



VINTAGE

# DUSKLANDS

J M COETZEE

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## About the Author

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J.M. Coetzee's work includes *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Life & Times of Michael K*, *Boyhood*, *Scenes from Provincial Life*, *Youth*, *Elizabeth Costello* and *Disgrace*, which won the Booker Prize making him the first author to have won it twice. In 2003 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

*In the Heart of the Country*

*Waiting for the Barbarians*

*Life & Times of Michael K*

*Foe*

*White Writing*

*Age of Iron*

*Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*

*The Master of Petersburg*

*Giving Offense*

*Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life*

*The Lives of Animals*

*Disgrace*

*Stranger Shores: Essays 1986-1999*

*Youth*

*Elizabeth Costello*

*Diary of A Bad Year*

# DUSKLANDS

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J.M. Coetzee

VINTAGE BOOKS  
London



Obviously it is difficult not to sympathize with those European and American audiences who, when shown films of fighter-bomber pilots visibly exhilarated by successful napalm bombing runs on Viet Cong targets, react with horror and disgust. Yet, it is unreasonable to expect the U.S. Government to obtain pilots who are so appalled by the damage they may be doing that they cannot carry out their missions or become excessively depressed or guilt-ridden.

*Herman Ka*

My name is Eugene Dawn. I cannot help that. Here goes.

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I

Coetzee has asked me to revise my essay. It sticks in his craw: he wants it blander, otherwise he wants it eliminated. He wants me out of the way too, I can see it. I am steeling myself against this powerful, genial, ordinary man, so utterly without vision. I fear him and despise his blindness. I deserved better. Here I am under the thumb of a manager, a type before whom my first instinct is to crawl. I have always obeyed my superiors and been glad to do so. I would not have embarked on the Vietnam Project if I had guessed it was going to bring me into conflict with a superior. Conflict brings unhappiness, unhappiness poisons existence. I cannot stand unhappiness, I need peace and love and order for my work. I need coddling. I am an egg that must lie in the downiest of nests under the moaning coaxing of nurses before my bald, unpromising shell cracks and my shy secret life emerges. Allowances must be made for me. I brood, I am a thinker, a creative person, one not without value to the world. I would have expected more understanding from Coetzee, who should be used to handling creative people. Once upon a time a creative person himself, he is now a failed creative person who lives vicariously off true creative people. He has built a reputation on the work of other people. He has been put in charge of the New Life Project knowing nothing about Vietnam or about life. I deserve better.

I am apprehensive about tomorrow's confrontation. I am bad at confrontations. My first impulse is to give in, to embrace my antagonist and concede all in the hope that he will love me. Fortunately, I despise my impulses. Married life has taught me that all concessions are mistakes. Believe in yourself and your opponent will respect you. Cling to the mast, if that is the metaphor. People who believe in themselves are worthier of love than people who doubt themselves. People who doubt themselves have no core. I am doing my best to fashion a core for myself, late though it be in life.

I must pull myself together. I believe in my work. I am my work. For a year now the Vietnam Project has been the center of my existence. I do not intend to be cut off prematurely. I will have my say. For once I must be prepared to stand up for myself.

I must not underestimate Coetzee.

He called me into his office this morning and sat me down. He is a hearty man, the kind that eats steak daily. Smiling, he paced his floor, thinking up an opening, while I, swivelling right and left, did my best to point my face toward him. I refused his offer of coffee. He is the kind of man who drinks coffee, I the kind who with caffeine in his veins begins to quiver and make euphoric commitments.

Say nothing which you may later regret.

I wore my straight shoulders and bold gaze for the interview. Coetzee may know that I am hunched and shifty—I cannot help these eyes—but I wished to signal him that today I was formally accreting myself around the bold and the true. (Since pubertal collapse all postures have sat uneasily on me. However, there is no behavior that cannot be learned. I have high hopes for an integrated future.)

Coetzee spoke. In a series of compliments whose ambiguity was never less than naked he blighted the fruit of a year's work. I will not pretend that I cannot construe his speech word for word.

"I never imagined that this department would one day be producing work of an *avant-garde* nature," he said. "I must commend you. I enjoyed reading your first chapters. You write well. It will be



pleasure to be associated with so well-finished a piece of research.

~~“Which is not to say”, he continued, “of course, that everyone has to agree with what you say. You are working in a novel and contentious field and must expect contention.~~

“I didn’t ask you to drop by, however, to discuss the substance of your report, in which—let me repeat it—you say some important things which our contractors are going to have to seriously think about.

“What I would like to do, rather, is to make some suggestions regarding presentation. I make these suggestions only because I have had a certain amount of experience in writing and supervising reports on D.O.D. projects. Whereas—correct me if I am wrong—this is the first time round for you”.

He is going to reject me. He fears vision, has no sympathy for passion or despair. Power speaks on to power. Sentences are queueing behind his neat red lips. I will be dismissed, and dismissed according to form. A certain configuration of his mouth and nose so subtle as to be perceptible only to me tells me that the hectic toxins chasing in my blood and wafted in my sweat afflict his expensive senses with distaste. I glare. I am striving to strike down with my lightning-bolt a man who does not believe in magic. If I fail I will settle for a home among the placid specialists in control and self-control. My eyes flash a series of pleas and threats so rapid as to be perceptible only to me, and to him.

“As you know from your dealings with them, the military are, as a class—to put it frankly—slow thinking, suspicious, and conservative. Convincing them of something new is never easy. Yet these are the people you have finally to convince of the justness of your recommendations. Take my word, you will not succeed if you speak over their heads. Nor will you succeed if you approach them in the spirit of absoluteness, of intellectual ferocity, that you find in our internal debate here at Kennedy. We understand the conventions of the intellectual duel, they don’t: they feel an attack as an attack, probably an attack on their whole class.

“So what I would like you to do, first of all, before we talk over anything else, is to set to work revising the *tone* of your argument. I want you to rewrite your proposals so that people in the military can entertain them without losing self-respect. Keep this in mind: if you say that they don’t know the jobs (which is probably true), that they don’t understand what they are doing (which is certainly true) then they have no choice but to throw you out the window. Whereas if you stress continually, not only explicitly but through the very genuflections of your *style*, that you are merely a functionary with a narrow if significant specialism, a near-academic with none of the soldier’s all-round understanding of the science of warfare; that, nevertheless, within the narrow boundaries of your specialism you have some suggestions to offer which may have some strategic fallout—then, you will find, your proposals will get a hearing.

“If you haven’t seen Kidman’s little book on Central America, look at it. It’s the best example I know of self-effacing persuasion.

