge seeks to oppose an increasingly instrumental approach to literature, a trend that he presents as "part of a more general, globally experienced increase in weight given to values of the market-place, to the success-ethic, to productivity as a measure of worth" (9). By contrast, responsive and creative reading requires that the reader resists the temptation to read a literary work according to predetermined set of expectations. Such reading "involves a suspension of habits, a willingness to rethink old positions in order to apprehend the work's inaugural power" (80). For Attridge, ethics is the fundamental relation, not just between subjects, but the subject and its multiple others: "Ethics is a relation that is not a relation and that cannot be named because it is prior to relations and names, and prior in fact to logic. We find ourselves already responsible for the other – and this fundamental fact constitutes the artistic sphere as much as it does the ethical" (127). Attridge claims that "ethics concerns persons and not texts, however, if the literary text is an event of signification (human signification), the demands it makes – to respect its otherness, to respond to its singularity, to avoid reducing it to the familiar and the utilitarian even while attempting to understand it – may be ethical in a fundamental, non-metaphorical sense" ("The Ethics of Reading" 12). In this sense, formal innovation is innovation in meanings, and is therefore a form of ethical testing and experiment. However, ethics may be the wrong word according to Attridge, implying as it does a philosophical conceptualization, which the demands of otherness disturb.

He accentuates that the modernist text is through its form, which is to say through its staging of human meanings and intentions, a central challenge at the core of the ethical and political (“The Ethics of Reading” 13). Attridge creates a non-moral discourse of ethics that provides insights into the fundamental conditions of the moral-political domain, the world of rules, programs, categories, without being reduced to them (“The Singularity of Literature” 128). An open and creative approach to reading invokes an ethical responsibility- openness to the otherness and inventiveness of the text- that is paralleled in ethics of literature, or the ethical sense that literature can generate. For Attridge, “to read a literary work responsibly [...] is to read without placing over a grid of possible uses, as historical evidence, moral lesson, path to truth, political inspiration or personal encouragement [...]. It is to trust in the unpredictability of reading, its openness to the future (“The Singularity of Literature” pp. 129-30)”. The inquiry of my project departs slightly from Attridge and broadens up his reading of trust. My arguments are an extension of his theoretical claims, but I go further into the ways in which trust and trusting the other becomes constitutive of Mrs. Curren and the relationship between her character and Vercueil in the novel. I disclose how the novel is about a woman who acknowledges the responsibility for the other without calculation or without forethought. In the ethical reading of Mrs. Curren’s act of entrusting Vercueil with the letter she is writing to her long distant daughter, the political context representing a realm where generalizations and predictions are made is destabilized. A precise understanding of trust is disclosed in the ethical reading of Mrs. Curren’s character. – Mention Attridge in connection to *Foe*

2.2 Levinas’ Philosophy on Proximity and Language in *Foe*

Levinas’ introduces “Language and Proximity” in *Collected Philosophical Papers* by pointing out how thought and language require at a basic level, contact between two utterly particular persons, and this contact is what he refers to as proximity. He claims that the speech act is not unfolded in knowledge of the other, but in his proximity (116). He explains how proximity or contact is the original language. This original language is ethical and it occurs via the face of the other person. According to Morgan, Levinas is interested in how meaning is associated with communication, discourse and social context. He explains how Levinas points out that the interpersonal situation at its most basic level does not have any meaning. It involves persons who are present and in contact in all their particularity. The meaning of the communicative relationship and the meaning of the content of speech between parties occur later. Furthermore, this basic relationship, their contact, is constituted as ethical; “[contact] is about how the other, in her particularity matters to me, is significant for me. Any words that

are spoken to the other, prior to its being meaningful or having content or character, are already a response to the other person, an act of acknowledging that person, accepting her, granting her space and status” (128).

In Levinas’ essay, he says the immediacy of the sensible is an event of proximity and not of knowledge (116). In the remainder of the essay, he clarifies what that contact is between the I and the other - what proximity is. He says that contact comes from tenderness and responsibility and he explores what these features are and how they are related. Morgan points out how Levinas focuses on “sensibility” or sensory experience when he talks about proximity; “contact” and tenderness are words of sensory character (128). He clarifies how Levinas takes proximity to be a relation to the other person that is experienced in a certain way and he proceeds to describe how the other person appears to the self within this relation. Morgan explains how we tend to treat sensation as a kind of theoretical apprehension of an object by a subject. That is, we use the model of sight, and we are inclined to intellectualize the experience. He then shows how Levinas criticizes this tendency in the epistemological tradition, originating with Descartes by giving attention to the way sensory involvement in, and with the world is not primarily observational or theoretical (128). In Levinas’ essay, he explains how proximity is a tenderness and it exists between the face and nudity of the skin – the one in context of the other (118). He says that first sensibility must be interpreted as a touch and that this touch is pure approach and proximity that is not reducible to the experience of proximity: “A caress takes form in the contact without this signification turning into an experience of a caress. In the caress proximity remains a proximity and does not become an intention of something although the caress could become an expressive gesture, a bearer of messages” (“Language and Proximity” 118).

In “Language and Proximity” Levinas explains how the term of proximity derives from the face-to-face relation. According to Levinas, proximity awakens in the experience of the touched beginning with the human skin, a face, with the approach of the neighbor (118). He calls this relationship of proximity the original language and it is language without words or propositions, a pure communication (119). For Levinas, the relationship of proximity is a kind of communication prior to words or phrases. Morgan clarifies Levinas’ understanding of language as being based on a contact between the other person and the self. According to Morgan, In *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* and various later essays, Levinas shows how social life and language arise out of this basic relationship (133). He argues that Levinas’ “Language and Proximity” should be understood as exposing the fundamental dimension of

moral and political life and as argument for how the face-to-face and the responsibility, which it signifies, is the ground of language and discourse (135). According to Morgan, Levinas' view of language is not grounded in conflict or aggression. His understanding of language is based on the need to move from the utterly particular, pre-conceptual environment of the face-to-face, with its ethical but singular content, to the public, social, and communal world of principles, deliberation, decision, and social policy (136).

There original language is depicted in the reading of the relationship between Susan and Friday, and a sense of pure communication is distinguished in the contact between these two particular characters in the text. Friday is the first man Susan encounters when she is washed up on the deserted island, and when he begins to guide her across the island, they communicate through a language based on tactile sensory experience without speaking to one another. In the ethical reading of *Foe*, I disclose how Levinas' philosophy on proximity and language is illuminated in the contact between Susan and Friday, particularly in the island setting. The relationship of proximity is distinguished in the contact between these particular characters, and I explore the ways in which, the signification of tenderness and the experience of the caress ground an ethical reading of the novel. In *Foe*, Friday's character is silenced, but his violated body renders him an undeniable authority, in the way his body is constitutive of a text of his own story. A sign of historical oppression is explicated in the violated body of Friday's figure in the novel's dominant setting and in the ethical reading, I disclose how a sense of sensibility is distinguished in the relationship between Susan and Friday, which enables a sense of healing in the text. I argue that the structure of sensibility enables a sense of healing in the political setting, where the violence of the text is distinguished in Friday's violated body.

2.2.1 The Metaphor of the Violated Body in Ledbetter's Narrative Ethics

In Ledbetter's studies in *Victims and the Postmodern Narrative, or Doing Violence to the Body*, he claims the ethic writing is to discover and making silenced voices heard and that the ethic of reading is about hearing those silenced voices (1). He points out that reading a textual distraction, a moment in the story that interrupts the narrative's sense of wholeness may be the moment of ethical discovery. He explains how we as readers have a tendency to read disruptive moments in a text by looking at the larger whole of the narrative and then impose some pattern of consistency to the disruptive part of the work. Ledbetter criticizes this tendency of narrative consistency and suggests that textual interruptions have an interpretive purpose of pointing us towards the narrative's ethic (2). Ledbetter accentuates the indication

of the violated body when he talks about the transforming moments of ethical importance (10). He suggests that the most intimate act of knowing and experiencing is through the human body. His point is that one cannot remove the metaphor of the body from thought, and how one relates to world. Therefore, understanding the body metaphor becomes crucial for our understanding of the world:

Body metaphor lays claim to the world and narrows the distance between who we are and the experience we have, and by describing the world with the most personal terms we have, ourselves. When we choose a language that is physical and emotional in our attempt to know – know anything – we speak an act of embodiment. Body metaphor celebrates the senses and says no to any Cartesian split that makes our bodies second class citizens to the mind. (12)

According to Ledbetter, the language of the body metaphor must include the violated, the mutilated, and the diseased body in order to lay claim to any ethical understanding of the world. He states: “While pain is not ‘something that can be confirmed’; pain is also, ‘something that cannot be denied’. Our own bodies tell us this. While we may doubt another’s pain, ‘to have pain is to have certainty’” (13). Ledbetter says that more often than not, pain and victimization are described by reference to the body and since we cannot talk about victimization without reference to the body, he includes the metaphor of the body into his discussion of narrative ethics.

Ledbetter suggests that in order for the readers to recognize the moment of violence and scarring, they should focus on the literally physical, mental and emotional violence, which is imposed onto the bodies of the characters in the text. Further, he accentuates how the ethical moment is not only the violence itself, but also how the victims transform the violation in order to achieve an end other than the end intended by the violators. The violation is an identifying mark for the victim and it represents the strength of the victim to define their scarred body on their own terms. Ledbetter asserts that the identifying mark is the victim’s exercise of freedom, power and responsibility within a context where such experiences are seemingly absent (19). In *Foe*, the metaphor of the violated body is a narrative disruption in the dominant discourse of the novel. A sign of colonial oppression is signified in the explication of Friday’s tortured body in the text. The metaphor of the violated body and the principles of logocentrism and eurocentrism are signs of historical oppression in the novel’s

political setting where Friday's character is silenced. The principles of logocentrism and eurocentrism are incorporated into the western logic of language associated with Susan's reasoning in the novel. In the ethical reading of Coetzee's *Foe*, I discuss how the metaphor of the violated body represents the violence of the text as well as distinguishing the narrative's ethic. The figure of the suffering body points the reader towards the narrative's ethic and Friday's character is a portal to establish the ethical reading of the text. In the ethical reading of his violated body, the moral coherency of the novel's dominant discourse is disrupted.

2.2.2 Derrida's Criticism of Western Metaphysics

Jacques Derrida presents an epigraph to his overall project of investigating the "science of writing" in the excerpt titled "Exergue" in *Of Grammatology*. The first thing he investigates is that western discussions of writing tend to make two claims, presenting an *ethnocentric* argument that phonetic writing is the most advanced kind and a *logocentric* argument that spoken language is superior to written language. Therefore, the form of writing that most closely approximates speech is superior and that speech itself is considered primary:

[The epilogue] is intended not only to focus attention on the ethnocentrism, which, everywhere and always, had controlled the concept of writing. Nor merely to focus attention on what I shall call *logocentrism*: the metaphysics of phonetic writing (for example, of the alphabet) which was fundamentally – for enigmatic yet essential reasons that are inaccessible to a simple historical relativism – nothing but the most original and powerful ethnocentrism, in the process of imposing itself upon the world [...]. (1689)

Logocentrism is the privileging of *logos*, of "word, speech, story, reason", and in a note, Vincent B. Leitch explains how Derrida applies the term to knowledge assumed to be organized around a central truth (e.g., being, presence, the living voice, or the word of God) (1689). Leitch clarifies how the terming of logocentrism and ethnocentrism are a part of Derrida's account on "western metaphysics". He explains how philosophy and literature is the study of things that can matter only to creatures that possess language, even-or especially-when they are attempting to get "beyond" it. That "beyond" is what philosophy calls "metaphysics" (1689).

