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How would you characterise the relationship between politics and the novel in the works of Nadine Gordimer and J.M. Coetzee?

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The relationship between politics and the novel in the works of Nadine Gordimer and J.M. Coetzee can be characterised by the way in which the writers treat the broad political themes of land and language in the novels *The Conservationist, July's People, In the Heart of the Country* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*. A perception of politics tied not only to immediate contemporary issues but also to a wider understanding of politics, which has at its root a concern with a complex network of human relationships, with each other and with the environment, is illuminated by the way the writers interrogate the failure of the languages of colonial discourse to allow a 'true exchange' and the effects of power relations on the land.

The oppression of the black majority enacted by the government of South Africa and enforced with brutality by its police force presented to its writers an almost unique ethical and aesthetic challenge. Potential censorship, the degree to which writing can or should be seen as an intervention in the political sphere, the ethical responsibility of the representation of the struggle for democracy and its consequences; the ethical legitimacy of writing at all in a society in such urgent need of reform; all of these challenges exerted a weight on South African literature during the period of apartheid. Coetzee has described the literature of South Africa as 'less than fully human literature, unnaturally preoccupied with power and the torsions of power, unable to move from elementary relations of contestation, domination, and subjugation to the vast and complex human world that lies beyond them. It is exactly the kind of literature you would expect people to write from a prison.'[1] Gordimer has called for writing, even (or especially) writing in situations of oppression and injustice, to resist the temptation to become merely propaganda. In *The Essential Gesture* she writes that 'a writer has to reserve the right to tell the truth as he sees it, in his own words, without being accused of letting the side down.'[2] Both Gordimer and Coetzee are expressing concern that apartheid has placed certain restrictions on novel-writing in South Africa. In this situation, the most salient challenge becomes that of writing literature which deals with the political, yet is not limited by it. Coetzee calls for a wider understanding of politics than one which deals only with chains and prison bars; his 'vast and complex human world' is nothing if not a political idea, politics being at root an exploration of the ways in which humans live together, the theory and practice of the social. If viewed in this way, the relationship between politics and the novel can be seen not as a limiting force but an essential concern; not merely contemporary reference, but an attempt to engage with the complexities of a wider human life and society.

There are differing perspectives among critics as to the extent to which Gordimer and Coetzee are understood as political writers. While Stephen Clingman has written that

[1] J.M. Coetzee, 'Jerusalem Prize Acceptance Speech' in Doubling the Point ed. by David Attwell (London: Harvard University Press, 1992) p 98
[2] Nadine Gordimer, 'A Writer's Freedom' in The Essential Gesture ed. by Stephen Clingman (London: Jonathan Cape, 1988) p 107

'Gordimer's work has always been tied much more urgently than Coetzee's to the idea of political obligation and responsibility'[3] Derek Attridge suggests that 'the importance of Coetzee's books...lies...in the way they raise and illuminate questions of immense practical importance for all of us'; one of these questions he identifies is 'the relation between ethical demands and political decisions.'[4] The way in which both critics characterise the political, however, appears to be as an intervention in the political sphere; Coetzee's novels are seen to be valuable because they have 'practical' applications; Gordimer is described as aware of a 'responsibility' to society. I want to consider the relationship between politics and the novel differently here, to avoid a definition of politics which sees the interaction with contemporary governments or certain key issues as the essence of the political. Rather, the way countries are governed and the issues that come to define the contemporary moment are manifestations of a wider politics, one which seeks to understand how humans relate to each other and with their environment. It is this awareness that characterises the relationship between politics and the novel in the works of Gordimer and Coetzee.

One of the broad political themes explored by Coetzee and Gordimer is that of land. Clearly there are reasons within the immediate context that indicate why this should have been a concern for South African novelists during apartheid; several of the key laws which formed the system of apartheid concerned organisation of the land, including the Group Areas Act of 1950, which designated separate areas of the country for different racial groups, and the Pass Laws, which regulated the freedom of movement of the black population across the country. However, while the concept of land in the novels of Gordimer and Coetzee incorporates these contemporary injustices it sees them as symptoms of a wider and deeper social malaise.