“There is one more thing I would like you to think about. As you must know, you carry out your analysis of the propaganda services in terms which are alien to most people. This applies not only to your work but to the work of everyone in the Mythography section. For my part I find mythography fascinating, and I think it has a great future. But don’t you perhaps misread your audience? I get the odd impression, going over your essay, that it is written for my eyes. Well, you will find your real audience a much ruder crew. Let me suggest, therefore, some kind of introduction in which you explain in words of one syllable the kind of procedure you follow—how myths operate in human society, how signs are exchanged, and so forth; with lots of examples and for God’s sake no footnotes”.

My fingers curl and clench in the palms of my hands, where they grow puffed and dull. As I write the moment I catch my left fist clenching. Charlotte Wolff calls it a sign of depression (*The Psychology of Gesture*), but she cannot be right: I do not at this moment feel depressed, being engaged in a liberating creative act. Nevertheless Charlotte Wolff, when she speaks on gesture, speaks with authority, therefore I am careful to create opportunities for my fingers to busy themselves. While I am reading for example, I conscientiously flex and unflex them; and when I talk to people I keep my hands conspicuously relaxed, even to the point of letting them droop.

I notice, however, that my toes have taken to curling into the soles of my feet. I wonder whether other people, Coetzee for instance, have noticed it. Coetzee is the kind of man who notices symptoms. As a manager he has probably sat through a one-week seminar on the interpretation of gesture.

If I stamp out the gesture at the level of my feet, where will it migrate next?

I am also unable to rid myself of the habit of stroking my face. Charlotte disapproves of this tic which she says betokens anxiety. I keep my fingers from my face (I pick my nose too) by an effort of the will, on important occasions. People tell me that I am too intense, people, that is to say, who think they have reached the stage of confidences with me; but if the truth be told I am intense only because my will is concentrated on subduing spasms in the various parts of my body, if spasm is not too dramatic a word. I am vexed by the indiscipline of my body. I have often wished I had another one.

It is unpleasant to have your productions rejected, doubly unpleasant if they are rejected by one you admire, trebly unpleasant if you are used to adulation. I was always a clever child, a good child and a clever child. I ate my beans, which were good for me, and did my homework. I was seen and not heard. Everyone praised me. It is only recently that I have begun to falter. It has been a bewildering experience, though, being possessed of a high degree of consciousness, I have never been unprepared for it. At the moment when one ceases to be the pupil, I have told myself, at the moment when one starts to strike out for oneself, one must expect one's teachers to feel betrayed and to strike back with envy. The petty reaction of Coetzee to my essay is to be expected in a bureaucrat whose position is threatened by an up-and-coming subordinate who will not follow the slow, well-trodden path to the top. He is the old bull, I the young bull.

This consoling thought does not however make his insults any the easier to swallow. He is in power over me. I need his approval. I will not pretend that he cannot hurt me. I would prefer his love to his hatred. Disobedience does not come easily to me.

I have begun to work on my Introduction. I do the creative part in the mornings; afternoons I spend with my authorities in the basement of the Harry S. Truman Library. There, among the books, I sometimes catch myself in a state not far from happiness, the highest happiness, intellectual happiness (we in mythography are of that cast). The basement (in fact the sub-basement, a stage in the downward expansion of the library) is reached via a spiral stairway and an echoing tunnel plated in battleship gray. It holds Dewey classes 100–133, unpopular among Truman's clientele. The racks run on rails for compactness. The four security cameras that oversee the basement can be evaded in blind spots in the shifting aisles; in these blind spots one of the assistants, a girl whose name I do not know, flirts, if that is the word, with my friend the basement stack attendant. I disapprove, and take the trouble to radiate disapproval from my little carrel, but the girl does not care and Harry knows no better. I disapprove not because I am a killjoy but because she is making a fool of Harry. Harry is a microcephalic. He loves his work; I would not like to see him get into trouble. He is brought to the library in the mornings and fetched home in the evenings in an unmarked Order of Our Lady the Virgin microbus.

He is himself a harmless virgin and likely to die so. He uses the blind spots to masturbate in.

My relations with Harry are entirely satisfying. He loves the shelves to be in order and resents, I suspect, from his headshakes, people who take down books. Therefore when I take books from the shelves I am careful to mollify him by putting regulation green slips in them and arranging them neatly on the shelves above my carrel. Then I smile at him, and he grins back. I like to think, too, that the tasks I steal myself in in the afternoons are such as he would approve of if he understood. I make extracts, check references, compile lists, do sums. Perhaps, seeing the neat script-strings that issue from my pen, seeing my orderly books and papers, my quiet white-shirted back, Harry knows, in his way, that I can be admitted to his stacks without fear. I am sorry there is no more of him in my story.

I am unfortunately unable to carry on creative work in the library. My creative spasm comes only in the early hours of the morning when the enemy in my body is too sleepy to throw up walls against the forays of my brain. The Vietnam report has been composed facing east into the rising sun and in a mood of poignant regret (*poindre*, to pierce) that I am rooted in the evening-lands. None of this is reflected in the report itself. When I have duties to fulfil I fulfil them.

My carrel in the library is gray, with a gray bookrack and a little gray drawer for stationery. My office at the Kennedy Institute is also gray. Gray desks and fluorescent lighting: 1950's functionalism. I have toyed with the idea of complaining but cannot think of a way of doing so without opening myself to counterattack. Hardwoods are for the managers. So I grind my teeth and suffer. Gray planes, the shadowless green light under which like a pale stunned deep-sea fish I float, seep into the gray centres of memory and drown me in reveries of love and hatred for that self of mine who exhausted the fire of his twenty-third, twenty-fourth, and twenty-fifth years beneath the fluorescent glare of Datamatic longing in dying periods for 5 PM with its ambiguous hesperian promise.

The lights of Harry S. Truman hum in their reserved, fatherly way. The temperature is 72. Hemmed in with walls of books, I should be in paradise. But my body betrays me. I read, my face starts to lose its life, a stabbing begins in my head, then, as I beat through gales of yawns to fix my weeping eyes on the page, my back begins to petrify in the scholar's hook. The ropes of muscle that spread from the spine curl in suckers around my neck, over my clavicles, under my armpits, across my chest. Tendrils creep down legs and arms. Clamped round my body this parasite starfish dies in rictus. Its tentacles grow brittle. I straighten my back and hear bands creak. Behind my temples too, behind my cheekbones, behind my lips the glacier creeps inward toward its epicenter behind my eyes. My eyeballs ache, my mouth constricts. If this inner face of mine, this vizard of muscle, had features, they would be the monstrous troglodyte features of a man who bunches his sleeping eyes and mouth as if a totally unacceptable dream forces itself into him. From head to foot I am the subject of a revolting body. Only the organs of my abdomen keep their blind freedom: the liver, the pancreas, the gut, and of course the heart, squelching against one another like unborn octuplets.