Charles E. Bressler explains how Derrida views the entire history of western metaphysics as founded on a classic fundamental error. This misconception in western philosophy, is the search for what Derrida terms as a “transcendental signified”, an external point of reference upon which one may build a concept or a philosophy (109). According Bressler, Derrida says that in western metaphysics, a variety of terms that can function as centers have been invented, such as “God, reason, origin, truth, humanity, self” to name a few (110). Each of these concepts are transcendental signified because they operate as self-sufficient and self-originating. Bressler says that this tendency to determine a center is what Derrida refers to as *logocentrism*: “[t]he belief that there is an ultimate center of truth, which can serve as the basis for all our thoughts and actions” (Derrida cited in Bressler 110). In *Foe*, the terming of logocentrism is incorporated into the western logic of language and recognized in Susan’s reasoning. In the novel, the principle of logocentrism represents a sign of historical oppression. The silencing of Friday’s character is contextualized in the assumptions of logocentrism and eurocentrism and articulated in Susan’s understanding of language in the dominant setting of the novel. I introduce Ledbetter’s narrative ethics and Derrida’s terming of logocentrism in the dominant setting of the novel when I analyze Friday’s violated body and the silencing of his figure. In the novel, the metaphor of the violated body and the silencing of Friday represent the violence of the text. The violations of Friday’s bodily integrity and dignity are indications of how his figure is a victim of colonial oppression in the text. In the ethical reading of Friday’s figure, I focus on the signification of the body. The metaphor of the violated body distinguished in Friday’s figure indicates a presence of the other ethics. In the ethical reading of the novel, I focus on how the language of sensory experience is illuminated in the contact between Susan and Friday, which enables a sense of healing in the novel.

3 An Ethical Reading of Proximity and Peace in *Age of Iron*

Age of Iron is set during apartheid in Cape Town, South Africa, and takes the form of a letter, written by Mrs. Curren, an elderly white woman and a retired classics lecturer, to her distant daughter living in North America. Coetzee wrote the novel when South Africa was governed under a State of Emergency in 1986 until 1990 and the scenes of township violence demonstrate the unrest in Cape Town of 1986. The novel registers a principle of black opposition: “that of nonwhite solidarity and non-cooperation” (Head 67). An increasingly militant youth, promoting school boycotts, is a feature of this phase of black resistance, and this kind of attitude is reflected in Bheki’s stance in the novel. Mrs. Curren’s liberal reflections on childhood are directly confronted and challenged by the comradeship of a new militant youth (Head 67). The ideology of Afrikaner Nationalism and the militant resistance of the black youth are incorporated into the political context of apartheid in the novel. Mrs. Curren denounces the brutal effects of the state’s violence and in the ethical reading of her character, the social dimensions of Levinas thinking are illuminated. In this chapter, I adapt Levinas’ ethical philosophy on proximity into the ethical reading of the relationship between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil, and I establish how the bond of responsibility illuminated in the contact between these particular characters enables a sense of resistance towards the dimensions of violence in the political context of apartheid. A sense of immediacy older than the abstractness of nature is prescribed in the contact between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil and in the ethical reading of the relationship between these characters, an underwriting of the fellowship with the other human is designated. In the political context of apartheid, human relations are imbued with hostility and violence, and in the ethical reading of the contact between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil, a sense of ethical peace is distinguished, which destabilizes the discursive modes of systematic rule, racial classification and retributive violence in the novel.

3.1 The Dimensions of Violence in the Political Context of Apartheid

The novel’s title refers to Hesiod’s poem *Work and Days* and the mythical aspect of the iron age is mirrored in the political setting of apartheid. In one of the first passages of the novel, when Mrs. Curren talks about the increasing violence amongst the younger black generations with her housecleaner Florence, the metaphor of iron is disclosed. Florence is a black woman and the mother of Bheki. She sympathizes with the violent resistance caused by the black youth and she takes pride in her son’s militant activism. When Mrs. Curren accuses

her of turning her back against the black children of South Africa, Florence's sense of pride is illuminated in the metaphor of iron: "These are good children, they are like iron. We are proud of them" (50). In Mrs. Curren's response and in her point of view on the spreading of violence, a contrasting image of the metaphor of iron is revealed in the text: "I waited for her to say more. But there was no more. [Florence] was not interested in debating with me. Children of iron, I thought. Florence, herself, too, not unlike iron. The age of iron. After which comes the age of bronze. How long, how long before the softer ages return in their cycle, the age of clay, the age of earth?" (50) In Mrs. Curren's view, the brutality of the regime has caused destructive interpersonal relationships. Because of Afrikaner Nationalism apartheid's ideology and the militant resistance of the black youth, human relations are imbued with hostility. Mrs. Curren is a former classics professor and in Greek mythology, "the iron age" is recognized as one of the five stages of man. The ancient poet, Hesiod, systematized the ages of man in a moral fable. Hesiod knew himself to be living in the age of iron because men's hearts were hard as iron. He referred to the iron age as a living guilt culture because the gods of Aidos and Nemesis had left earth. According to Hesiod, because of lack of shame and indignation, humankind would destroy itself, and the gods would abandon them (Pinsent 45). For Mrs. Curren, South Africa has degenerated into a period of desolation, pain and destruction because of the brutalizing effects of the state's violence. The state's implementations of systematic rule and racial classification has produced the violence of the black opposition.

Before Mrs. Curren accuses Florence of turning her back against the younger black generations, she asks her if she accepts that Bheki has taken part in the incidents of school burnings. When Florence replies that she cannot tell these children what to do and that there are no more mothers and fathers, Mrs. Curren confronts her: "That is nonsense, [...]. There is always mothers and fathers" (39). Further, in the same passage, when Bheki has been involved in the matter of beating Vercueil, Mrs. Curren tells Florence that it is the parents, who give up their authority over children, who are to blame for their children's violent behavior:

You told me you admire your son's generation because they are afraid of nothing. Be careful: they may start being careless of their own lives and end by being careless of everyone else's. [...] I keep thinking what you said the other day: that there are no more mothers and fathers. I can't believe you meant it. Children cannot grow up without mothers or fathers. The burnings and killings one hears of, the shocking

callousness, even this matter of beating Mr. Vercueil – whose fault is it in the end? Surely, the blame must fall on parents who say, Go do as you wish, you are your own master now, I give up authority over you. (48-9)

In these lines, the dependency between parents and children is explicated in Mrs. Curren's argument. The authorial role of parenthood is foregrounding in her argument in the text. For Mrs. Curren, it is the structural violence of the regime and the lack of responsibility parents, who are to blame for the violent behavior of the younger black militants. She blames Florence and the parents who have given up their authority over children for allowing a community of violence among the younger black generations. In Mrs. Curren's criticism, an indication of how interpersonal relationships have become destructive is stated. The state's violence and the lack of responsibility parents have caused the increasingly aggressive behavior amongst the younger black generations. Because of the brutal effects of the state's violence, natural relations between parents and children are destructed and undermined.

Mrs. Curren understands that it is colonial history and specifically Afrikaner Nationalism, that has produced the violent resistance of the younger black generations. The discursive mode of racial classification is implied in the structural violence of Afrikaner Nationalism ideology in the passage when Bheki's black friend 'John' has been hospitalized after being hounded by the police. Mrs. Curren witnesses the incident and she is outraged over the poor medical treatment, in which he receives at the hospital. There is no record of him, and he is put in the same room as a psychiatric patient. The indication of how his character is subjected to racial discrimination is implied when he is abused by the police and poorly treated at the hospital. The criminalization of the black youth and the negligent hospital treatment indicate how racial classification is a form of structural violence in the apartheid regime in the text. After visiting John at the hospital, Mrs. Curren asks Bheki why the police were after them, and he replies that the police are after all of the black children of South Africa: "They are not after me. They are after everybody. I have done nothing. But anybody they see they think should be in school, they try to get them. We do nothing, we just say we are not going to school. Now they are waging this terror against us. They are terrorist" (67). Then, when Mrs. Curren questions why he is not going to school, his stance implies a principle of black opposition: "What is school for? It is to make us fit into the apartheid system" (67). The principle of nonwhite solidarity and non-cooperation is detected in Bheki's stance in the text. The principle of black opposition is recognized in his refusal to be a part of the system. Bheki rejects the institution of school because he believes it forces black children

to become submissive to white rule. He takes a stance against the oppression of the black population by refusing the system. In the novel, Bheki's involvement in the incidents of school burnings illustrates his revolt against the system. The discursive mode of retributive violence is associated with his rebellion and the militant resistance caused by the black youth.

Mrs. Curren's denunciation of the retributive violence is stated when she confronts Mr. Thabane, a former teacher and the leader of the black opposition about encouraging comradeship amongst children:

[...] I fear I know comradeship all too well. The Germans had comradeship, and the Japanese, and the Spartans. [...] Comradeship is nothing but a mystique of death, of killing and dying, masquerading as what you call a bond (a bond of what? Love? I doubt it). I have no sympathy with this comradeship. You are wrong, you and Florence and everyone else, to be taken in by it and, worse, to encourage it in children. It is just another of those icy, exclusive, death-driven male constructions. That is my opinion. (150)

In these lines, Mrs. Curren confronts Mr. Thabane with the dangers of the ideology of comradeship, and she criticizes him for encouraging it amongst children. Mrs. Curren is a former classics professor and she traces the ideology of comradeships to world wars and genocides. In her view, the constitutions of comradeships have amounted to the systematization of violence and caused processes of dehumanization. A sense of singleness of purpose is implied in the ideology of comradeship. The loyalty and the sense of obligation to a purpose or a common ideal becomes of higher value than the individual human being, and Mrs. Curren criticizes Mr. Thabane for encouraging it amongst children because she knows they are more vulnerable and susceptible to being influenced by it. In the political context of apartheid, Afrikaner Nationalism and the militant resistance of the black youth have caused distorted interpersonal relationships.

Further, I will transition into the ethical reading of the novel by introducing the social dimensions of Levinas' thinking and Coetzee's conception of peace, which I relate to the ethical reading of Mrs. Curren and the relationship between her character and Vercueil. In the ethical reading of the sense of immediacy distinguished between these characters, a bond of responsibility is established, which enables a resistance towards the dimensions of violence in the political context of apartheid. Interpersonal relationships are imbued with hostility and oppression because of the brutal effects of the state's violence and in the ethical reading of the

relationship between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil, a sense of ethical peace, coming from the fellowship with the other human is distinguished, which destabilizes the political context of apartheid in the novel.

3.2 The Ethical Reading of the Fellowship with the Other

According to Morgan, Levinas perceives the shaping of the self as arising in the relation to others in a social world and the relevance of these relationships are fundamentally a matter of responsibility and the self being singled out by the other, by every other (283). He also states that Levinas regards the individual as being intrinsic to a natural social condition (284). The social dimensions of Levinas' thinking is illuminated in the ethical reading of the personage of Mrs. Curren and the relationship between her character and Vercueil. The imperative of responsibility is constitutive of the contact between these particular characters in the text. Because of the state's violence and parents who have given up their authority over children, natural relations between parents and children are undermined in political context of apartheid. Colonial history and specifically Afrikaner Nationalism have produced the increasingly aggressive behavior among the black youth and in the criminalization and discrimination of the younger black children, the structural violence of apartheid is implied. The sense of fellowship distinguished in the comradeship of the black opposition is also determined by violence. The incidents of school burnings signify a sense of retributive violence and Bheki's involvement in the matter of beating Vercueil demonstrates the increasingly aggressive behavior of the younger black generations. The interpersonal relationships are destructed because of dimensions of violence, and in the ethical reading of the personage of Mrs. Curren and the sense of immediacy distinguished in the relationship between her character and Vercueil, a sense of resistance towards the political context of apartheid is enabled.

In an interview in *Doubling the Point*, Coetzee distinguishes between the realms of politics and ethics by introducing the political as more narrowly associated with mass action and the use of violence, and the ethical as encompassing a refusal of "retributive violence" (Attwell 337). Coetzee associates the political realm with violence and death, while the ethical reflects an internal resistance towards violence: "Violence, as soon as I sense its presence within me, becomes introverted as violence against myself: I cannot project it outward. I am unable to, or refuse to, conceive of a liberating violence" (337). When he talks about the differences between the realms of politics and ethics, he accentuates the ethical as the alternative that brings about peace: "I cannot but think: if all of us imagined violence as

violence against ourselves, perhaps we should have peace” (337). This sense of internal resistance towards violence is illuminated in the character of Mrs. Curren. She turns the violence, which Bheki’s friend ‘John’ experiences at the hospital after being harassed by the police, against herself and rages against the system. In the novel, she also makes a decision to leave her house when she witnesses the murder of ‘John’ by security forces. Mrs. Curren also denounces the violence of the black militant youth and when Bheki has been involved in the matter of beating Vercueil, she blames Florence for her son’s bad behavior. Mrs. Curren has been opposed to the brutality of apartheid all her life, and in her sense of shame and mounting anger; an indication of internalizing the violence is evident. She begins to break through towards some kind of human understanding when her illness increasingly worsens and it is with the symbol of common sense and ordinary humanity, Vercueil, with which she achieves this rather than any of the African characters (Rich 4). The recognition of the individual as being intrinsic to a natural social condition is illuminated in the personage of Mrs. Curren and the ethical relation between her character and Vercueil. Further, I present the ethical reading of the proximity distinguished in the relationship between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil and I discuss how the bond of responsibility, which is entrenched in the contact between these particular characters challenges the reading of the dimensions of violence in the interpersonal relationships in the political context of apartheid. I also introduce Attridge’s ethical criticism when I discuss how the novel is about a woman who acknowledges responsibility without calculation or forethought by trusting the other. In the ethical relation distinguished between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil, a sense of ethical peace rooted in the responsibility for the other is illuminated, which destabilizes the political dimensions of violence in the setting of apartheid in the novel.