Rita Barnard has suggested examining Nadine Gordimer's fiction with particular attention to her use of place, arguing 'Places are not just metaphorically expressive in Gordimer's work...but are also conceived of as ideologically productive: the ordinary enclosures in which we live shape, as much as they represent, dominant social relations'.[5] I would suggest that place within the fiction of Gordimer and Coetzee is 'ideologically productive' in another way too; that the notion of place is shaped by dominant social relations as much as it shapes them. At the very end of *In the Heart of the Country* Magda describes the farm as a 'paradise'; discussing the 'gods' she says 'My hope was always that they would descend and live with me in paradise.'[6] Interestingly, this word occurs at the end of another novel by Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, to describe another unlikely paradise. The magistrate, attempting to write a history of the outpost, writes that 'No one who paid a visit to this oasis...failed to be struck by the charm of life here. We lived in the time of the seasons, of the harvests, of the migrations of the waterbirds. We lived with nothing between us and the stars. This was paradise on earth.'[7] The magistrate's description of the outpost utilises the language of pastoral, the evocation of the beauties of nature but it is a description that the magistrate himself describes as 'devious', 'equivocal' and 'reprehensible' (p169) because it establishes a relationship with the land that is the essence of pastoral; an admiration for the land, coupled with a silence about those who work it. Coetzee has described this as the typical recourse of the 'hereditary masters of South Africa', the colonisers: 'their talk, their

[3] Stephen Clingman, The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History from the Inside (London: Bloomsbury, 1993). p xiii

[4] Derek Attridge, J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event (London: University of Chicago Press, 2004) p x

[5] Rita Barnard, Apartheid and Beyond: South African Writers and the Politics of Place (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) p 42

[6] J.M. Coetzee, In the Heart of the Country (London: Vintage, 2004) p 151 (All subsequent references to this edition.)

[7] J.M. Coetzee, Waiting for the Barbarians (London: Vintage, 2004) p 168-169 (All subsequent references to this edition)

excessive talk about how they love South Africa has consistently been directed toward *the land*, that is, toward what is least likely to respond to love: mountains and deserts, birds, animals and flowers.'[8] This is strikingly similar to the magistrate's 'love' of the landscape; it is a claiming of the landscape, a relationship with nature that is shaped and distorted by power. If the dominant power relations oppress and exclude the people of the land, then love for the land itself becomes the only available discourse. This relationship between power relationships and representations of land has been a constant theme in the works of Gordimer and Coetzee.

One of the traditional representations of this relationship in South Africa has been mediated by the genre of pastoral. Coetzee has written that pastoral art in South Africa 'is essentially conservative; it looks back, usually in a spirit of nostalgia, to the calm and stability of the farm...Blindness to the colour black is built into South African pastoral.'[9] In Coetzee's reading of the pastoral form, the beauties of the landscape of the farm and veld in the past are evoked, and become a legitimisation of a certain social order, including the oppression of the black majority, in the name of tradition. Coetzee goes on to note a strand of South African fiction which uses the conventions of the pastoral form in order to critique the silences and gaps it endorses; an anti-pastoral tradition, into which he places Nadine Gordimer's *The Conservationist. The Conservationist* fits neatly into this categorization; Coetzee writes that 'if the work of the hands on a particular patch of earth, digging, ploughing, planting, building, is what inscribes it as the property of its occupiers by rights then the hands of the black serfs doing the work had better not be seen.'[10] *The Conservationist* is anti-pastoral in these terms because it attempts to subvert and uncover this type of silence within the pastoral.

The ending of the novel becomes a symbolic, cathartic purging of secrets of the land, as a black man is reinterred by the black community. In the final sentence of the novel Gordimer writes that the dead man 'took possession of this earth, theirs; one of them.'[11] This sentence hinges around the word 'theirs', which seems to refer both to the land – that is, that the land belongs to the community, and to the black man himself – that he too belongs to them. This contrasts strongly with Mehring's perception of ownership throughout the novel. The novel's second section begins with one of the quotations from the Reverend Henry Callaway's *The Religious System of the Amazulu* which are scattered throughout the text; this, the first, reads 'I pray for corn, that many people may come to this village of yours and make a noise and glorify you.' (p 37). This ironically mirrors Mehring's thoughts at the beginning of the section as he lays in the veld thinking about a business trip to Japan in which he had discussed the farm with his colleagues: 'his presence on the grass becomes momentarily a demonstration, as if those people on the other side of the world were smilingly seeing it for themselves: I have my bit of veld and my cows.'(p39-40) The notions of possession and the glories of ownership are repeated in the Callaway quotation and in Mehring's thoughts, and through the reminder of the earlier African ownership of the land and its culture, Mehring's reflections become ironic. There is an assumed security in his possession of the farm here, emphasised by the repetition of the possessive 'my' in the first sentence but following immediately after his reflections on his seemingly unassailable possession of the land, this dramatises the question of its rightful owners. As Mehring lies on the ground 'breathing intimately into the ground' (p 39) a parallel with the dead man is established. It is this motif which appears again at the end of the novel, as the dead man takes possession of the land.