Now is also the time to mention the length of gristle that hangs from the end of my iron spine and affects my sad connection with Marilyn. Alas, Marilyn has never succeeded in freeing me from my rigors. Though like the diligent partners in the marriage manuals we attend to each other's whispered moans, and groans, though I plough like the hero and Marilyn froth like the heroine, the truth is that the bliss of which the books speak has eluded us. The fault is not mine. I do my duty. Whereas I cannot escape the suspicion that my wife is disengaged. Before the arrival of my seed her pouting yawns and falls back, leaving my betrayed representative gripped at its base, flailing its head in vain inside an immense cavern, at the very moment when above all else it craves to be rocked through its tantrum in a soft, firm, infinitely trustworthy grip. The word which at such moments flashes its tail across the heavens of my never quite extinguished consciousness is *evacuation*: my seed drips like

urine into the futile sewers of Marilyn's reproductive ducts.

Marilyn (to whip myself up for a while longer against Marilyn, though it is not good for me) upholds a fixed-quantum theory of love: if I have love to spend on other objects such love must be stolen from her. Thus she has grown more and more jealous of my work on the Vietnam Project as I have deepened myself further and further in it. She wishes dull jobs on me in order that I should find relief in her. She feels herself empty and wishes to be filled, yet her emptiness is such that every entry into her she feels as invasion and possession. Hence her desperate look. (I have an intuitive understanding of women though I feel no sympathy for them.) My life with Marilyn has become a continual battle to keep my poise of mind against her hysterical assaults and the pressure of my enemy's body. I must have poise of mind to do my creative work. I must have peace, love, nourishment, and sunlight; those precious mornings when my body relaxes and my mind soars must not be laid to waste by whining and shouting between Marilyn and her child. Ever since I asserted my inviolability, the poor Martin has stood in as my whipping-boy, enduring the lash of his mother's tongue for waking her up, for wanting his breakfast, for wanting to be dressed, till storms of fury burst in my faroff head and with red sheets of apoplexy blinding my vision I bellow for silence. Then it is all over: the ropes begin to knot around my body, the primitive, muscular face within my face begins to close off all avenues to the outside world, it is time for me to pack my bag and pick my way through the dogshit on the sidewalk toward another iron day.

I carry my papers and photographs about with me in one of those oldfashioned briefcases which the Essen auto-workers nowadays use as lunch pails. If I do not keep this bulky, fatuous load with me Marilyn pores through my manuscript trying to find out what I am up to. Marilyn is a disturbed and unhappy woman. I let her see nothing because I know that she discusses me with other people and because she is in my estimation not equipped to understand correctly the insights into man's soul that I have evolved since I began to think about Vietnam. Marilyn is eager, but for her own sake only, that I should have a prosperous career. She is alarmed to see me leave the high road of orthodox S-Propaganda and strike out a path of my own. She is a conformist who hoped to marry in me her conformist twin. But I have never in my heart been a conformist. I have always just been biding my time. Marilyn's great fear is that I will drag her out of the suburbs into the wilderness. She thinks that every deviation leads into the wilderness. This is because she has a false conception of America. She cannot believe that America is big enough to contain its deviants. But America is bigger than all of us. I acknowledged that long before I began to say my say to Coetzee—America will swallow me, digest me, dissolve me in the tides of its blood. Marilyn need have no fear: she will always have a home. Nor, in the true myth of America, is it I who am the deviant but the cynic Coetzee together with all those who no longer feel the authentic American destiny crackling within them and stiffening the marrow. Only the strong can hold course through history's doldrums. It is possible that Coetzee may survive the 1970's; but simple natures like Marilyn's will rot without a core of belief.

There is no doubt that Marilyn would have liked to believe in me. But she has found honest belief impossible ever since she decided that my moral balance was being tipped by my work on Vietnam. My human sympathies have been coarsened, she thinks, and I have become addicted to violent and perverse fantasies. So much have I learned on those sentimental nights when she weeps on my shoulder and bares her heart. I kiss her brow and croon comfort. I urge her to cheer up. I am my old self, I tell her, my same old loving self, she must only trust me. My voice drones on, she sleeps. The soothing medicine is good for a day or two of sudden embraces, tiptoeing, warm meals, confidence. Marilyn is a trusting soul with no one to trust. She lives in the hope that what her friends call my psychic brutalization will end with the end of the war and the Vietnam Project, that reinsertion into

civilization will tame and eventually humanize me. This novelettish reading of my plight amuses me. I might even one day play out the role of ruined and reconstructed boy, did I not suspect the guiding hands of Marilyn's sly counsellors. Books have begun to roll out, I know, about the suburban sadists and cataleptic dropouts with Vietnamese skeletons in their cupboards. But the truth is that like huff Henry I never did hack anyone up: I often reckon, in the dawn, them up: nobody is ever missing. No, if I were to commit myself body and soul to some fiction or other, would I choose any fiction but my own. I am still the captain of my soul.

Marilyn and her friends believe that everyone who approaches the innermost mechanism of the world suffers a vision of horror which depraves him utterly. (I articulate Marilyn and her friends better than they do themselves. This is because I understand them as they do not understand me.) During the past year relations between my own and other human bodies have changed in ways which I shall recount in detail at the correct time and place. Marilyn connects these changes with the twenty-four pictures of human bodies that I am now forced to carry around with me all day in my briefcase. She believes they have a secret, a cancer of shameful knowledge. She attributes it to me for her own consolation, for to believe in secrets is to believe the cheery doctrine that hidden in the labyrinth of the memory lies a simple explanation for the haphazard present. She would not believe disclaimers, nor would her friends. They flex their talons: be it ever so deeply rooted, they promise her, we will dig it out. I dismiss them. I would explain it all to Marilyn were she not so full of their low dogged poison. There are no secrets, I would tell her, everything is on the surface and visible in mere behavior, to those who have eyes to see. When you find that you can no longer kiss me, I would say, you talk in signs, telling me that I am dead meat which you are revolted to take in your mouth. When for my part I convulse your body with my little battery-driven probe, I am only finding a franker way to touch my own centers of power than through the unsatisfying genital connection. (She cries when I do it but I know that she loves it. People are all the same.) I have no secrets from you, I say, nor you any from me.

But the daytime Marilyn is remorseless in her urge to unveil the mysteries. Every Wednesday she installs a pregnant black teenager in the house and goes to San Diego for therapy and shopping. I do not disapprove and gladly pay. If she will return to being a smiling honey-blonde with long brown legs, I do not mind by what unsound route she gets there. I am weary of this mental patient with hair in rats'-tails sprawling around my home, sighing, clasping her hands, sleeping round the clock. I pay my money and hope for results. At present, however, the Wednesday agon of coming to terms with herself deprives her of all appeal: the silent tears, the red nose, the cheesy flesh anesthetize my most powerful erections and leave me plying grimly at her with only the dimmest epidermal sheath.