In *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Levinas says: “[t]he face of the neighbor signifies an exceptional responsibility, which precedes every free consent, every pact and every contact. The disclosing of face is nudity, the abandoning of one self, ageing, dying, [...]. It is poverty, skin with wrinkles, which are a trace of itself” (88). Manderson explains how the figures that Levinas uses to convey the nature of responsibility, face-to-face, exposure, nakedness and bleeding wounds, clarify the point that responsibility comes from our proximity to them (103). The ethical disclosing of the face-to-face relation is illuminated in the passage when Mrs. Curren finds Vercueil having settled behind the garage of her house: “Yesterday, at the end of this alley, I came upon a house of carton boxes and plastic sheeting and a man curled up inside, a man I recognized from the streets: tall, thin, with a weathered skin and long, carious fangs, wearing a baggy gray suit and a hat with a sagging brim” (3).

She recognizes him as “one of the derelicts who hang around the parking lots on Mill Street, cadging money from shoppers, drinking under the overpass, eating out of refuse cans” (4). The disclosing of the face-to-face relation is illustrated in the encounter between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil. In Mrs. Curren’s disclosure of Vercueil’s face, she comes face to face with her own impending death. In the immediacy between these characters, the ethical imperative of responsibility is constitutive of her character in the text.

According to Levinas, proximity is something that happens outside the place of rest and it is a disturbance of the memorable time (“Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence” 89). Mrs. Curren’s encounter with Vercueil on the same day her illness is diagnosed. The cancer and the incumbent obligation, in which Vercueil’s character places upon her are disturbances in the dominant discourse of the novel. In “Dialogue’ and ‘Fulfilment’ in J.M. Coetzee’s *Age of Iron*”, Attwell points out that Vercueil’s role is to serve as an Archimedean point of reference outside of the dimensions of what is recognizable real, and outside of Mrs. Curren’s world, and thus enable her to speak from within her consciousness of impending death (174). In *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Levinas defines proximity as an immediacy older than the abstractness of nature (86). He associates proximity with a Biblical formula rooted in the responsibility for the other:

In proximity the absolutely other, the stranger whom I have neither conceived nor given birth to, I already have on my arms, already bear, according to the Biblical formula, in my breast as the nurse bears the nurseling. He has no other place, is not autochthonous, is uprooted, with a country, not an inhabitant, exposed to the cold and the heat of the seasons. To be reduced to having recourse to me is the homelessness or strangeness of the neighbor. It is incumbent on me (91).

The Biblical formula of the responsibility for the other is distinguished in the character of Mrs. Curren when she has allowed Vercueil to take shelter outside of her house and when she brings him inside to give him food: “Why do I give this man food? [...] For the same reason I gave you my breast. To be full enough to give and to give from one’s fullness: what deeper urge is there? Out of their withered bodies even the old try to squeeze one last drop. A stubborn will to give, to nourish” (8). In these lines, a sense of doubling is identified in Mrs. Curren’s character with the imperative of responsibility signaled in the relationship with her daughter and in the contact with Vercueil. He is associated with a sense of uprootedness, who

places an incumbent obligation upon Mrs. Curren in the text. The Biblical formula of the responsibility for the other is illuminated in the immediacy between these characters.

In the introduction of *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Lingis clarifies how Levinas perceives responsibility as the response to the imperative addressed in the concrete act of facing. Responsibility is in fact a relationship with the other, in his very alterity (xvii). Further, he explains how being exposed to alterity is the very experience of immediacy. The subject is exposed to alterity before it can gather itself up and take a stand and this closeness without a distance, is what Levinas calls proximity (xix). Attridge explains how the figures of alterity usually are members of subordinated group perceived from the point of view of a dominant “first-world” culture in Coetzee’s novel (“The Ethics of Reading” 12). In the novel, Mrs. Curren is a white woman and a retired classics lecturer and Vercueil is an alcoholic vagrant. His character seems to be outside structures of social and political life. The unreadability of his character is explicated in the passage where Mrs. Curren is unsure of how to pronounce his name: “His name is Mr. Vercueil, I said. Vercueil, Verkuil, Verskuil” (37). The structure of alterity is distinguished in his figure. He is irreducible to comprehension. He is presented from Mrs. Curren’s point of view in the text. The impenetrability of his character is indicated in the passage where Mrs. Curren attempts to engage in a conversation with him: “He barely listen when I speak to him. Perhaps, despite those keen bird-eyes, he is more befuddled with drink than I know. Or perhaps, finally, he does not care. Care: the true root of charity. I look for him to care, and he does not. Because he is beyond caring. Beyond caring and beyond care” (22). In these lines, Vercueil’s impenetrability is articulated. Mrs. Curren cannot assimilate his character into the western liberal discourse in the text. He remains wholly unfamiliar to her and he challenges her principles on moral responsibility, obligation and charity. Vercueil is irreducible to comprehension. The relationship of alterity is illuminated in Mrs. Curren’s receptiveness and openness towards Vercueil’s character, and the structure of proximity is implied in the very experience of immediacy between these particular characters in the text.

According to Lingis, in Levinas’ conception of responsibility it distinguishes a bond: “[responsibility] is a bond with an imperative order, a command. All subjective moments are under an order: subjectivity is this subjection. This bond does not only determine a being to act, but is constitutive of subjectivity as such, determines it to be” (xiii). He clarifies how Levinas regards responsibility as a form of recognition, an acknowledgement of a claim, an order, which is constitutive of subjectivity. This recognition is not a cognitive act, that is, an identifying, re-presenting, re-cognizing act. It is effected in expressive acts by which one

expresses oneself, expresses one's own being and exposes oneself to the other. Concretely the acts by which one recognizes the other are acts of exposing, giving, of one's very substance to another. Responsibility is enacted not only in one's offering one's properties or one's possessions to the other, but in giving one's own substance for the other. The figure of maternity is an authentic figure of responsibility (xiii). In the ethical reading of the novel, the figure of maternity is entrenched in the personage of Mrs. Curren. In the contact established with Vercueil, the imperative of responsibility becomes constitutive of Mrs. Curren's sense of self. The bond of responsibility is figured into the reading of the relationship between these particular characters in the text.

The figure of maternity is illuminated in Mrs. Curren's character in the passage where she acknowledges a sense of responsibility for Vercueil:

I need his presence, his comfort, his help, but he needs help too. He needs the help only a woman can give a man. Not a seduction, but an induction. He does not know how to love. I speak not of the motions of the soul but of something simpler. He does not know how to love as a boy does not know how to love. [...] The nearer the end comes, the more faithful he is. Yet still I have to guide his hand. (196)

In these lines, when Mrs. Curren's acknowledges how dependent she has become on Vercueil, a nurturing instinct is detected in her character. The figure of maternity is disclosed in the ethical reading of her reckoning of the mutual dependency between herself and Vercueil in the text. She has provided for Vercueil throughout the novel, but when she exposes her own vulnerable condition, she understands his need of comfort and love. In Mrs. Curren's recognition of Vercueil's character, the imperative of responsibility becomes constitutive of her sense of self. The bond of responsibility distinguished in the contact between these characters illuminates the figure of maternity in Mrs. Curren's character and she manifests an authentic figure of responsibility in the text.

There is no moral, pragmatic or philosophical ground of Attridge's ethics of responsibility, and he acknowledges Levinas' thinking, because it is prior to any possible ground:

Without the responsibility for the other, there would be no other; with no other, repeatedly appearing, always different, there would be no same, no self, no society, and no morality. We cannot deduce the obligation to the existing world; the existing

world, including the means by which any deductions could be made about ethics of responsibility, is premised upon an obligation to the other.

(“The Singularity of Literature” 127)

According to Attridge, the ethics of responsibility comes from an obligation to the other and this notion is underlined in the ethical reading of the relationship between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil. The character of Vercueil places an incumbent obligation upon Mrs. Curren’s character. Attridge’s ethics of responsibility is incorporated into the ethical reading of the contact between these particular characters, which destabilizes the discursive modes of systematic rule and racial classification in the political context of apartheid in the novel. In Attridge’s account, the component of trust is intertwined with the ethics of responsibility:

I trust the other before I know what the other will bring. [...] I take responsibility for the other before any calculation – for the risk is incalculable. [...] I cherish the other, not in spite of but because of its otherness, since its otherness is precisely what makes it valuable to me, and without any guarantees, I undertake to realize and sustain this otherness as fully and enduringly as possible [...].

(“The Singularity of Literature” 124)

He states that the act of entrusting involves a sense of uncertainty. Attridge explains how the enactment of trust entails an incalculable risk. He points out that trust cannot be calculated. I extend on Attridge’s reading on trust, but rather than focusing on the reader’s sense of responsibility, I focus on how the component of trust is crucial for the relationship between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil.

In the passage when Mrs. Curren asks Vercueil to send the letter she is writing to her distant daughter, the ethical implication of trusting the other is signified in the text:

If Vercueil does not send these writing on, you will never read them. You will never even know they existed. A certain body of truth will never take on flesh: my truth: How I lived in these times. In this place. What is the wager, then, that I am making with Vercueil, on Vercueil? It is a wager on trust. So little to ask, to take a package to the post office and pass it over the counter. So little that it is almost nothing. Between taking the package and not taking it the difference is as light as a feather. If there is the slightest breath of trust, obligation, piety left behind when I am gone, he will surely

take it. If not, there is no trust and we deserve no better, all of us, than to fall into a hole and vanish. Because I cannot trust Vercueil I must trust him”. (130)

Mrs. Curren has no certainty of knowing if Vercueil will post the letter, she has given him. She cannot calculate the outcome of her request. The impenetrability of Vercueil’s character makes her request a wager on trust. The ethical implication of taking responsibility for the other is indicated when Mrs. Curren entrusts Vercueil with the letter. She also expresses the counter logic of her decision: “I give my life to Vercueil to carry over. I trust Vercueil because I do not trust Vercueil. I love him because I do not love him. Because he is the weak reed I lean upon him” (130). In these lines, the ethical implication of trust is designated in the ethical reading of the relationship between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil. Mrs. Curren’s decision to trust Vercueil is not based on a rational scheme. Her wager on trust is without calculation. It is a sense of sacrificial trust because its outcome cannot be known in advance.

In *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event*, Attridge claims: “We are already obligated to the other, we find ourselves responsible for it/him/her/them, and responsible in an absolute way” (103). He says that responsibility cannot be calculated and then enacted. Attridge exemplifies *Age of Iron* as a novel about a woman who undertakes the fullest acceptance of responsibility: “This is a story of what happens to someone who accepts it, without calculation, without forethought – or better, accepts it on the far side of calculation and forethought, at the end of a long life lived according to the rules” (104). In the political context of apartheid in the novel, there is a lack of trust between every individual, which is challenged by the ethical reading of Mrs. Curren’s act of trusting the other. Attridge says that the novel offers an accurate understanding of trust that raises vital questions about the other and the future (104). Mrs. Curren’s enactment of trust is not a political prescription. Her enactment of trust does not contain within itself any program indicating when, where and how such trust should operate. It is a pure decision born out of uncertainty. Her enactment of trust reveals a precise understanding of trust that raises vital questions about the future of South Africa and the future of humanity.