[8] Coetzee, 'Jerusalem Prize Acceptance Speech' in Doubling the Point p 97
[9] J.M. Coetzee, White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa (London: Yale University Press, 1988) p 4-5
[10] Coetzee, White Writing p 4
[11] Nadine Gordimer, The Conservationist (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005) p 323 (All subsequent references to this edition.)

The traditional representation of the relationship between power relations and the land is represented by Mehring in this version of anti-pastoral, and ultimately removed from the land.

Brighton J. Uledi Kamanga has criticised the 'easy optimism' of the readings of the end of the novel which view it as prophesying the end of the relationship between power relations and the land symbolised by Mehring, arguing that across the breadth of Gordimer's work from this period is rather a sense of 'political dead end.'[12] This critique places the novel in its contemporary context, aligning it with the situation in South Africa at the time of publication, suggesting that 'in light of the ruthless ways in which the South African Government defended apartheid and white power for many years, this prophecy in a 1975 novel sounded like simple-minded wishful thinking.'[13] This analysis establishes an interesting comparison with Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country.* This, initially, looks to fit Kamanga's premise rather better; there is no final catharsis, no repossession of the land by its rightful owners, but a hauntingly repetitive cycle of the pastoral. In *White Writing* Coetzee appears immediately uncomfortable with his own neat division of pastoral and anti-pastoral, questioning whether 'it is in the nature of the ghost of the pastoral ever to be finally laid.'[14] *In the Heart of the Country* could be considered a fictional dramatisation of this uncertainty; the motif of death and burial which forms such a key part of the symbolism of *The Conservationist* is repeated here, but where Gordimer presents a final cathartic burial, in *In the Heart of the Country,* the corpse refuses to remain dead, let alone buried. The father reappears after Magda kills him the first time, and after she accidentally shoots him, he dies slowly and painfully. The attempts to bury him are repeatedly unsuccessful because the corpse will not fit in the hole in the ground and even when it appears that he is dead and buried, he re-emerges as Hendrik dresses in his clothes. (p 106) At the end of the novel the father reappears again, sitting in a chair as Magda talks to him; in section 36 Magda says that 'he does not die so easily after all'.(p 18) The father figure comes to represent the pastoral form, and the power relations it encodes; just as Coetzee questions whether the ghost of the pastoral can ever be truly laid, Magda relates that 'what was once pastoral has become one of those stifling stories in which brother and sister, wife and daughter and concubine prowl and snarl around the bedside, listening for the death-rattle.' (p 77) The sense of claustrophobic unease in the novel is created by this sense of waiting for the father, and all that he symbolises, to die. While it could be suggested, with Kamanga, that this is simply a more accurate rendering of a contemporary political situation than Gordimer's cathartic burial, the way in which Gordimer and Coetzee link their burial and death motifs to the pastoral form suggest a wider reference point than the structures of apartheid; a system of representations of relationships to the land are analysed, and in this way can be seen to form a continuity with other novels by the two authors; the different resolutions reflect more than different predictions about contemporary politics but rather about the possibility, or otherwise, of forming a new type of relationship with the land.

In *July's People,* the revolution significantly changes the relationship between the Smales family and the land. Before the revolution, 'Roberts' bird book and standard works on indigenous trees and shrubs were (their) accommodation of the wilderness to themselves when they used to visit places like this, camping out. At the end of the holiday you packed up and went home.'[15] In the phrase 'camping out' there is a sense of the norm being departed from, to live in the land; this alteration requires the 'accommodation of the wilderness to