Yet Wednesdays, I find, are the days when I need Marilyn most. I come home purposely early to release Marcia and wait behind the curtains for Marilyn's Volkswagen. When she opens the door her hubby stands ready to help with the parcels and gets a smile from which a shaft of cynical insight is not absent. Marilyn wants above all else to fall down and sleep forever; instead she has me fussing over her skirts like a spaniel. Do I catch the whiff of a strange man on her? Unhappy young wives who drive off to a day of unspecified appointments are often conducting extra-marital liaisons. I know the world. I am curious to know the truth, very curious. What could another man see in this tired, beaten woman? As an exercise I watch her through a strange man's eyes. New perspectives excite me. My eyes, no doubt, glow. But Marilyn is tired: she smiles and brushes off my caresses: the day is sticky, she must shower, did I pay Marcia? I am mature and forbearing. I watch her shower. Under the water her movements are gawky, youthful.

One can grow addicted to anything, anything at all. I am addicted to driving long distances, the longer the better, though it exhausts me. I find masticating a disgusting process, yet I eat incessantly.

(I am a thin man, as you will have guessed: my body voids all nutriment half-digested.) I am plain addicted to my marriage, and addiction is in the end a surer bond than love. If Marilyn is unfaithful she is so much the dearer to me, for if strangers prize her she must be valuable, and I am reassured. Every faithless afternoon flows into a reservoir of intimate memory within this neurotic houseboat and I who by the most resolute and fevered acts of the imagination have so far failed to share the savor have promised myself that one day I will broach that dam.

She falls asleep folded in her own arms. I lie thrilling beside her, sensitive to the subtle emanations from her skin, fighting a delicious battle to hold the rush of words ("Tell me, tell me . . .") that spoken prematurely break the sensual spell. It is most of all on Wednesday nights that I have sworn to myself that without Marilyn I would have no reason to go on; and thereby surely begin to know what it must be like to love. Toward sleeping creatures in general I am capable of the most uncomplicated gushes of tenderness. Over sleeping children I can weep with joy. I sometimes think that I might climb to the highest pitches of ecstasy if only Marilyn would sleep through the sexual business. There are surely ways of achieving that.

But I cannot believe that the pleasure Marilyn gets from other men is real. She is by character a masturbator who needs steady mechanical friction to generate on the inner walls of her eyes those fantasies of enslavement which eventually squeeze a groan and shudder out of her. If she goes with strangers it can only be to escape the embarrassments of solitary meals or to prolong the wistful conviviality of sensitivity gatherings where ruined couples and wooden boys touch fingertips trying to revive their dying fires. Casual sex means to Marilyn four cold feet, foreplay by rote, fingers among her dry wattles, blushes and charity in the dark, the familiar flood of disgrace. At armslength the smile tranquilly, all passion spent, longing for the certainties of the domestic hearth and praying never to see each other again. "Did you come?"—"No, but it was lovely". Draining the bitter cup, biting the bullet.

She keeps no record of these adventures save in undying memory. Her diary is clean, nothing in her purse is not explicable. Her guilt must be inferred from involuntary signs: a brash doorway posture, an unreal absorption in chores, a candid return of my candid gaze. I am not, I would say, tormented by doubt or jealousy or much disturbed by the thought that I may be in error in attributing a secondary life to her. We are all more or less guilty; the offense is less significant than the sin; and I know my wife well, having contributed much to her making. If I must point to evidence that my suspicions are not extravagant, I point to the black leather writing case on the highest shelf of her wardrobe, the innermost pocket of which used to contain only a photograph of me, with the liquid brown eyes and full, wavering mouth common to all specialists in persuasion, but in which there blossomed in late February a nude pose of Marilyn herself. She reclines on a black satin Playboy sheet, her legs crossed (the razor spots come out clearly), her pubic beard on display, her neck and shoulders locked on the camera in an amateur's bold rictus of concentration. I squirm not only for her rectitude but for the bare art of the photographer. "Help me!" squeaks the picture, a frozen girl caught in a frozen moment by a freezing eye. Contrast the great fashion models with their message of impersonal mockery: Meat for your Master. I emerge from the pages of *Vogue* trembling with powerlessness.

The photographs I carry with me in my briefcase belong to the Vietnam report. Some will be incorporated into the final text. On mornings when my spirits have been low and nothing has come, I have always had the stabilizing knowledge that, unfolded from their wrappings and exposed, the pictures could be relied on to give my imagination the slight electric impulse that is all it needs to set it free again. I respond to pictures as I do not to print. Strange that I am not in the picture-faking side of propaganda.

Only one of my pictures is openly sexual. It shows Clifford Loman, 6' 2", 220 lb., onetime linebacker for the University of Houston, now a sergeant in the 1st Air Cavalry, copulating with a Vietnamese woman. The woman is tiny and slim, possibly even a child, though one is usually wrong about the ages of Vietnamese. Loman shows off his strength: arching backward with his hands on his buttocks he lifts the woman on his erect penis. Perhaps he even walks with her, for her hands are thrown out as if she is trying to keep her balance. He smiles broadly; she turns a sleepy, foolish face on the unknown photographer. Behind them a blank television screen winks back the flash of the bulb. I have given the picture the provisional title "Father Makes Merry with Children" and assigned it a place in Section 7.

I am, by the way, having a series of very good mornings, and the essay, usually a vast lumbering planet in my head, has been spinning itself smoothly out. I rise before dawn and tiptoe to my desk. The birds are not yet yammering outside, Marilyn and the child are sunk in oblivion. I say a grace holding the finished chapters to my exulting breast, then lay them back in their little casket and without looking at yesterday's words begin to write. New words flow. The frozen sea inside me thaws and cracks. I am the warm, industrious genius of the household weaving my protective fabrications.

I have only to beware to guard my ears against the rival voices that Marilyn releases from the radio, sometimes between 7:00 and 8:00 (I respond to the voice too as I do not to print). It is the bomb tonnage and target recitals in particular that I have no defense against. Not the information itself—it is not in my nature to be disturbed by the names of places I will never see—but the plumbeous, incontrovertible voice of the master of statistics himself calls up in me a tempest of resentment probably unique to the mass democracies, which sucks a whirlpool of blood and bile into my head and renders me unfit for consecutive thought. Radio information, I ought to know from practice, is pure authority. It is no coincidence that the two voices we use to project it are the voices of the two masters of the interrogation chamber—the sergeant-uncle who confides he has taken a liking to you, he would not like to see you hurt, talk, it is no disgrace, everyone talks in the end; and the cold, hands-on captain with the clipboard. Print, on the other hand, is sadism, and properly evokes terror. The message of the newspaper is: "I can say anything and not be moved. Watch as I permute my 5 affectless signs". Print is the hard master with the whip, print-reading a weeping search for signs of mercy. Writer is as much abased before him as reader. The pornographer is the doomed upstart hero who aspires to such delirium of ecstasy that the surface of the print will crack beneath his words. We write our violent novelties on the walls of lavatories to bring the walls down. This is the secret reason, the mere hidden reason. Obscuring the hidden reason, unseen to us, is the true reason: that we write on lavatory walls to abase ourselves before them. Pornography is an abasement before the page, such an abasement as to convulse the very page. Print-reading is a slave habit. I discovered this truth, as I discovered all the truths in my Vietnam report, by introspection. Vietnam, like everything else, is inside me, and in Vietnam, with a little diligence, a little patience, all truths about man's nature. When I joined the Project I was offered a familiarization tour of Vietnam. I refused, and was permitted to refuse. We creative people are allowed our whims. The truth of my Vietnam formulations already begins to shimmer, as you can see, through the neat ranks of script. When these are transposed in print their authority will be binding.