In “The Proximity of the Other”, Levinas says that sociality stands for the best of the human (103). He claims: “Sociality is that alterity of the face, of the for-the-other that calls out to me, a voice that rises within me before all verbal expression, in the mortality of the I, from the depths of my weakness” (103). Levinas insists on the meaning of for the other, resting on a responsibility that is already there in a dormant state (103). In the immediacy between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil, a contact is figured, in which the structure of sociality is

illuminated. The ethical relation is disclosed in Mrs. Curren's reckoning of Vercueil's character and in the concern, she shows for his needs in the text. The imperative of responsibility is embedded in the immediacy between these characters, which is constitutive of the character of Mrs. Curren. The contact is based on an immediacy older than the abstractness of nature. The ethical relation between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil illuminates a structure of peace that destabilizes the dimensions of violence in the political context of apartheid in the novel.

In "Peace and Proximity", Levinas defines an ethico-political order based on sociality and love. He designates peace as: "[t]he fraternal way of proximity to the other [...] which would signify precisely the excess of sociality over all solitude – excess of sociality and love" (137). The structure of peace presupposes an ethical implication of human proximity. Levinas' understanding of peace is not a narrowly political peace, but rather an "ethical peace, a relation to the unassimilable other, the irreducible other, the unique other" (138). Levinas prescribes peace as the fellowship with the other human. His philosophy on peace is supplemented by a Biblical tradition, acknowledging peace as a responsibility to the other (Critchley 162). Morgan explains how Levinas' order of peace presupposes an ethical structure based on the face-to-face relation. According to Morgan, Levinas claims that this is not a narrowly political peace, not the creation of a new totality, but rather an "ethical peace, a relation to the unassimilable other, the irreducible other, the unique other" (138).

The ethico-political structure is distinguished in the relationship between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil in the ethical reading of the novel. The structures of sociality and love are manifested in the immediacy between these characters. The proximity is determinative of the contact between the characters and the relationship incorporates the ethical structure of the face-to-face relation. Vercueil's figure is irreducible to comprehension and the contact between his character and Mrs. Curren brings forward relevant allusions to a conception of peace relating to the Biblical tradition and the responsibility to the other. In the ethical reading of the novel, a sense of ethical peace is commenced in the structure of sociality and love distinguished in the relationship between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil. A structure of sociality and love is also detected in the novel when Mrs. Curren confesses her inability to love Bheki's friend, John, in the letter she is writing to her distant daughter: "Therefore let me utter my second, dubious word. Not wanting to love him, how true can I say my love is for you? For love is not like hunger. Love is never sated. Love is never stilled. When one loves, one loves more. The more I love you, the more I ought to love him. The less I love him, the less, perhaps, I love you" (137). In these lines, when Mrs. Curren talks about her incapability to

care for John, her understanding of love resonates with Levinas' definition of ethical peace in the text. Levinas' ethical understanding of peace is defined by the proximity to the other and where the excess of sociality and love is signified over all solitude. When Mrs. Curren confesses that the condition of love is constitutive of social relationships, a sense of ethical peace is illuminated in her personage. Mrs. Curren also learns to love those whom she is least inclined to love, notably Bheki and his friend John. The condition of love as constitutive of the social dimension of human existence is underlined in the ethical reading of the personage of Mrs. Curren and in the relationship between her character and Vercueil. In the ethical reading of how the condition of love is constitutive of human fellowship, the social dimensions of violence in the political context of apartheid are undermined.

When Mrs. Curren's condition has weakened because of the cancer, she understands how dependent she has become upon Vercueil, and she acknowledges his mutual dependency on her:

There has always been in him a certain hovering if undependable solicitude for me, a solicitude he knows no way of expressing. I have fallen and he has caught me. It is not he who fell under my care when he arrived, I now understand, nor I who fell under his: we fell under each other, and have tumbled and risen since then in the flights and swoops of that mutual election. (196)

In these lines, when Mrs. Curren reflects on her relationship with Vercueil, a sense of mutual dependency is distinguished between these characters. The cancer is indicating of Mrs. Curren's vulnerable condition and when she acknowledges a mutual dependency between herself and Vercueil, the ethical ground of proximity is signified in the text. Manderson upholds Libertson's designation of proximity as "a recognition of our relationship with others that does not reduce them to a term in our equation, which is sensitive to vulnerability, and which acknowledges our dependence on other" (Libertson cited in Manderson 102). The vulnerability implied in Mrs. Curren's character with the condition of her illness and the impenetrability of Vercueil's character distinguish how the contact is determined by an immediacy older than the abstractness of nature. In the ethical reading, these characters can be read as being intrinsic to a natural social condition. In the text, Mrs. Curren confesses that Vercueil has shown an undependable attentiveness for her, which he has no way of expressing, and this alludes to the ethical implication of proximity in the sense that it constitutes the contact between the characters. The ethical implication of proximity is distinguished in Mrs. Curren's reckoning of the mutual dependency between herself and

Vercueil's character. The sense of fellowship distinguished in the ethical reading of the contact between these particular characters, brings forward a sense of peace in the text.

Levinas' ethical philosophy on proximity is illuminated in the final scene of the novel, when Mrs. Curren dies in Vercueil's arms: "The curtains parted; he came in beside me. For the first time I smelled nothing. He took me in his arms and held me with mighty force, so that the breath went out of me in a rush. From that embrace there was no warmth to be had" (196). The ethics of proximity is distinguished in the explication of the embrace in the text. According to Levinas, proximity is a sense of restlessness that takes place outside the place of rest. In his ethical philosophy, proximity is most sufficiently articulated in the experience of the embrace ("Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence" 82). For Levinas, proximity is both a relationship and a term of this relationship. The ethical relation is prior to all thought and is associated with the immediacy between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil in the text. An aspect of vulnerability is indicated in Mrs. Curren's character when she is about to die, and in proximity to Vercueil's character, the familiar discourses of her life are erupted. A sense of restlessness is transfigured in the proximity of the embrace and represents a disturbance of time, where the immediacy is determinative of the ethical relation. Levinas' relating of peace to the proximity of the other is distinguished in the immediacy between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil, when she dies in his arms at the end of the novel.

In the final scene of the novel, a reckoning of ethical peace is distinguished in the contact between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil, which destabilizes the political dimensions of violence in the novel. In the ethical reading of the contact between these two characters, an order of peace, which is based on the fellowship with the other human is grounded. Levinas' understanding of the individual as being intrinsic to a natural social condition is reflected in these two particular characters in the text. Manderson explains how Levinas relates proximity to the experience of a caress: "[Proximity] searches, it forages, but it does not attempt to control or pin down. It is a contact, an experience of the senses that does not take hold of either person or thing" (Levinas cited in Manderson 101). In the depiction of the embrace in the final scene of the novel, the proximity is determinative of the relationship between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil, which commences a sense of peace in the text. Morgan says that Levinas' implication of peace is biblical: "It is peace of a different kind than Hobbesian peace: peace as wholeness, rectification, completion, ultimately a condition where people and nations seek to maximize their acknowledgement and acceptance of others and their responsibility for their needs" ("Discovering Levinas" 127). When Mrs. Curren dies in Vercueil's arms, a sense of rectification is distinguished. Levinas' designation of peace is

illuminated in the ethical relation between these characters where the Biblical formula of the responsibility for the other is entrenched. The structure of peace distinguished in the contact between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil destabilizes the political context of apartheid and the discursive modes of systematic rule, racial classification and retributive violence in the novel. The dimensions of violence in the political context have caused degenerated and destructed human relations and in the ethical reading of Mrs. Curren and the contact between her character and Vercueil, a recognition of the fellowship with the other human is foregrounded. In the ethical reading of the novel, the relationship between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil illuminates a reckoning of Levinas' Biblical understanding of ethical peace, where the responsibility for the other is manifested.

In this chapter, I have presented an ethical reading of the relationship between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil by introducing Levinas' ethical philosophy on proximity. In the ethical reading of the sense of immediacy distinguished between these particular characters, a sense of resistance towards the dimensions of violence in the political context of apartheid is established. The political context of apartheid incorporates the discursive modes of systematic rule, racial classification and retributive violence. Because of the brutal effects of the state's violence, interpersonal relationships are imbued with hostility. The social dimensions of the political context of apartheid are associated with structures of violence in the novel. The natural relations between parents and children are undermined and in the novel, Mrs. Curren understands that it is colonial history and particularly Afrikaner Nationalism that has caused the increasingly aggressive behavior of the black youth. Mrs. Curren achieves some kind of human understanding or political enlightenment when her illness increasingly worsens, and it is with the symbol of ordinary humanity, Vercueil, with which she achieves this, rather than any of the African characters. In the novel, the proximity represents a disturbance of time. In the ethical reading of the contact between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil, an immediacy older than the abstractness of nature is distinguished. On the same day Mrs. Curren's terminal bone cancer has been diagnosed, she encounters Vercueil, who appears seeking shelter outside of her house. In the immediacy distinguished in the relationship between Vercueil and Mrs. Curren, she is exposed to being outraged and pained, and her character is exalted in the presence of his character. In the relationship with Vercueil, Mrs. Curren comes to terms with her own impending death.

A sense of ethical peace is illuminated in the ethical reading of the contact between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil, which destabilizes the discursive modes of systematic rule, racial classification and retributive violence in the novel. In the novel, the sense of ethical peace

distinguished in the relationship between these particular characters comes from the fellowship with the other human and enables a form of rectification in the political context of apartheid where interpersonal relationships are shaped by structures of violence. In the sense of fellowship associated with the contact between Mrs. Curren and Verducci, the Biblical formula of the responsibility for the other is entrenched. In the following chapter, I present the ethical reading of *Foe* and I focus on Levinas' ethical philosophy on proximity and language in my analysis of the contact between Susan and Friday in the island setting of the novel. In the ethical reading of the relationship between Susan and Friday, a language determined by sensibility is distinguished. In the ethical reading of the contact between these two particular characters, a sense of healing is enabled, which destabilizes the dominant setting of the novel where Friday's violated body and the silencing of his character represent the violence of the text.

4 An Ethical Reading of the Original Language in *Foe*

Coetzee's *Foe* takes place in the second decade of the eighteenth century. The novel reveals the retellings of Susan Barton to the acclaimed author Mr. Daniel Foe about her unusual life spent as a castaway on an island with a man called Cruso, and his mutilated Negro servant Friday. According to Dominic Head, the novel is a highly literary work, a postcolonial reworking of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, containing important allusions to other works by Defoe. Coetzee's preoccupation with textuality and the role of the novel is apparent in *Foe*, but there is also a poignant evocation of oppression, which is made to speak simultaneously to the business of literary history and to how the colonized other is silenced (Head 62). In this chapter, I present an ethical reading of *Foe* and I focus on the implications of historical oppression in Friday's violated body and the silencing of his character in the text. His character is a victim of colonial oppression, but his scarred body renders him an undeniable authority that represents text of his own story. I address the silencing of Friday's character by introducing Ledbetter's *Victims and the Postmodern Narrative, or Doing Violence to the Body*. Ledbetter says that the textual distraction or the moment that interrupts the narrative's sense of wholeness may be the moment of ethical discovery (1). The principles of eurocentrism and logocentrism are articulated in Susan's understanding of language and they represent signs of historical oppression in the novel's dominant discourse. Friday's violated body and the silencing of his character represent the violence of the text and transfigure moments of ethical importance. His figure represents a portal in the ethical reading of the novel. I have a primary focus on Levinas' ethical philosophy on proximity and language in the ethical reading, which I adapt into my analysis of the relationship between Susan and Friday in the island setting of the novel. In the ethical reading of the contact established between these two particular characters, I argue that Levinas' conception of language and sensibility enables a sense of healing in the text. The principles of eurocentrism and logocentrism, which are associated with Susan's western understanding of language are undermined in the ethical reading of the relationship between Susan and Friday in the novel.