[12] Brighton J. Uledi Kamanga, Nadine Gordimer's fiction and the irony of apartheid (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2002) p 20
[13] Kamanga, Nadine Gordimer's fiction and the irony of apartheid p 20
[14] Coetzee, White Writing p81
[15] Nadine Gordimer, July's People (London: Jonathan Cape, 1981) p 179 (All subsequent references to this edition)

themselves.' It is power which determines what land is 'home' and what is an excursion into the 'wilderness'. This pictures a power relationship in which the land, 'the wilderness' can be controlled, used at will and regulated, for 'at the end of the holiday you went home.' It is July's wife who brilliantly articulates the deviations from this norm of space and land organisation caused by the revolution; 'White people here! Didn't you tell us many times how they live, there. A room to sleep in, another room to sit in, a room with books (she had a Bible), I don't know how many times you told me, a room with how many books...Now you tell me *nowhere* ...White people must have their own people somewhere. Aren't they living everywhere in this world?...Don't they go anywhere they want to go?.' (p 23) The patterning of 'here' and 'there' and 'nowhere', 'somewhere' and 'everywhere' emphasises the relationship of power to land, the differences between the 'here' and 'there' enormous and the endless locations suggested by 'everywhere' open only to the 'white people'. The very notions of here, there, of home and elsewhere, are decided and enacted by power.

In *The Conservationist* and *In the Heart of the Country* possession of the land comes to be seen as essential to the power relations pastoral encodes. For the coloniser to love the land it must be owned; Magda says 'I am heir to a space of natal earth which my ancestors found good and fenced about. To the spur of desire we have only one response: to capture, to enclose, to hold.' (p 124) There is a Biblical echo in the cadence of 'found good and fenced about' which is reminiscent of the creation story in Genesis 1; this becomes ironic as the response to finding the earth good is to regulate it, to control it, in effect to colonise it, to claim it as a possession. This notion appears too in *The Conservationist* where Mehring's attitude to the land, his attempt to conserve it, is at the same time an effort to create borders in order to protect his possession: 'On the farm it is the time for conservation – buildings to be repaired, fire-breaks cleared, he must go round all the fences with Jacobus.'(p 78) Conservation of the land in these terms is an attempt to assure the security of the farm, not an attempt to keep it in a 'natural' state. If in *The Conservationist* Gordimer finds a final hope in the exchange of the possession of the land, from the white oppressor to the black workers, Coetzee posits, in *Life & Times of Michael K*, that an entirely different representation of power relation to the land may be possible. Michael is deeply ambiguous about the idea of fences, so beloved by Mehring and Magda's family, and so essential to the pastoral; 'he could not imagine himself spending his life driving stakes into the ground, erecting fences, dividing up the land. He thought of himself not as something heavy that left tracks behind it, but if anything as a speck upon the surface'.[16] For Coetzee, if a final hope is to be found in the representation of land, it is in a figure which does not seek to exercise power on it at all, a 'trackless' existence upon the earth.

A second way in which Coetzee and Gordimer have explored the relationship between politics and the novel is through the interrogation of language and communication. The problem of communication is an issue that has preoccupied both Coetzee and Gordimer. In *White Writing* Coetzee asks 'is there a language in which people of European identity or if not of European identity, then of a highly problematical South African colonial identity, can speak to Africa and be spoken to by Africa? ...the lone poet in empty space is by no means a peripheral figure in South African writing. In the words he throws out to the landscape, in the echoes he listens for, he is seeking a dialogue with Africa, a reciprocity with Africa, that will allow him an identity better than that of a visitor, stranger, transient.' (p 8) Both Gordimer and Coetzee have examined the issue of language within their writing, exploring whether there exists or could exist a form of language that would enable communication, a true dialogue, across the political divides of South Africa.

[16] J.M. Coetzee, Life and Times of Michael K (London: Vintage, 2004) p 97

The problems of language are illustrated in *July's People* where confusion about the way individuals interact in a post-revolutionary South Africa, in which the dynamic of relationships have changed irrevocably, is played out in linguistic terms. Stephen Clingman has suggested that in *July's People* 'it becomes clear that language in this context is a battlefield – as much a battlefield as the realm of private and political relations it helps both constitute and conceal.'[17] The terms of Clingman's 'battle' could be considered the battle to find ways of communication across the social divide. For Bam and Maureen certain types of language are unrecoverable after the revolution; 'this kind of repartee belonged to the deviousness natural to suburban life.'(p 108) As the relationship between July and the Smales family changes, as he moves from his role as servant to that of host, from dependant to the one they are dependent upon, the gaps in their communication become obvious: 'they could assume comprehension between them only if she kept away from even the most commonplace of abstractions...(his English) was based on orders and responses, not the exchange of ideas and feelings.'(p116) This notion of exchange is crucial, it is exchange which has been lacking from the Smales' dialogue with July; comprehension relies on her assumptions and allowances. The same concept occurs in *In the Heart of the Country* too; Magda, talking with Anna says 'I have never learned to talk with another person...I have never known words of true exchange, Anna. The words I give you you cannot give back. They are words without value.'(p 110) In both novels, the dialogue between master and servant lacks true exchange, it is one-sided, with the servant unable to respond.