There remains the matter of getting past Coetzee. In my darker moments I fear that when battle breaks out between the two of us I will not win. His mind does not work like mine. His sympathy has ceased to flow. I would do almost anything for his respect. I know I am a disappointment to him, that he no longer believes in me. And when no one believes in you, how hard it is to believe in yourself. On evenings when the sober edge of reality is sharpest, when my assembled props feel most like

notions out of books (my home, for example, out of a La Jolla décor catalog, my wife out of a novel that waits fatefully for me in a library in provincial America), I find my hand creeping toward the briefcase at the foot of my desk as toward the bed of my existence but also, I will admit, as toward an encounter full of delicious shame. I uncover my photographs and leaf through them again. I tremble and sweat, my blood pounds, I am unstrung and fit this night only for shallow, bilious sleep. Surely, I whisper to myself, if they arouse me like this I am a man and these images of phantoms a subject fit for men!

My second picture is of two Special Forces sergeants named (I read from their chests) Berry and Wilson. Berry and Wilson squat on their heels and smile, partly for the camera but mostly out of the glowing wellbeing of their strong young bodies. Behind them we see scrub, then a wall of trees. Propped on the ground before him Wilson holds the severed head of a man. Berry has two, which he holds by the hair. The heads are Vietnamese, taken from corpses or near-corpses. They are trophies of the Annamese tiger having been exterminated, there remain only men and certain hardy less-mammals. They look stony, as severed heads always seem to do. For those of us who have entertained the fearful suspicion that the features of the dead slip and slide and are kept in place for the moment only by discreet little cottonwool wads, it is heartening to see that, marmoreally severe, these faces are as well-defined as the faces of sleepers, and the mouths decently shut. They have died well. (Nevertheless, I find something ridiculous about a severed head. One's heartstrings may be tugged by photographs of weeping women come to claim the bodies of their slain; a handcart bearing a coffin or even a man-size plastic bag may have its elemental dignity; but can one say the same of a mother with her son's head in a sack, carrying it off like a small purchase from the supermarket? I giggle.)

My third picture is a still from a film of the tiger cages on Hon Tre Island (I have screened the entire Vietnam repertoire at Kennedy). Watching this film I applaud myself for having kept away from the physical Vietnam: the insolence of the people, the filth and flies and no doubt stench, the eyes of prisoners, whom I would no doubt have had to face, watching the camera with naive curiosity too unconscious to see it as ruler of their destiny—these things belong to an irredeemable Vietnam, the world which only embarrasses and alienates me. But when in this film the camera passes through the gate of the walled prison courtyard and I see the rows of concrete pits with their mesh grates, it bursts upon me anew that the world still takes the trouble to expose itself to me in images, and I shall watch with fresh excitement.

An officer, the camp commander, walks into the field. With a cane he prods into the first cage. We come closer and peer in. "Bad man", he says in English, and the microphone picks it up as "Communist".

The man in the cage turns languid eyes on us.

The commander jabs the man lightly with his cane. He shakes his head and smiles. "Bad man", he says in this eccentric film, a 1965 production of the Ministry of National Information.

I have a 12" X 12" blowup of the prisoner. He has raised himself on one elbow, lifting his face toward the blurred grid of the wire. Dazzled by the sky, he sees as yet only the looming outlines of his spectators. His face is thin. From one eye glints a point of light; the other is in the dark of the cage.

I have also a second print, of the face alone in greater magnification. The glint in the right eye has become a diffuse white patch; shades of dark gray mark the temple, the right eyebrow, the hollow of the cheek.

I close my eyes and pass my fingertips over the cool, odorless surface of the print. Evenings are quiet here in the suburbs. I concentrate myself. Everywhere its surface is the same. The glint in the right eye, which in a moment luckily never to arrive will through the camera look into my eyes, is black.



and opaque under my fingers, yielding no passage into the interior of this obscure but indubitable man. I keep exploring. Under the persistent pressure of my imagination, acute and morbid in the night it may yet yield.

The brothers of men who stood out against proven tortures and died holding their silence are not broken down with drugs and a little clever confusion. They talk freely, holding their interrogator's hands and opening their hearts like children. After they have talked they go to hospital, and then to rehabilitation. They are easily picked out in the camps. They are the ones who hide in corners or walk up and down the fences all day pattering to themselves. Their eyes are closed to the world by a wall of what may be tears. They are ghosts or absences of themselves: where they had once been is now only a black hole through which they have been sucked. They wash themselves and feel dirty. Something is floating up from their bowels and voiding itself endlessly in the gray space in their head. Their memory is numb. They know only that there was a rupture, in time, in space, I use my words, that they are here, now, in the after, that from somewhere they are being waved to.

These poisoned bodies, mad floating people of the camps, who had been—let me say it—the finest of their generation, courageous, fraternal—it is they who are the occasion of all my woe! Why could they not accept us? We could have loved them: our hatred for them grew only out of broken hopes. We brought them our pitiable selves, trembling on the edge of inexistence, and asked only that they acknowledge us. We brought with us weapons, the gun and its metaphors, the only copulas we knew between ourselves and our objects. From this tragic ignorance we sought deliverance. Our nightmare was that since whatever we reached for slipped like smoke through our fingers, we did not exist; that since whatever we embraced wilted, we were all that existed. We landed on the shores of Vietnam clutching our arms and pleading for someone to stand up without flinching to these probes of reality: if you will prove yourself, we shouted, you will prove us too, and we will love you endlessly and shower you with gifts.

But like everything else they withered before us. We bathed them in seas of fire, praying for the miracle. In the heart of the flame their bodies glowed with heavenly light; in our ears their voices rang; but when the fire died they were only ash. We lined them up in ditches. If they had walked toward us singing through the bullets we would have knelt and worshipped; but the bullets knocked them over and they died as we had feared. We cut their flesh open, we reached into their dying bodies tearing out their livers, hoping to be washed in their blood; but they screamed and gushed like the most negligible phantoms. We forced ourselves deeper than we had ever gone before into the women; but when we came back we were still alone, and the women like stones.

From tears we grew exasperated. Having proved to our sad selves that these were not the dark-eyed gods who walk our dreams, we wished only that they would retire and leave us in peace. They would not. For a while we were prepared to pity them, though we pitied more our tragic reach for transcendence. Then we ran out of pity.