4.1 The Metaphor of the Violated Body and the Silencing of Friday

Ledbetter suggests that the most intimate act of knowing and experiencing is through the metaphor of the human body. The language of the body metaphor must include the violated, the mutilated, and the diseased body in order to lay claim to any ethical understanding of the world (12). In his approach to narrative ethic, he claims that the

indication of the violated body reveals the transforming moments of ethical importance. According to Ledbetter, body pain represents the moment of approaching any sense of certainty in the narrative. He explains that more often than not, pain, hurt and victimization are described by reference to the body and because we cannot talk about the victimization without reference to the metaphor of the body, Ledbetter suggests that we cannot talk about narrative ethic without reference to the body (14). In an interview in *Doubling the Point*, Coetzee articulates a standard when he addresses the issues of power in connection to the consciousness of the body in his writing: “[this] standard is the body. Whatever else, the body is not ‘that which is not’, and the proof that it *is* is the pain it feels. The body with its pain becomes a counter to the endless trials of doubt” (248). In his contemporary South Africa, Coetzee argues that the suffering body is overwhelmingly present and impossible to disregard for reasons of power and politics. According to Coetzee, it is not that one grants the authority of the suffering body, the suffering body takes this authority: that is its power. He insists that its power is undeniable (248). The figure of bodily pain is represented in Friday’s character and it becomes an undeniable power in the text. Further, I introduce the dominant discourse of the novel, in which the signs of historical oppression are represented in terms of the metaphor of the violated body and the discursive modes of eurocentrism and logocentrism associated with Susan’s western understanding of language.

The metaphor of the violated body is disclosed in Friday’s character and takes authority in the text. He is a former slave and because of his inability to speak, his character is silenced in the dominant discourse of the novel. In the passage, when Susan learns that it was his former slaveholders, who cut out his tongue, the metaphor of the violated body explicates a sign of colonial oppression in the text: “‘He has no tongue’, said Cruso. ‘That is why he does not speak. They cut out his tongue’. [Susan] stared in amazement. ‘Who cut out his tongue?’ ‘The slavers’. ‘The slavers cut out his tongue and sold him into slavery?’ ‘The slave-hunters of Africa’ But surely he was a mere child when they took him. Why would they cut out a child’s tongue?’” (23). In these lines, Friday is introduced as a victim of colonial oppression and the metaphor of the violated body is explicated in the reading of how his former slaveholders tortured his body. A historical tracing to colonialism is stated when Friday is described as a former slave, who was tortured and sold into slavery by slave-hunters of Africa. The depiction of torture incorporates a sign of colonial oppression and represents the violence of the text in the sense that Friday’s bodily integrity is violated. The innocence associated with symbolism of the child is also evident for identifying how Friday’s character is a victim of colonial oppression. The depiction of torture and the violence implied with

abusing a child signify modes of oppression in the text. The metaphor of the violated body and the figure of bodily pain are textual disruption to the narrative's sense of wholeness. The power of the figure of bodily pain is undeniable. The reading of the violence perpetrated onto Friday's character transfigures a moment of ethical importance in the text.

Before Susan learns about how Friday's former slaveholders tortured his body, a sign of historical oppression is incorporated into the discursive mode of eurocentrism, which is associated with her understanding of language in the text. Her European heritage is explicated in the beginning of the novel when she has been washed up on the deserted island and she introduces herself to Crusoe for the first time: "My father was a Frenchman who fled England to escape persecutions in Flanders. [...] My mother was an Englishwoman" (10). On the island, she lives with Crusoe and Friday in a hut where there is nothing but a bed, which was made of poles bound together with thongs and in the corner a pile of curled apeskins and a stove. One evening when she is preparing supper and she asks Friday to fetch more wood, Crusoe tells her that he has only taught him one word for understanding the word wood: "'*Firewood* is the word I have taught him', [...]. 'Wood he does not know'. [Susan] found it strange that Friday should not understand that firewood was a kind of wood, as pinewood is a kind of wood, or poplarwood; but [she] let it pass" (21). Susan waits until after supper to ask Crusoe how many words Friday knows: "As many as he needs", Crusoe replies. "This is not England, we have no need of a great stock of words" (21). In Susan's reply, the discursive mode of eurocentrism is detected in the text:

'You speak as if language were one of the banes of life, like money or the pox,' said [Susan]. 'Yet would it not have lightened your solitude had Friday been master of English? You and he might have experienced, all these years, the pleasures of conversation; You might have brought home to him some of the blessings of civilization and made him a better man. What benefit is there in a life of silence?' (22)

According to Susan, Friday would be a better man if he were able to master the English language and she claims that the spoken language counts as one of the blessings of civilization. The assumption of eurocentrism is detected in her understanding of language when she asserts that the spoken language has a privileged position for civilizing man and that it takes part in the progress of civilization. In her understanding of language, the power of speech is fundamental of civilized life. Susan's understanding of language incorporates the principle of eurocentrism and Friday is silenced in the text because of his inability to speak.

He is not presented on his own term in the dominant discourse of the novel, his character exists in relation to Susan. Friday is interpreted from her point of view in the text. She attempts to comprehend his character from a western liberalist point of view, and in her insinuations of how Friday would be a better man if he were able to master the English language, a sign of historical oppression is explicated in the text.

Cruso's reacts with indifference to Susan's beliefs and instead he calls out to Friday and asks him to sing for her: "[...] Friday raised his face to the stars, closed his eyes, and, obedient to his master, began hum in a low voice. [Susan] listened but could not make out no tune. Cruso tapped my knee. 'The voice of man', he said" (22). In these lines, when Cruso asks Friday to express himself through song, his character articulates a stance that goes against the principle of eurocentrism grounded in Susan's argument in the text. When Friday hums in a low voice and Cruso tells Susan that it is the voice of man, his statement illuminates the dignity of Friday's character. When Friday expresses himself by raising his voice, the signification of the body is foregrounded in the text. Instead of being interpreted from Susan's point of view, his character is determined on his own terms. The principle of eurocentrism represents a sign of historical oppression and in the signification of the body disclosed in the character of Friday; the inviolable dignity of man is illuminated. Further, I introduce a passage, where a sign of historical oppression is articulated in the assumption of logocentrism, and how the signification of the body in Friday's figure configures a sense of resistance towards the silencing of his character in the novel. I discuss how the signs of historical oppression explicated in the metaphor of the violated body and in the discursive modes of eurocentrism and logocentrism represent the violence of the text. The signs of historical oppression violate the bodily integrity and dignity of Friday's character and I discuss how the silencing of his character reflects the narrative's sense of violence. The violation of Friday's bodily integrity and dignity also points the reader towards the narrative's ethic. The reading of his violated body brings forward transforming moments of ethical importance in the text.

The discursive mode of logocentrism, which is articulated in Susan's understanding of language, is stated in the passage where she tries to teach Friday how to write. Jacques Derrida criticizes how western discussions of writing consists of two claims, presenting "an *ethnocentric* argument that phonetic writing is the most advanced kind and a *logocentric* (a coinage from the Greek word *logos*, meaning, 'reason, logic, word') argument that the spoken language is superior to written language" (Leitch 1689). In a note, Vincent B. Leitch explains that logocentrism is the privileging of *logos*, of "word, speech, story, reason" and that Derrida

applies the term to knowledge assumed to be organized around a central truth (1689). When Susan has been returned with Friday to England after a short and uneventful sojourn on the island, she seeks out the acclaimed author Mr. Foe to have her story from the island recollect, but she realizes that she needs Friday's help, whose tongue has been cut out. Then when she tries to teach him how to write, she points out that Friday's inability of speech disables him from learning how to write, and in her assumption, the principle of logocentrism is illuminated:

‘How can [Friday] write if he cannot speak? Letters are the mirror of words. Even when we seem to write in silence, our writing is the manifest of a speech spoken within ourselves or to ourselves’. [...] ‘How can he be taught to write if there are no words within him, in his heart, for writing to reflect, but on the contrary only a turmoil of feelings and urges’. (142)

In these lines, when Susan argues that Friday is unable to write because of his inability to speak, her character represents a view associated with the assumption of logocentrism, which privileges the spoken language over the written language. In the western logic of language, *logos* is both thought and word, and the two are inseparable. According to Susan, the spoken language is complementary to the written language. She believes the word is determined by a meaning and that it conveys this particular meaning. In her view, speech is contact with the sources of language because it seems to inhere consciousness itself.

Mr. Foe articulates a sense of resistance towards Susan's assumption of logocentrism when he claims that she confuses the techniques of language with language itself:

‘Speech is but means through which the word is uttered, it is not the word itself. Friday has no speech, but he has fingers, and those fingers shall be his means. Even if he had no fingers, even if the slavers had looped them all off, he can hold a stick of charcoal between his toes, or between his teeth like the beggars on the Strand’. (143)

In these lines, when Mr. Foe insists that writing is as much a function of the body as speech, the logocentric assumption is undermined. He insists that speech is but a means through which the word is uttered and not the word itself and his statement implies a sense of resistance towards the dominant discourse where Friday is silenced because of his inability to speak. The underwriting of the signification of the body is indicated in Mr. Foe's statement.

Because of Friday's inability to speak, Mr. Foe points out that it is the different functions of his body that are his means of self-expression, which implies a sense of resistance towards the western logic of language. In the dominant setting of the novel, the violence perpetrated onto Friday's character connotes relevant allusions to how his bodily integrity is violated. The metaphor of the violated body and the principles of eurocentrism and logocentrism indicate how his character is a victim of historical oppression and represent the violence of the text. The metaphor of the violated body distinguished in Friday's figure alludes to a transforming moment of ethical importance in the sense of illuminating the inviolable dignity of the body in the text. The ethical reading of the signification of the body underwrites the dignity of Friday's character, and performs a sense of resistance towards the dominant discourse where his character is a victim of historical oppression.

A figure of the suffering body is distinguished in Friday's character in the final section of the novel. There is a new narrating personage at the end of the novel, and in the final passage, he comes across Susan's manuscript from her experiences on the island and in a metafictional gesture, he slips 'overboard' into her text, and into the water above a shipwreck. The narrator dives down to the wrecked ship and finds the only signs coming from Friday:

In the last corner, under the transforms, half buried in sand, his knees drawn up, his hands between his thighs, I come to Friday. I tug his woolly hair, finger the chain about his throat. 'Friday,' I try to say, kneeling over him, sinking hands and knees into the ooze, 'what is this ship?' but this is not a place of words. Each syllable, as it comes out, is caught and filled with water and diffused. This is a place where bodies are their own signs. It is the home of Friday. (157)

The figure of the suffering body is depicted in the lines where Friday is described as lying in a fetal position with a chain around his neck. The ship where his character is found represents a composite of imperialist venture, and the figure of the suffering body reveals the scars of colonial history as text of its own story. The signification of the body alludes to the repression of the black majority of South Africa and represent an absolute presence in the text. The tracings of colonial oppression is signified in the violence implied in the chain that Friday has around his neck, which indicates the violation of his bodily integrity. The thematic concern of oppression incorporates a tracing to the history of colonialism and the institutionalizing of slavery with its processes of dehumanization. The figure of the suffering body disclosed in Friday's figure points the reader towards the narrative's ethic. The signification of the body

unleashes an alternative history, in which the figure of the suffering body becomes text of its own story. Friday's tortured body and the connotations of bodily pain grounds a sense of certainty in the text. The figuration of bodily pain is undeniable. A sense of authority is implied in the figure of the suffering body when Friday's bodily integrity is violated in the text. The ethical reading of the figuration of bodily pain transfigure a reckoning of the inviolable dignity of the body. The figure of the suffering body disclosed in Friday's figure reveals the scars of colonial history and his violated body is a portal to an ethical reconfiguring of the signs of historical oppression and the silencing of his character in the text.

Ledbetter focuses on the scar as the most crucial figure for body language and as representing the narrative's moment of approximating any certainty (15). He explains how the narrative's scar represents an intruding otherness that is chaotic and crisis oriented, and that it demands new awareness on the part of the writer and the reader and, in particular, the characters in the text. The critical point in Ledbetter's ethical approach is that "[t]he text's violence reveals a moment of ethical awareness against the otherwise complete narrative that suggests a moral coherence" (18). According to Ledbetter, the text's violence can refer to what Levinas describes as "the presence of the other ethics" (Levinas cited in Ledbetter 18). The presence of the other ethics reminds the reader that there is always another ethics. In order for the reader to recognize the moment of violence and scarring in the text, Ledbetter suggests that the reader must focus on the literally physical, mental and emotional violence, which is imposed onto the bodies of the characters. Further, the ethical moment in the text is not only the violence itself, but also how the victims transform the violation in order to achieve an end other than the end intended by the violators. The violations are identifying marks that represent the strength of the victims to define their scarred body on their own terms. Ledbetter suggests that this is the victim's exercise of freedom, power and responsibility within a context where such experiences are seemingly absent (19). The silencing of Friday's character is implied in the metaphor of the violated body and the assumptions of eurocentrism and logocentrism articulated in Susan's understanding of language in the dominant setting of the novel. The metaphor of the violated body and the discursive modes of eurocentrism and logocentrism are signs of historical oppression and represent the violence of the text. In the novel, Friday is a victim of historical oppression, which represent the violence of the text, and in the ethical reading of his figure, Levinas' point on the presence of the other ethics can be distinguished. In the reading, Friday's violated body represents an intruding otherness that is chaotic, crisis oriented, and which disrupts the

consistency and moral coherency of the dominant discourse and the western logic of language explicated in Susan's reasoning in the text.