This understanding of the language of master-servant dialogue is realised vividly in *The Conservationist* where Gordimer renders Mehring's attack on a young girl in a plane ironically in the language of communication; the movements each make are described in the language of dialogue. There is a 'pause, quite delicate and patient, until the answer –she lifted her weight just enough'(p 148), 'an inquiry into what kind of flesh this was' (p149), 'a message of excitement and pleasure' (p 149), 'the finger was in no hurry to broach the question' (p149), 'this time the question was differently phrased' (p 150), 'an appreciative monologue' (p 151) and so on. This has the effect of drawing the attention to the fact that this is in actuality a completely non-consensual, non-dialogic action. The phrases are incongruous because Mehring is engaged in the opposite of 'true exchange' or conversation. That Gordimer uses this language makes ironic the notion of real communication within the novel; Mehring's notion of communication is quite clearly one in which true exchange has no place.

If Mehring symbolises the coloniser blithely continuing his conversation with little awareness, other colonisers within the works of Gordimer and Coetzee are striving towards a language that might provide exchange. The Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* spends hours trying to understand the lessons of wooden slips he has found from a long-dead civilisation. When Colonel Joll attempts to find out if the slips are messages from the barbarians, the Magistrate expounds on the ambiguity of language: 'It is the barbarian character *war*, but it has other senses too. It can stand for *vengeance*, and if you turn it upside down like this, it can be made to read *justice.* There is no knowing which sense is intended.'(p 122) The Magistrate can only discuss the multiple meanings that symbols have; he never establishes what they mean, he can never understand the lessons of this other civilisation. Ultimately the Magistrate is frustrated by his lack of communication and does not find any way to circumvent it. Although he determines that 'I will not disappear into the earth without leaving my mark on them' (p 123), discussing his captors, he is unable to find any language that will allow this exchange. Even discussing the girl he has loved, he 'must ask myself whether, when I lay head to foot with her, fondling and kissing those broken ankles, I was not in my heart of hearts regretting that I could not engrave myself on her so

[17] Clingman, The Novels of Nadine Gordimer, p 200

deeply.' (p 148) This is a failure of communication; like Mehring in *The Conservationist*, the Magistrate is aware of a language that can impose upon another its meanings; unlike Mehring he does not impose it upon the body of a girl, but ultimately, without this language, finds himself unable to find a method of communication at all.

Michael Marais identifies a conflation of 'imperialism and authorship' in order to argue that 'the dialectic of self and other informing the coloniser-colonised relationship also informs the author-text relationship; that the imperialist gesture is, essentially, an *hermeneutic* act.'[18] Marais identifies the author as the site of Coetzee's colonial critique but there is a sense that it is within language itself that this problem resides. While Derek Attridge writes of Coetzee's novels that 'since it is language that has played a major role in producing (and simultaneously occluding) the other, it is in language – language aware of its ideological effects, alert to its own capacity to impose silence as it speaks – that the force of the other can be most strongly represented.'[19] There is also a clear sense in Coetzee's work of the ambiguities and difficulties of language, and the difficulty of representing the other in this way. The failure of communication is a more common theme, to some extent, than the possibility of a new use of language. For example, at the end of *In the Heart of the County,* Magda hears voices 'that speak to me out of machines that fly in the sky. They speak to me in Spanish...I know no Spanish whatsoever. However...I find it immediately comprehensible...The words are Spanish but they are tied to universal meanings.'(p 137) This is a vision of an ideal language, one which is understood, open to everyone, a 'Spanish of pure meanings' (p 137). It is a language without the flaws of English or Afrikaans in South Africa, tied to the systems of power and repression. However, importantly, no 'true exchange' is possible for Magda even in this situation. As she shouts at the planes, trying to catch their attention with beacons of fire, she receives 'no answering voice'. Michael Marais has discussed the way in which such silences in Coetzee's work can be understood: 'for Coetzee, then, silence is not, as Salman Rushdie would have it, 'the ancient language of defeat'. It is a potent political tool through which the other escapes'.[20] In contrast, for Benita Parry a consequence of 'writing the silence attributed to the subjugated' is a covert return to the colonial domination of European speech, forming 'renarrativisations where only the European possesses the word and the ability to enunciate.'[21] However silence here appears to me to be not Marais' 'potent political tool', nor, as Parry suggests, another oppression of the powerless enacted through the literary text, but an examination of failed communication. Magda acknowledges finally that 'the source of our disease' is that 'we have no one to speak with, that our desires stream out of us chaotically, without aim, without response, like our words, whoever *we* may be, perhaps I should speak only for myself?'(p 147) The lack of an interlocutor, and the impossibility of communication in these circumstances is emphasised by the movement from the plural to the singular pronoun in this quotation; communication breaks down when speakers speak 'only for myself'. As Magda says earlier in the novel, 'it is not speech that makes man man, but the speech of others.' (p 137) Magda's final position in the novel is defined by failure of communication, deprived of 'the speech of others' just as the Magistrate is ultimately aware of his failure to communicate.