With the completion of this Introduction I close my contribution to Coetzee's project *New Life for Vietnam*.

## INTRODUCTION

**1.1 *Aims of the report.*** This report concerns the potential of broadcast programming in Phases IV–V of the conflict in Indo-China. It evaluates the achievements of this branch of psychological warfare during Phases I–III (1961–65, 1965–69, 1969–72) and recommends certain changes in the future form and content of propaganda. Its recommendations apply both to broadcasting services operated directly by U.S. agencies (including services in Vietnamese, Khmer, Lao, Muong, and other vernaculars but excluding V.O.A. Pacific services) and to those operated by the Republic of Vietnam with U.S. technical advice (principally Radio Free Vietnam and V.A.F., the Armed Forces radio).

The strategy of the psychological war must be determined by overall war strategy. This report is being drawn up in early 1973 as we enter upon Phase IV of the war, a phase during which the propaganda arm will play a complex and crucially important role. It is projected that, depending upon domestic political factors, Phase IV will last until either mid-1974 or early 1977. Thereafter there will be a sharp remilitarization of the conflict (Phase V), followed by a police/civilian reconstruction effort (Phase VI). This scenario is broad. I have accordingly had no qualms about projecting my recommendations beyond the end of Phase IV into the final phases of the conflict.

**1.2 *Aims and achievements of propaganda services.*** In waging psychological warfare we aim to destroy the morale of the enemy. Psychological warfare is the negative function of propaganda: its positive function is to create confidence that our political authority is strong and durable. Waged effectively, propaganda war wears down the enemy by shrinking his civilian base and recruitment potential and rendering his soldiers uncertain in battle and likely to defect afterwards, while at the same time fortifying the loyalty of the population. Its military/political potential cannot therefore be overstressed.

However, the record of the propaganda services in Vietnam, U.S. and U.S.-aided, remains disappointing. This is the common conclusion of the Joint Commission of Inquiry, 1971; of the internal studies made available to the Kennedy Institute; and of my own analysis of interviews with contended civilians, defectors, and prisoners. It is confirmed by content analysis of programs broadcast between 1965 and 1972. Our gross inference must be that the effective psychological pressure we bring to bear on the guerrillas and their supporters is within their limits of tolerance; further inference may be that some of our programming is counterproductive. The correct starting point for our investigation should therefore be this: is there a factor in the psychic and psychosocial constitution of the insurgent population that makes it resistant to penetration by our programs? Having answered this question we can go on to ask: how can we make our programs more penetrant?

**1.3 *Control.*** Our propaganda services have yet to apply the first article of the anthropology of Franz Boas: that if we wish to take over the direction of a society we must either guide it from within its cultural framework or else eradicate its culture and impose new structures. We cannot expect to guide

the thinking of rural Vietnam until we recognize that rural Vietnam is non-literate, that its family structure is patrilineal, its social order hierarchical, and its political order authoritarian though local autonomous. (This last fact explains why in settled times the ARVN command structure degenerates into local satrapies.) It is a mistake to think of the Vietnamese as individuals, for their culture prepares them to subordinate individual interest to the interest of family or band or hamlet. Traditional rational promptings of self-interest matter less than the counsel of father and brothers.

1.31 *Western theory and Vietnamese practice*. But the voice which our broadcasting projects in Vietnamese homes is the voice of neither father nor brother. It is the voice of the doubting self, the voice of René Descartes driving his wedge between the self in the world and the self who contemplates that self. The voices of our Chieu Hoi (surrender/reconciliation) programming are wholly Cartesian. Their record is not a happy one. Whether disguised as the voice of the doubting secret self (“Why should I fight when the struggle is hopeless?”) or as that of the clever brother (“I have gone over to Saigon—so can you!”), they have failed because they speak out of an alienated *doppelgänger* rationality for which there is no precedent in Vietnamese thought. We attempt to embody the ghost inside the villager, but there has never been any ghost there.

The propaganda of Radio Free Vietnam, crude though it may seem with its martial music, boasts and slogans, exhortations and anathema, is closer to the pulse of Vietnam than our subtle programming of division. It offers strong authority and a simple choice. Our own statistics show that everywhere except in Saigon itself Radio Free Vietnam is the most favored listening. The Saigoneses prefer U.S. Armed Forces Radio for its pop music. Our figures for Liberation Radio (NLF) indicate small listenership but are probably unreliable. Figures for the U.S.-run services are more accurate and indicate low interest everywhere except in the cities. The provincial population listens with respect to the ferocious war-heroes, humble defectors, and brass-band disk-jockeys of Radio Free Vietnam. There is an early-evening commentary program run by Nguyen Loc Binh, a colonel in the National Police, which draws an enormous audience. Westerners are distressed by Nguyen’s crudity, but the Vietnamese like him because with rough humor, cajolements, threats, and a certain slyness of insight he has worked up a typically Vietnamese elder-brother relationship with his audience, particularly with women.

1.4 *The father-voice*. The voice of the father utters itself appropriately out of the sky. The Vietnamese call it “the whispering death” when it speaks from the B-52’s, but there is no reason why it should not ride the radio waves with equal devastation. The father is authority, infallibility, ubiquity. He does not persuade, he commands. That which he foretells happens. When the guilty Saigoneses in the dead of night tunes to Liberation Radio, the awful voice that breaks in on the LR frequency should be the father’s.

The father-voice is not a new source in propaganda. The tendency in totalitarian states is, however, to identify the father-voice with the voice of the Leader, the father of the country. In times of war the father exhorts his children to patriotic sacrifice, in times of peace to greater production. The Republic of Vietnam is no exception. But the practice has two drawbacks. The first is that the omnipotence of the Father is tainted by the fallibility of the Leader. The second is that there exist penalties that the prudent statesman dare not threaten, punishments that he dare not celebrate, which nevertheless belong to the omnipotent Father.

It is in view of such considerations that I suggest a division of responsibilities, with the Vietnamese operating the brother-voices and we ourselves taking over the design and operation of the father-voice.

[I omit three dull pages on details of interface between intelligence and information services; on the problem of security among the South Vietnamese; and on the longed-for assumption of responsibility by them.]

1.41 *Programming the father-voice*. In limited warfare, defeat is not a military but a psychic concept. To the ideal of demoralization we pay lip service, and insofar as we wage terroristic war we strive to realize it. But in practice our most effective acts of demoralization are justified in military terms, though the use of force for psychological ends were shameful. Thus, for example, we have justified the elimination of enemy villages by calling them armed strongholds, when the true value of the operations lay in demonstrating to the absent VC menfolk just how vulnerable their homes and families were.

Atrocity charges are empty when they cannot be proved. 95% of the villages we wiped off the map were never on it.