In the ethical reading of the novel, a sense of self-determination is associated with Friday's figure. In the passage, when Susan observes him when he expresses himself through song and dance, a sense of self-determination is illuminated in his figure "In the grip of dancing he is not himself. He is beyond human reach. I call his name and am ignored, I put out a hand and am brushed aside. All the while he dances he makes a humming noise in his throat, deeper than his usual voice; sometimes he seems to be singing" (92). In these lines, the signification of the body is stated when Friday expresses himself through song and dance, and he is positioned on his own terms in the text. He defines his scarred body on his own terms. The signification of the body represents a sense of resistance towards the dominant discourse and the silencing of his character. According to Susan's reasoning, speech is in contact with the sources of language because language seems to inhere consciousness itself. In this particular scene, the signification of the body disclosed in the representation of Friday and his means of self-expression disrupts the western logic of language associated with Susan's position in the novel. Friday's scarred body points the reader towards the narrative's ethic. In the disclosure of his violated body, the inviolable dignity of man is stated. When he expresses himself through song and dance, a sense of self-determination is distinguished in his personage, which destabilizes the dominant discourse and the western logic of language. The metaphor of the violated body is an identifying mark in the way that Friday's scarred body is defined on his own terms in the text. The narrative's ethic is disclosed in the reading of his scarred body, which underwrites the bodily integrity and inviolable dignity of the individual. Further, I proceed with the ethical reading of the relationship between Friday and Susan and I adapt Levinas' ethical philosophy on proximity and language into the contact between these characters in the island setting of the novel. In the ethical reading of the contact between these two particular characters, Levinas' designation of language and sensibility is illuminated and this enables a sense of healing in the dominant discourse where the metaphor of the violated body and the silencing of Friday's character represent the violence of the text.

4.2 The Ethical Reading of the Relationship of Proximity

In "Language and Proximity", Levinas says that the speech act is based on a relationship with a singularity, which is located outside of the discourse of speech and that this singularity is not recognized by the speech but approached. According to Levinas, the speech act does not unfold in knowledge of the other, but in his proximity (115). Further, he

explains how the immediacy of contact is not spatial contiguity, visible to a third party and signifying through the “synthesis of understanding”. For Levinas, proximity is *by itself* a signification (116). He begins to say something about this proximity or contact: “This is the original language, the foundation of the other one. The precise point at which this mutation of the intentional into the ethical occurs, and occurs continually, at which the approach breaks through consciousness, is the human skin and face. Contact is tenderness and responsibility” (116). In Levinas’ view, the original language is ethical and occurs via the face of the other person. He also explains how proximity comes from our tenderness and responsibility to the other. In the ethical reading of the contact between Susan and Friday, Levinas’ ethical designation of the original language is underlined. The ethics of proximity is determinative of the ethical reading of the relationship between these two particular characters in the text. I begin my ethical inquiry by introducing some of the passages from the island and I disclose how the relationship of proximity, which is illuminated in the contact between Susan and Friday, enables a sense of healing in the dominant discourse where the violated body of Friday’s figure represents the violence of the text.

In the first passage of the novel, when Susan has been washed up on the deserted island, the first man she encounters is Friday, and the designation of the original language is distinguished in the contact between these characters:

A dark shadow fell upon me, not a cloud but of a man with a dazzling halo about him. ‘Castaway, [Susan] said with [her] thick dry tongue. ‘I am cast away. I am all alone.’ And I held out my sore hands. The man squatted down beside me. He was black: a Negro with a head of fuzzy wool, naked save for a pair of rough drawers. I lifted myself and studied the flat face, the small dull eyes, the broad nose, the thick lips, the skin not black but a dark grey, dry as if coated with dust. (6)

A sense of immediacy is established between the characters when Susan reaches out her sore hands, after she has told Friday that she is a castaway and all alone, and when he sits down beside her. In the immediacy between these characters, the relationship of proximity is distinguished. Friday sits down beside Susan when she has reached out her sore hands, and a sense of tenderness is associated with the contact between them. The proximity is determinative of the contact between these characters. For Levinas, all thought and language is unfolded in proximity to the other, and in the immediacy distinguished between Susan and

Friday, the contact becomes an ethical occurrence in the text. Susan lifts herself and she studies Friday's flat face, his small dull eyes, the broad nose, his thick lips and his dark grey skin, and in the disclosure of the face-to-face, proximity is *by itself* a signification. The sense of vulnerability depicted in Susan's gesture of reaching out her sore hands and when Friday sits down beside her are indications of how contact is tenderness and responsibility. The original language is illuminated in the immediacy distinguished in the first encounter between these characters in the text.

Further, into the same passage, Friday continues to lead Susan across sand dunes and along a path ascending to the hilly interior of the island. A sense of tenderness is signified in the contact when she injures her heel and Friday indicates that he can carry her by offering her his back: "[Susan] hesitated to accept, for he was a slight fellow, shorter than I. But there was no help for it. So part-way skipping on one leg, part-way riding on his back, with my petticoat gathered up and my chin brushing his springy hair, I ascended the hillside, my fear of him abating in this strange backwards embrace" (6). Susan is hesitant of letting Friday carry her, but when she accepts his help, a sense of tenderness is signified in the contact between them. The implication of tenderness is implied when her chin brushes his springy hair and when her fear of him subsides and specifically in the enactment of the embrace. In this particular passage, the contact between the characters is determined by tenderness and a sense of responsibility is illuminated in Friday's gesture of offering his back. He offers to help Susan without using the spoken language; the communication between them is non-verbal.

According to Levinas, no site is ever sufficiently a proximity, like an embrace ("Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence" 82). The signification of proximity is distinguished in the contact between Susan and Friday when he carries her on his back in a backwards embrace. The contact between Susan and Friday in the island setting of the novel alludes to an encounter irreducible to comprehension. In the relationship with Friday, particularly on the island, the western logic of language, which is associated with Susan's reasoning in the dominant setting of the novel, is undermined. Friday is interpreted from her western liberalist point of view in the text. In her understanding of language, speech seems to inhere consciousness itself. In the relationship with Friday on the island, the principle of logocentrism and the privileging of speech is destabilized. The contact is constituted by the proximity between the characters. In the ethical reading of the relationship between these characters, a language determined by sensibility is distinguished. In the following passage, I deploy the ethical experience of sensibility in Levinas' philosophy on language into the

ethical reading of the relationship between Susan and Friday, and I argue that it enables a sense of healing in the text.

Levinas elaborates on the terms “sensibility” or sensory experience when he talks about the meaning of proximity. He states that the immediacy of the sensible is an event of proximity and not of knowledge and that sensibility first begins as a touch (“Language and Proximity” 116-118). Levinas’ notion of how proximity is an experience of sensibility and that it first begins as a touch is illuminated in the passage when Friday touches Susan’s arm when he leads her across the island: “He reached out and with the back of his hand touched my arm. He is trying my flesh, I thought. But by and by my breathing slowed and I grew calmer. He smelled of fish, and of sheepswool on a hot day” (6). In these lines, when Friday touches Susan’s arm, the implications of tenderness in the gesture of the touch, is designating of a language based on sensibility and the ethical occurrence is an event of proximity. The contact between Susan and Friday is first experienced through the immediacy of the sensible. A language determined by sensory experience signifies the proximity between these particular characters. The experience of the touch and Susan’s smelling of Friday’s body indicate how a language determined by sensory experience grounds the ethical implications of proximity. When Friday touches Susan’s body, she begins to breathe slower and she becomes calmer, and in this event of proximity, the contact turns into an ethical occurrence in the text. In this particular scene, the ethical implications of the experience of sensibility is incorporated into the reading of the relationship between these two particular characters. Levinas’ ethical philosophy on language and proximity is distinguished in the contact between Susan and Friday enables a sense of healing in the novel’s dominant setting where Friday’s violated body represents the violence of the text.

Levinas also focuses on the experience of the caress when he talks about proximity: “[T]he caress of the sensible awakens in contact and tenderness, that is, proximity, awakens in the touched only starting with the human skin, a face, only with the approach of the neighbor” (118). He accentuates that “this relationship of proximity, [...] is the original language, a language without words or propositions, pure communication” (119). After a short sojourn on the island, Susan and Friday are returned to England. Crusoe dies on the return passage, and when Susan caresses Friday’s body in order to soothe him, a relationship of proximity is signified in the contact between these two characters:

I knew of course that Friday did not understand the words. But it had been my belief from early on that Friday understood tones, that he could hear kindness in a human

voice when kindness was sincerely meant. So I went on speaking to him, saying the same words over and over, laying my hand on his arm to soothe him; I guided him to his master's bedside and made him kneel there till I felt calm overtake us [...]. (41)

The relationship of proximity is evident when Susan strokes her hand over Friday's arm. The explication of the caress, signified in Susan's gesture of stroking Friday's arm, indicates how the contact between these characters constitutes a relationship of proximity. Susan's recognition of Friday's ability to respond to tones and the sincerity of kindness in a human voice also connotes a sense of tenderness in the contact between the characters. She consoles him by saying the same word over and over, and she caresses his skin, and when she makes him sit down beside his master's bedside, both of them are overtaken by a sense of calmness. In the relationship of proximity distinguished in the contact between these characters, the original language is distinguished, and a sense of pure communication is designated when she caresses his body. The original language is distinguished in the contact between Susan and Friday and when both of them are overtaken by a sense of calmness, the contact between these characters become an ethical occurrence in the text. The relationship of proximity signified in the contact between Susan and Friday destabilizes the dominant setting of the novel where the character of Friday is silenced because of his inability to speak. In the ethical reading of the contact between Susan and Friday, the relationship of proximity and a sense of pure communication is illuminated, which enables a sense of healing in the text.

Morgan claims that Levinas uses terms like "caress" and tenderness with the intention to move away from traditional epistemological vocabulary, from words like "sensory quality", "sense data" or "appearance", and that he focuses on contiguity, intimacy, involvement and immersion to emphasize how sensory involvement in and with the world is not perceived as primarily observational or theoretical (128). In the passage when Susan teaches herself how to play the flute, in order to communicate in a language accessible to Friday, Levinas' emphasis on how sensory involvement is based on contiguity and immersion is explicated. She plays his tune, first in unison with him, then in the intervals when he is not playing, and they continue to play until her hands has become sore. The thematic element of sensory involvement is disclosed in the contact between Susan and Friday when they are playing music together, and the ethics of proximity resonates with Susan's understanding of love:

I thought: It is true, I am not conversing with Friday, but is this not as good? Is conversation not simply a species of music in which first the one takes up the refrain and then the other? Does it matter what the refrain of our conversation is any more than it matters what tune it is we play? And I asked myself further: Are not both music and conversation like love? Who would venture to say that what passes between lovers is of substance (I refer to their lovemaking and not their talk), yet is it not true that something is passed between them, back and forth, and they come away refreshed and healed for a while of their loneliness? As long as I have music in common with Friday, perhaps he and I will need no language. (9)

In these lines, a sense of pure communication is distinguished in the relationship of proximity, which is identified in the contact between Susan and Friday when they are playing music together. The immediacy of the sensible is distinguished in the contact between them. Instead of observing Friday while he is playing his flute, Susan teaches herself how to play his instrument. The signification of sensory involvement is implied in the contact between the characters when they are playing music. Levinas points to how sensory involvement in and with the world cannot be perceived as primarily observational or theoretical, and his stance resonates with the ethical reading of how Susan's communicates with Friday through the language of music. The contact between these characters is determined by sensory involvement and immersion. According to Susan, speech seems to be in contact with the sources of language, and in this particular passage, when she acknowledges that she can communicate with Friday through the language of music, the silencing of his figure is destabilized. The western logic of language is associated with Susan's reasoning in the novel, and when she decides to communicate in a language accessible to Friday, the ethics of proximity is manifested in the contact between the characters. In the ethical reading of the novel, the signification of proximity in the contact between Susan and Friday conveys a reckoning of how immediacy is constitutive of the condition of love, which enables a sense of healing in dominant setting, where the narrative's sense of violence is indicated in the violation of Friday's bodily integrity and dignity.