July's People is more optimistic in its conclusion about the possibility of a dialogue with Africa. Although the novel explores the difficulty of communication in the face of changing power relationships, there is an ultimately hopeful tone. The Smales' children instinctively pick up the language and the non-verbal communication signals of the village.

[18] Michael Marais, ,'The Hermeneutics of Empire: Coetzee's Post-colonial Metafiction' in Critical Perspectives on J.M. Coetzee ed. by Graham Huggan and Stephen Watson (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1996) p 69
[19] Attridge, J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading p 30
[20] Marais,'The Hermeneutics of Empire' in Critical Perspectives on J.M. Coetzee ep 75
[21] Benita Parry, 'Speech and Silence in the fictions of J.M. Coetzee' in Critical Perspectives on J.M. Coetzee p 39-40

Between Maureen and Martha Gordimer suggests a similar possibility of communication, despite language differences; 'She couldn't tell Martha why she wanted July; it was not a matter of language, they had communicated before.' (p 178) In *The Pickup* too, Gordimer presents some examples of true exchange, between Julie and Maryam, for example. As they teach each other their languages 'the young sister seemed to enjoy having the foreigner repeat these banalities become achievements' and then 'in turn, the young woman slowly arranged the sequence of her English words'.[22] The girls teach each other their languages in an exchange, in this way learning to communicate with each other.

Near to the end of *July's People,* July speaks to Maureen in his own language; Gordimer writes that 'She understood although she knew no word. Understood everything: what he had had to be, how she had covered up to herself for him, in order for him to be her idea of him.'(p 186) Gordimer here posits a new type of master-servant dialogue, presenting the servant as the dominant speaker, and the master as the one whose responsibility it is to listen. Where earlier in the novel their communication can only take place if she chooses the right words, here it occurs through giving July the opportunity to talk in his own language in his own way. In *Foe,* by contrast, Friday, the colonised figure is mute, his tongue cut out. Susan attempts to provide him with means of communication, a slate, upon which Friday draws an image of walking eyes which he refuses to show her[23]. In *July's People,* the opportunity for response in a dialogue with the coloniser is taken by the colonised, in his own way and on his own terms. Friday on the other hand will not join the dialogue or enter into an exchange; he will not reveal his drawing to Susan's gaze. Both Gordimer and Coetzee present the one-sided nature of the colonial conversation, but where for Gordimer a possibility of true conversation is, in the end, a reality, Coetzee suggests that this may be ultimately impossible. If a final resolution is offered in *Foe*, it is that 'bodies are their own signs', an attempt to redefine the nature of possible communication. This has clear significance for the relationship between politics and the novel. Where Gordimer is hopeful that a communication of true exchange can be enacted in language, Coetzee is preoccupied with the endless ambiguities and failures of language; where for Gordimer the task becomes using the novel as a method of communication with the world in this way, for Coetzee there are still many unanswered questions about the viability of language to move outside of the one-sided dialogue colonialism has enacted with the world.

In their explorations of the way in which power relationships shape representations of land and the way in which the language of colonialism has failed to achieve true linguistic exchange, Coetzee and Gordimer explore the essence of the political; the way in which humans interact. The writers come to different conclusions: Coetzee posits a new representation of the relationship between land and power; Gordimer is hopeful about a potential use of language which would allow true exchange within a South African context where Coetzee is less so. However, a common view of the political can be identified. It is a view which sees politics as broader than a particular moment, but instead a complex networks of relationship with the world and with fellow citizens of it.

[22] Nadine Gordimer, The Pickup (London: Bloomsbury, 2001) p 135-6
[23] J.M. Coetzee, Foe (London: Penguin, 1986) p 147

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