There is an unsettling lack of realism about terrorism among the higher ranks of the military. Questions of conscience lie outside the purview of this study. We must work on the assumption that the military believe in their own explanations when they assign a solely military value to terror operations.

1.411 *Testimony of CT*. There is greater realism among men in the field. During 1968 and 1969 the Special Forces undertook a program in political assassination (CT) in the Delta Region. Under CT a significant proportion of the NLF cadres were eliminated and the rest forced into hiding. The official report defines the program as a police action rather than a military one, in that it identified specific victims and eliminated them by such subject-specific means as ambush and sniping. The official explanation for the success of the program is that the NLF lost face because the populace were made to see that NLF operatives had no defense against their own weapon of assassination.

The men who carried out the killings have a different explanation. They knew that the intelligence identifying NLF cadres was untrustworthy. Informers often acted out of personal envy and hatred, or simply out of greed for reward. There is every reason to suspect that many of those killed were innocent, though innocence among the Vietnamese is a relative affair. Not only this. I quote one member of an assassination squad: "At a hundred yards who can tell one slope from another? You can only blow his head off and hope". Nor only this. We must expect that when they knew they had been marked down, the more important cadres would have slipped away. So we must regard the official count of 1250 as grossly inflated with non-significant dead.

Yet CT was a measurable success. In concert with the more orthodox activities of the National Police it brought about a 75% drop in terror and sabotage incidents. Investigators using advanced non-verbal techniques—in Vietnam all verbal responses are untrustworthy—recorded a progressive muting of such positive reactions as rage, contempt, and defiance in subjects from villages where before 1968 the NLF had held sway. After phases of insecurity and anxiety their subjects settled into a state known as High Threshold, with affect traits of apathy, despondency, and despair.

Once again those who knew the flavor of the moment tell the story best. I quote: "We scared the shit out of them. They didn't know who was next".

Yet fear was no novelty to these Vietnamese. Fear had bound the community together. The novelty of CT was that it broke down the community not by attacking the whole but by facing each member with the prospect of an attack on him as an individual with a name and a history. To his question, Why me? there was no comforting answer. I am chosen because I am the object of an inscrutable choice.

am chosen because I am marked. With this non sequitur the subject's psyche is penetrated. The emotional support of the group falls into irrelevance as he sees that war is being waged on him in his isolation. He has become a victim and begins to behave like one. He is the quarry of an infallible hunter, infallible since whenever he attacks someone dies. Hence the victim's preoccupation with taint: I move among those marked for death and those unmarked—which am I? The community breaks down into a scurrying swarm whose antennae vibrate only to the coming of death. The net hums with suspicion (Is this a corpse I am talking to?). Then, as pressure is maintained, the coherence of the psyche cracks (I am tainted, I smell in my own nostrils).

(My explication of the dynamics of this de-politicizing process is strikingly confirmed by the studies of Thomas Szell in the de-politicizing of internment camps. Szell reports that a camp authority which randomly and at random times selects subjects for punishment, while maintaining the appearance of selectivity, is consistently successful in breaking down group morale.)

What is the lesson of CT? CT teaches that when the cohesiveness of the group is weakened the threshold of breakdown in each of its members drops. Conversely, it teaches that to attack the group as a group without fragmenting it does not reduce the psychic capacity of its members to resist. Many of our Vietnam programs, including perhaps strategic bombing, show poor results from neglect of this principle. There is only one rule in Vietnam: fragment, individualize. Our mistake was to allow the Vietnamese to conceive themselves as an entire people huddled under the bombs of a foreign oppressor. Thereby we created for ourselves the task of breaking the resistance of a whole people—a dangerous, expensive, and unnecessary task. If we had rather compelled the village, the guerrilla band, the individual subject to conceive himself the village, the band, the subject elected for especially harsh punishment, for reasons never to be known, then while his first gesture might have been to strike back in anger, the worm of guilt would inevitably, as punishment continued, have sprouted in his bowels and drawn from him the cry, "I am punished therefore I am guilty". He who utters these words is vanquished.

1.5 *The myth of the father.* The father-voice is the voice that breaks the bonds of the enemy band. The strength of the enemy is his bondedness. We are the father putting down the rebellion of the band of brothers. There is a mythic shape to the encounter, and no doubt the enemy draws sustenance from the knowledge that in the myth the brothers usurp the father's place. Such inspirational force strengthens the bonds of the brothers not only by predicting their victory but by promising that the era of the warring brothers, the abhorred *kien tiem* of Chinese experience, will be averted.

A myth is true—that is to say, *operationally* true—insofar as it has predictive force. The more deeply rooted and universal a myth, the more difficult it is to combat. The myths of a tribe are the fictions it coins to maintain its powers. The answer to a myth of force is not necessarily counterforce for if the myth predicts counterforce, counterforce reinforces the myth. The science of mythography teaches us that a subtler counter is to subvert and revise the myth. The highest propaganda is the propagation of a new mythology.

For a description of the myths we combat, together with their national variants, I refer you to Thomas McAlmon's *Communist Myth and Group Integration: vol. I, Proletarian Mythography* (1967), vol. II, *Insurgent Mythography* (1969). McAlmon's monumental work is the foundation of the entire structure of modern revisionary counter-myth, of which the present study is one small example. McAlmon describes the myth of the overthrow of the father as follows.

"In origin the myth is a justification of the rebellion of sons against a father who uses them as pawns. The sons come of age, rebel, mutilate the father, and divide the patrimony, that is, the earth."

fertilized by the father's rain. Psychoanalytically the myth is a self-affirming fantasy of the child "powerless to take the mother he desires from his father-rival". In popular Vietnamese consciousness the myth takes the following form: "The sons of the land (i.e., the brotherhood of earth-tillers) desire to take the land (i.e., the Vietnamese *Boden*) for themselves, overthrowing the sky-god who is identified with the old order of power (foreign empire, the U.S.). The earth-mother hides her sons in her bosom, safe from the thunderbolts of the father; at night, while he sleeps, they emerge to unman him and initiate a new fraternal order" (II, pp. 26, 101).

1.51 *Countermyths*. The weak point in this myth is that it portrays the father as vulnerable, liable to wither under a single well-directed radical blow. Our response has hitherto been the Hydran counter-myth: for every head chopped off we grow a new one. Our strategy is attrition, the attrition of plenty. Before our endless capacity to replace dead members we hope that the enemy will lose faith, grow disheartened, surrender.

But it is a mistake to think of the Hydran counter as a final answer. For one thing, the myth of rebellion has a no-surrender clause. Punishment for falling into the father's hands is to be eaten alive or penned eternally in a volcano. If you surrender your body it is not returned to the earth and you cannot be reborn (volcanoes are not of the earth but terrestrial bases of the sun-father). Thus surrender is not an option because it means a fate worse than death. (Nor, considering what happens to prisoners of Saigon, can the intuitive force of this argument be denied.)