In this chapter, I have introduced Ledbetter's studies on narrative ethic and Levinas' ethical philosophy on proximity and language in order to present an ethical reading of Friday's violated body, and the contact between his character and Susan in the island setting of the novel. Friday's violated body points the reader towards the narrative's ethic. In the ethical reading of the novel, when he expresses himself through song and dance, Friday

defines his sense of self on his own terms, which illuminates the dignity of his character. In the ethical reading of the signification of the body in his particular character, the inviolable dignity of the individual is illuminated. I adapted Levinas' ethical philosophy on proximity and language into the ethical reading of the contact between Susan and Friday in the island setting of the novel. A language determined by sensibility is indicated when Friday carries Susan on his back in a backwards embrace and in Susan's smelling of Friday's body. On the island, the contact between these characters is determined by tenderness and responsibility. There is an immediacy of the sensible distinguished in the relationship between Susan and Friday, and particularly in the island setting of the novel. When Susan soothes Friday, when Crusoe dies on the return passage to England, she caresses his body, and in this gesture of tenderness, a sense of pure communication is articulated. The relationship of proximity distinguished between these particular characters articulates a sense of pure communication, which enables a sense of healing in the dominant setting where the violence of the text is revealed in the violation of Friday's bodily integrity and dignity. In the final chapter of this project, I present a summarized reading of my ethical analysis of both of the novels and I compare the novels in connection to Levinas' philosophy on proximity. I conclude by addressing how the ethics of proximity, which is distinguished in the relationship between Mrs. Curren and Veruciel and Susan and Friday in *Foe* can be included into a broader discussion on the ethics of literature. In the conclusion, I also introduce further inquiries of Coetzee's novels and particularly in relation to Levinas' ethical philosophy.

5 Conclusion

In this project, I have adapted Levinas' philosophy on proximity into the ethical reading of the relationships between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil in *Age of Iron* and between Susan and Friday in *Foe*, which enables a sense of resistance towards the political dimensions of violence in the novels. The fellowship with the other human is illuminated in the ethical reading of the relationship between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil, which challenges the political context of apartheid, where social relationships are imbued with violence and hostility. An immediacy older than the abstractness of nature is constitutive of the relationship between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil and in the ethical reading of the contact between these two particular characters the discursive modes of systematic rule, racial classification and retributive violence are disrupted. The proximity distinguished in the contact between these characters represents a disturbance of time. Mrs. Curren encounters Vercueil on the same day her illness is diagnosed, and he becomes a kind of angel of death to her. In the novel, Vercueil is the only character, who is not described by the means of the metaphor of iron by Mrs. Curren. His character seems to be outside the structures of social and political life. He challenges Mrs. Curren's orderly habits, cleanliness and her principles on moral obligation, commitment and charity. When Mrs. Curren's illness increasingly worsens, she begins to break through towards some kind of human understanding, and it is with the symbol of ordinary humanity, Vercueil, with which she achieves this, rather than any of the African characters. The structure of alterity reflected in the figure of Vercueil's is constitutive of Mrs. Curren's sense of self in the novel. The proximity is determinative of the face-to-face relation, and in the immediacy between these characters, Mrs. Curren comes to reconcile with her own impending death.

In the ethical reading of the personage of Mrs. Curren and the contact between her character and Vercueil, the social dimensions of Levinas' thinking is illuminated. These characters can be read as being intrinsic to a social condition. In the sense of immediacy identified in the contact between these particular characters, a command or an imperative is disclosed, which is determinative of Mrs. Curren's character. Vercueil's character places an incumbent obligation upon Mrs. Curren's character and the Biblical formula of the responsibility for the other is illuminated in her personage. In the ethical reading of the relationship between these characters, the bond of responsibility is established, which enables a pressure on the political context of apartheid where natural human relations are undermined by structures of violence. Mrs. Curren understands that it is colonial history and particularly

Afrikaner Nationalism, which have caused the militant resistance of the younger black generations, and in the novel, she has been opposed to apartheid all her life. She denounces the State's violence and the militant resistance caused by the black youth. The metaphor of iron alludes to the political dimensions of violence in the setting of apartheid in the novel. The natural relations between parents and children are undermined and the structural violence of the regime has produced the principle of black opposition, that of non-white solidarity and non-cooperation, which is reflected in Bheki's stance in the novel. In the ethical reading of the personage of Mrs. Curren, a sense of opposition against the violent regime is illuminated. She internalizes the brutal effects of the State's violence. In the ethical reading of her personage, a sense of progressing towards peace is distinguished. The bond of responsibility is entrenched in the ethical reading of the contact between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil, which destabilizes the political context of apartheid where parents have given up their authority over children and where human relations are imbued with hostility and vengeance. The political context of apartheid is a period of desolation and the fellowship with the other human has been destructed.

In the ethical reading of *Age of Iron*, the encounter between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil is irreducible to comprehension. Vercueil is a figure of alterity and when Mrs. Curren is exposed to his character in the text, she is exposed to being outraged and pained. In the contact with Vercueil, her sense of self is exalted. In the immediacy distinguished between these characters, Mrs. Curren becomes receptive towards his presence. In the recognition of his character, Mrs. Curren's sense of self is constituted. When she acknowledges his presence by offering her own substance, the imperative of responsibility is distinguished. When her illness increasingly worsens, Mrs. Curren acknowledges her dependency on Vercueil and in this recognition of his mutual dependency on her, the ethical implication of proximity is determined. The sense of fellowship identified in the contact between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil incorporates the structure of proximity and enables a reckoning of human dependency. The imperative of responsibility, which is reflected in Mrs. Curren's character, comes from the proximity to Vercueil's character and a figure of maternity is distinguished in her personage when she reveals her sense of vulnerability and when she exposes her very own substance to his character. The figure of maternity distinguished in her personage grounds an authentic figure of responsibility in the text and gives evidence to how the ethics of responsibility established in the ethical reading of the contact between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil overturns the political context of apartheid where the fellowship with the other human is undermined.

In the ethical reading of *Foe*, there is an ethical indication of the figure of maternity in the personage of Susan when she caresses Friday's body and in the passage where she teaches herself how to play the flute in order to communicate in a language accessible to him. The symbolism of the child also resonates with the ethical reading of the figure of maternity in the both of the novels. Mrs. Curren learns to love those who she is disinclined to love, namely Bheki and John. In *Foe*, the terms of "caress" and "tenderness" are clearly maternal and the language of sensibility, which is illuminated in the contact between Susan and Friday enables a sense of healing. In the relationship between these two particular characters, a sense of sensory involvement and almost an immersion is articulated. In the ethical reading of the relationships, an affectionate enclosing is illuminated in the enactments of the embrace, which destabilizes the political dimensions of violence in the novels. In this project, I chose to analyze novels by Coetzee that clearly show a connection to the figure maternity in Levinas' ethical philosophy. The sense of vulnerability and the susceptibility that the characters of Susan and Mrs. Curren show in their encounters with the figures of Vercueil and Friday are significant indicators for establishing how the ethical reading of the contact between these particular characters enables a resistance and destabilizes the political dimensions of violence in the novels. A further reading on the figure of maternity could be interrogated in connection to Coetzee's fiction. In *Age of Iron* and *Foe*, Mrs. Curren and Susan incorporate the western liberalist discourse, but they are characters that represents a lesser position, rather than a privileged position. Coetzee often uses female narrators and protagonists deliberately to problematize the concern of gender and marginality. By introducing an analysis of the figure of maternity in relation to some of the female protagonists presented in Coetzee's fiction, the social dimensions of human existence could be addressed further.

A sense of ethical peace is transfigured in the ethical reading of the relationship between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil. In the relationship between these characters, the contact is not characterized by taking hold of the other person. The proximity is constitutive of the contact between the characters. In the contact with Vercueil's character, Mrs. Curren reconciles with her own impending death. In the act of entrusting Vercueil, she allows herself to be changed by the other. The proximity represents a disturbance of time and she is able to let go herself as the relationship with Vercueil progresses in the novel. He relieves Mrs. Curren from her sense of solitude and in the ethical reading of the relationship between these characters; a structure of sociality and love is illuminated. A fraternal way of proximity is associated with the contact between these particular characters in the text. Vercueil's character is irreducible to comprehension. He is an unassimilable other in the text and the

contact between his character and Mrs. Curren is the experience of immediacy. In the sense of immediacy distinguished between these characters, when she is about to die in his arms at the end of the novel, the ethics of proximity is manifested. The enactment of the embrace is an experience of the senses and in the affectionate enclosing between these characters, a signification of love is illuminated in the contact between them. In the ethical relation between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil, a structure of peace that connotes a sense of rectification is distinguished in the novel. It is not merely a political peace, but rather a sense of peace originating in the fellowship with the other human. It is a sense of peace that is responsive to the needs of the other person. The sense of ethical peace arises out of responsibility and generosity. In the ethical reading of the sense of immediacy between these two particular characters, the political dimensions of violence are destabilized in the novel.

One of the central literary critics working on Coetzee's writing from a Levinasian perspective is Attridge. My arguments in this project have been an extension of his theoretical claims, but I go further into the social dimension of Levinas' thinking. The underwriting of the ethics of responsibility is underlined in the ethical inquiry of both of the novels, particularly in *Age of Iron*. However, I go further into Levinas' philosophy and I focus on the sense of immediacy distinguished between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil and Susan and Friday. In the ethical reading of the contact between these particular characters, the proximity is the inauguration of responsibility, sensibility, peace and love. My intention has been to establish how the ethical relation detected in the contact between these characters enables a sense resistance towards the dimensions of violence implied in the historical and political context of apartheid in the novels. In *Age of Iron*, the imperative of responsibility is inaugurated by the sense of immediacy distinguished between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil. The proximity is determinative of the contact between the characters, and a sense of ethical peace is illuminated in the ethical reading of their relationship in the novel. I have elaborated on Attridge's reading of how the novel is about a woman who takes responsibility for the other without calculation or forethought and suggested that this is related to the sense of ethical peace, which is commenced in the ethical reading of the contact between these characters in the novel. Mrs. Curren's act of trust is not a political prescription. Her act of entrusting Vercueil is a pure decision born out of uncertainty. It is a form of sacrificial trust in the sense that its outcome cannot be known in advance. A precise understanding of trust is designated in the ethical reading of Mrs. Curren's enactment of trust. A form of absolute trust is distinguished between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil, when she dies in his arms at the end of the novel, which signifies as a sense of peace in the text. The sense of vulnerability associated

with Mrs. Curren's character when she trusts him with her life is an indication of how she offers her very own substance to his character, which manifests the ethics of proximity. In this particular novel, I suggest that the ethical reading of the contact between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil enables a reckoning of the fellowship with the other human. In Levinas' philosophy, the face-to-face relation makes up a fact of human experience, which I argue is illuminated in the ethical reading of the contact between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil in the novel. The fellowship with the other human and a sense of ethical peace that acknowledges the needs of the other is illuminated in the contact between these particular characters, which establishes a sense of resistance towards the political context of apartheid where interpersonal relationships are undermined by structures of violence.

In this project, I have attempted to show that the relationship between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil cannot be reduced to an abstraction in the text. I have tried to accentuate the particularity of each of these characters and how their contact is concrete and particular. The ethical reading of the contact between these characters is resting on the idea of the fundamental relation. The notion of particularity is also underlined in the ethical reading of the contact between Susan and Friday in *Foe*. The proximity distinguished in the relationship between these particular characters is *by itself* a signification. The relationships of alterity, which are associated with the contact between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil and Susan and Friday is the most extreme immediacy. A sense of closeness without distance is illuminated in the reading of the contact between these particular characters. The encounters between these characters are irreducible to comprehension. The structure of alterity is associated with the figures of Vercueil and Friday. The structure of the experience of alterity is constitutive of the characters of Mrs. Curren and Susan in the novels. In Attridge's reading on figures of alterity in Coetzee's fiction, he focuses on the relationship between the reader and the literary work and the reader's sense of responsibility. My intention in this project has been to emphasize how the relationship of alterity, which is distinguished in the contact between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil and Susan and Friday establishes the ethical reading of the political dimensions of violence in the novels. I recognize that there are a number of figures of alterity in *Age of Iron* and *Foe* that could also be explored in a further inquiry of the novels. The concept of alterity and otherness are interrelated and the self-consciousness about alterity in *Foe* is also recognized in *Age of Iron* in the relationships Mrs. Curren have with those whom she is most socially distanced. Both of the novels thematizes and reflects on various modes of alterity. However, in order to narrow my approach in this project, I chose to focus on the structure of alterity in the figures of Vercueil and Friday. I chose to analyze novels that illuminate the

ethics of proximity and in these texts, I think there is evidence of how a sense of immediacy distinguished in the relationships between particular characters brings forward the ethical reading of the political dimensions of violence in the novels. I chose to go in-depth of how the structure of proximity is constitutive of the contact between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil and Susan and Friday and in the ethical reading of the relationships between these characters a sense of resistance towards the political dimensions of violence is enabled.

In *Foe*, the theme of oppression is disclosed in the representation of the mutilated Friday and the silencing of his character. Compared to *Age of Iron*, the historical and political tracings of oppression are more abstract. The novel is a post-colonial reworking of *Robinson Crusoe*, containing allusions to other works by Defoe. *Age of Iron* is set in South Africa during apartheid and in this novel there are factual settings and graphic depictions of township violence, such as the burning of the nearby black township. However, the principle of intertextuality is also present in *Age of Iron*. The novel's title for instance alludes to Hesiod's poem *Work and Days*. *Foe* takes place in the second decade of the eighteenth century and there are no direct references to South Africa or the historical and political context of apartheid. The tracing of colonial history is revealed in the reading of Friday, who is a former slave in the novel. In one of the passages in the final section of the novel, his figure is described as lying in fetal position with a chain around his neck, and in the reading of the violence perpetrated onto his body, a tracing to historical oppression is evident. In the novel, the silencing of Friday's character seems to suggest the repression of the black majority in South Africa. The problem of allegory is a mode that is evoked and it is clearest in connection to Friday, but because my intention for this project has been to illuminate how the contact between his character and Susan enables a sense of healing in text, I chose not to address the allegorical associations with his characters. For a further examination of the silencing of Friday's figure, I suggest a reading that introduces Stephen Slemon's "Post-Colonial Allegory and the Transformation of History". In this article, Slemon points out that the post-colonial allegory engages in a process of destabilization and of transforming our fixed ideas about history and in the kind of allegory he describes, it is fiction that determines the way we read history and not the other way around (165). For a further reading of Coetzee's *Foe*, I suggest to disclose a mode of the postcolonial allegory in the reading of the silencing of Friday's figure and address the thematic concern of oppression within discourses of history.

In the ethical reading of *Foe*, I have a primary focus on Levinas' philosophy on proximity and language, but in the process of writing this particular chapter, I recognized how

my analysis includes an ethical reading of the signification of the body in the text. In Levinas' philosophy as well as in Coetzee's fiction, the concern of the individual is clearly marked. However, in the ethical inquiry of *Age of Iron* and *Foe*, I put emphasis on how the fact of the ethical comes about in the relationship between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil and Susan and Friday. In *Foe*, the concern of the individual is explicated in the ethical reading of Friday's violated body. In one of the passages of the novels, the mutilated Friday is described with a chain around his neck, which is an indication of how his character is a victim of colonial oppression. The violation of his bodily integrity and dignity represents the violence of the text, but in the ethical reading of his violated body, a sense of presence of the other ethics is illuminated. The figure of the suffering body takes power in the text. The bodily pain associated with the figure of the suffering body alludes to a sense of certainty. In the reading of Friday's violated body, the aspect of bodily pain is undeniable. This is something that our own bodies tell us and in the ethical reading of the figure of the suffering body, an alternative history is unleashed into the novel. The metaphor of the violated body is chaotic and crisis-oriented and it disturbs the moral coherence of the novel's dominant setting, which is made up by the western logic of language associated with Susan's reasoning. Susan believes that speech is in contact with the sources of language because it seems to inhere consciousness itself. The assumption of eurocentrism is also articulated in Susan's understanding of language in the dominant setting of the novel. Friday is a figure of colonial oppression but his scars render him an invulnerable authority, as the signs of historical oppression constitute a story that is his own. The signification of the body points the reader towards the narrative's ethic. Friday's scarred body is an identifying mark and when his figure is determined on his own terms in the text, a sense of dignity is distinguished in his character. In the ethical reading of his figure, the inviolable dignity of the individual is illuminated.

The figure of the suffering body is also present in *Age of Iron* and associated with Mrs. Curren's illness. In the novel, she suffers from terminal bone cancer and a sense of doubling is detected in the cancer in the way it mirrors the diseased society of South Africa. The figure of bodily pain distinguishes an undeniable presence in the text. A sense of authority is associated with Mrs. Curren because she is dying. The authority of dying is related to the moral significance of her personage. Because Mrs. Curren is dying, a sense of sincerity and wisdom is reflected in her personage in the text. In the novel, she is tormented by a state of shame because she is living under an oppressive regime. Mrs. Curren has been opposed to Afrikaner Nationalism all her life, but in the novel she comes face to face with the brutality of the system. During apartheid, there are no democratic values and justice is ignored. A sense of

collective shame is affiliated with setting of apartheid. When Mrs. Curren's illness has increasingly worsened, her recognition of shame is tied to the notion of honour. The authority of the dying and the notion of honour is of private value to Mrs. Curren. In the novel, Mrs. Curren wants to experience a death with honour. She illuminates a sense of private honour in the novel and in her character, a sense of how shame is a potentiality for governing life is identified. For a further inquiry of this particular novel, I suggest to introduce the theme of shame in a larger discourse of post-colonial literature.

In the ethical reading of *Foe*, I chose to focus on how the relationship of proximity, which is distinguished in the contact between Susan and Friday, particularly in the island setting of the novel. A sense of pure communication is articulated in the contact between these particular characters. The ethical reading is based on Levinas' designation of the original language. For Levinas, the speech act does not unfold in knowledge of the other, but in his proximity. He says that proximity is *by itself* a signification. Because Friday is unable to speak, the communication between Susan and Friday is basically nonverbal. Susan tries to communicate with Friday by speaking to him and by teaching him how to write, but the language of sensory experience is determinative of the contact between these particular characters. In the ethical reading of the sense of immediacy distinguished between Susan and Friday, the western logic of language is undermined. On the island, Susan and Friday communicates through a language based on sensibility. Friday is the first man Susan encounters when she is washed up on the deserted island and when he sits down beside her when she reaches out her sore hands, a contact determined by tenderness and responsibility is illuminated. Friday carries Susan on his back when her heels are injured and when his hair touches her skin and she smells his body, a sense of sensibility is distinguished in the language and the contact between these particular characters. After an uneventful sojourn on the island, Crusoe dies on the return passage to England. Susan caresses Friday's body to console him, and when both of the characters are overtaken by a calmness, a sense of tenderness is implied in the contact between them. A sense of pure communication is distinguished in the proximity between these particular characters when Susan caresses Friday's arm, which is an ethical occurrence in the text. In the ethical reading, the relationship of proximity is illuminated in the contact between these characters when they are returned to England and Susan teaches herself how to play the flute in order to communicate in a language accessible to Friday. A sense of sensibility and almost immersion is designated in the relationship between these characters when they communicate through the language of music, and the ethical reading of the contact between these characters resonates with Levinas

assertion that sensory involvement in and with the world cannot be perceived as primarily observational or theoretical. In the ethical reading of this particular passage, the western logic of language, which is incorporated into the dominant setting of the novel and articulated through Susan's reasoning, is destabilized. The original language distinguished in the contact between Susan and Friday illuminates a reckoning of love, which manifests a sense of healing in the text. A sense of pure communication is distinguished in the original language associated with the contact between these particular characters, which enables a sense of healing in the novel's dominant setting where Friday is silenced and where his violated body represents the violence of the text.

I chose to analyze *Age of Iron* and *Foe* because I think these novels illuminates the ethical dimensions of Levinas' philosophy. In both of the novels, a concern for the individual's sense of responsibility to the other human is entrenched. This is also, why Attridge's criticism has been relevant for my inquiry of *Foe* and particularly of *Age of Iron*. In this particular novel, the bond of responsibility is illuminated in the ethical reading of the relationship between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil, which enables a sense of resistance towards the political dimensions of violence. The underwriting of the imperative of responsibility in the contact between these particular characters is what destabilizes the discursive of mode of systematic rule, racial classification and retributive violence. By illuminating how the fellowship with the other human is recognized in the ethical reading of the relationship between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil, the structures of violence associated with the interpersonal relationships in the political context of apartheid can be challenged. The ethical reading is established by focusing on the relationship of alterity, which is associated with the contact between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil. By focusing on the concrete contact between the characters and the particularity of each of these characters, a human reckoning of our mutual dependency can be illuminated. I have established the ethical reading of the relationships between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil and Susan and Friday in order to demonstrate how the contact between these particular characters can reinforce our understanding of human commitment, obligation and love. By emphasizing the particularity of each of these characters and the utter particularity of the relationships between these characters, the political dimension, which in my project, are related to systematic violence and processes of dehumanization are resisted. In my project, Mrs. Curren and Susan are recognized as protagonists; however, their relationships with Friday and Vercueil is the central protagonists in my ethical inquiry of the novels. The sense of immediacy distinguished in the contact

between these characters are what enables a sense of resistance towards the political dimensions of violence.

I acknowledge that my project does not take into account the criticism of Levinas' philosophy that questions the relation between the experience of the face-to-face and the spheres of, reason, law and justice, which in the western liberal tradition at least, are at the basis of the organization of society (Critchley 161). This has been a deliberate decision, on my part, because my overall intention of this project has been to disclose how the ethics of proximity distinguished in the ethical reading of the relationships between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil and Susan and Friday opens for a broader discussion of the ethics of literature. The realms of ethics and politics serves as a framework for my inquiry of Coetzee's novels, but my intention has been to broaden the discourses of ethics in literature by introducing how the sense of immediacy distinguished between these particular characters reinforces a human reckoning of the political dimensions of violence, oppression and injustice in the novels. In my ethical reading of the novels, the fact of the ethical comes about in the relationship with the other person, but a further inquiry of Coetzee's works could include the concerns for animals as well as the earth. I recognize that this is a contested issue among students and critiques of Levinas, but I think there is evidence for analyzing Coetzee's fiction from this ethical standpoint. A number of scholars have focused on animal rights and ecological thought in Coetzee's works and it could be relevant to include how the fact of the ethical can also come about in the relationship with animals as well as the earth.

I agree with Attridge that what shapes us as ethical human beings are impulses and acts of love, generosity and trust and that compared to spheres of politics, theology and philosophy, these acts and impulses are in their natural element in literature. In my project, I refer to the impulses of responsibility, sensibility, peace and love as experiences because they are constitutive of the characters of Mrs. Curren and Susan. Even if my ethical claims rely on Attridge's criticism, I extend his reading of ethics by suggesting that these impulses depend upon a sense of immediacy, which first emerges between the characters and is secondly developed in the reader's mind, as he/she witnesses this contact between the characters in text. Certainly, there is always a distance between the text and the reader, but, I argue that a sense of immediacy is created when the reader intimately engages with the relationship and the contact between these particular characters in the text. I chose to analyze *Age of Iron* and *Foe*, because I believe the novels enables me to draw a line between the ethical implication of immediacy and the ethics of literature. The sense of immediacy distinguished between the reader and the reading of the relationship between Mrs. Curren and Vercueil and between

Susan and Friday can open the reader's sense of responsiveness and receptiveness to the text. Proximity constitutes us as social human beings and through the reading process a reckoning of peace, reconciliation and love can be cultivated. The ethical reading of the novels involves a sensitive discernment of the particularity of each of these characters and a careful reading of the relationships between these particular characters. There is an ethical implication of the immediacy in the sense that it can overwhelm the reader and enable a receptiveness towards the ethical implications of the experiences and acts of sensibility, responsibility and trust. This sense of receptiveness in the reading can then open for human reckoning of peace, reconciliation and love, which grounds the ethics of literature.

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