A second fallacy in the Hydran counter is that it misinterprets the myth of rebellion. The blow that wins the war against the tyrant father is not a death-thrust but a humiliating blow that renders him sterile (impotence and sterility are mythologically indistinguishable). His kingdom, no longer fertilized, becomes a waste land.

The importance of the humiliating blow will not be underestimated by anyone who knows the place of shame in peri-Sinic value systems.

Let me now outline a more promising counter-strategy.

The myth of rebellion assumes that heaven and earth, father and mother, live in symbiosis. Neither can exist alone. If the father is overthrown there must be a new father, new rebellion, endless violence while no matter how deep her treachery toward her mate, the mother may not be annihilated. The scheming of mother and sons is thus endless.

But has the master-myth of history not outdated the fiction of the symbiosis of earth and heaven? We live no longer by tilling the earth but by devouring her and her waste products. We signed our repudiation of her with flights toward new celestial loves. We have the capacity to breed out of our own head. When the earth conspires incestuously with her sons, should our recourse not be to the arms of the goddess of *techne* who springs from our brains? Is it not time that the earth-mother be supplanted by her own faithful daughter, shaped without woman's part? The age of Athene dawns. In the Indo-China Theater we play out the drama of the end of the tellurian age and the marriage of the sky-god with his parthenogene daughter-queen. If the play has been poor, it is because we have stumbled about the stage asleep, not knowing the meaning of our acts. Now I bring their meaning to light in that blinding moment of ascending meta-historical consciousness in which we begin to shape our own myths.

1.6 *Victory*. The father cannot be a benign father until his sons have knelt before his wand.

The plotting of the sons against the father must cease. They must kneel with hearts bathed in obedience.

When the sons know obedience they will be able to sleep.

Phase IV only postpones the day of reckoning.

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There is no problem of reconstruction in Vietnam. The only problem is the problem of victory.

We are all somebody's sons. Do not think it does not pain me to make this report. (On the other hand, do not underestimate my exultation.) I too am stirred by courage. But courage is an archaic virtue. While there is courage we are all bound to the wheel of rebellious violence. Beyond courage there is the humble heart, the quiet garden into which we may escape from the cycles of time. I am neat and polite, but I am the man of the future paradise.

Before paradise comes purgatory.

Not without joy, I have girded myself for purgatory. If I must be a martyr to the cause of obedience I am prepared to suffer. I am not alone. Behind their desks across the breadth of America wait an army of young men, out of fashion like me. We wear dark suits and thick lenses. We are the generation who were little boys in 1945. We are taking up position. We are stepping into shoes. It is we who will inherit America, in due course. We are patient. We wait our turn.

If you are moved by the courage of those who have taken up arms, look into your heart: an honest eye will see that it is not your best self which is moved. The self which is moved is treacherous. It craves to kneel before the slave, to wash the leper's sores. The dark self strives toward humiliation and turmoil, the bright self toward obedience and order. The dark self sickens the bright self with doubts and qualms. I know. It is his poison which is eating me.

I am a hero of resistance. I am no less than that, properly understood, in metaphor. Staggering in my bleeding armor, I stand erect, alone on the plain, beset.

My papers are in order. I sit neatly and write. I make fine distinctions. It is on the point of a fine distinction that the world turns. I distinguish between obedience and humiliation, and under the fire of my distinguishing intellect mountains crumble. I am the embodiment of the patient struggle of the intellect against blood and anarchy. I am a story not of emotion and violence—the illusory war-story of television—but of life itself, life in obedience to which even the simplest organism represses its entropic yearning for the mud and follows the road of evolutionary duty toward the glory of consciousness.

There is only one problem in Vietnam and that is the problem of victory. The problem of victory is technical. We must believe this. Victory is a matter of sufficient force, and we dispose over sufficient force.

I wish to get this part over with. I am impatient with the restrictions of this assignment.

I dismiss Phase IV of the conflict. I look forward to Phase V and the return of total air-war.

There is a military air-war with military targets; there is also a political air-war whose purpose is to destroy the enemy's capacity to sustain himself psychologically.

We cannot know until we can measure. But in the political air-war there is no easy measure like the body-count. Therefore we use probability measures (I apologize for repeating what is in the books, but I cannot afford not to be complete.) When we strike at a target, we define the probability of a success as

$$P_1 = aX^{-3/4} + (bX - c)Y$$

where X measures release altitude, Y measures ground fire intensity, and a, b, c are constants. In a typical political air-strike, however, the target is not specified but simply formalized as a set of map co-ordinates. To measure success we compute two probabilities and find their product:  $P_1$  above (the

probability of a hit) and  $P_2$ , the probability that what we hit is a target. Since at present we can do little more than guess at  $P_2$ , our policy has been round-the-clock bombing, with heavy volume compensating for infinitesimal products  $P_1P_2$ . The policy barely worked in Phase III and cannot work in Phase IV, when all bombing is clandestine. What policy should we adopt in Phase V?

I sit in the depths of the Harry Truman Library, walled round with earth, steel, concrete, and miles after mile of compressed paper, from which impregnable stronghold of the intellect I send forth the winged dream of assault upon the mothering earth herself.

When we attack the enemy via a pair of map co-ordinates we lay ourselves open to mathematical problems we cannot solve. But if we cannot solve them we can eliminate them, by attacking the co-ordinates themselves—all the co-ordinates! For years now we have attacked the earth, explicitly in the defoliation of crops and jungle, implicitly in aleatoric shelling and bombing. Let us, in the act of ascending consciousness mentioned above, admit the meaning of our acts. We discount 1999 aleatoric missiles out of every 2000 we fire; yet every one of them lands somewhere, is heard by human ears, wears down hope in a human heart. A missile is truly wasted only when we dismiss it and are known by our foes to dismiss it. Our prodigality breeds contempt in the frugal Vietnamese, but only because they see it as the prodigality of waste rather than the prodigality of bounty. They know our guilt in devastating the earth and know that our fiction of aiming at the 0.058% of a man crossing the spot we strike at the moment we strike it is a guilty lie. Press back such atavistic guilt! Our future belongs not to the earth but to the stars. Let us show the enemy that he stands naked in a dying landscape.

I have to pull myself together.

We should not sneer at spray techniques. If spraying does not give the orgasm of the explosion (nothing has done more to sell the war to America than televised napalm strikes), it will always be more effective than high explosive in a campaign against the earth. PROP-12 spraying could change the face of Vietnam in a week. PROP-12 is a soil poison, a dramatic poison which (I apologize again) washed into the soil, attacks the bonds in dark silicates and deposits a topskin of gray ashy grit. Why have we discontinued PROP-12? Why did we use it only on the lands of resettled communities? Unless we reveal to ourselves and revel in the true meaning of our acts we will go on suffering the double penalty of guilt and ineffectualness.

I am in a bad way as I write these words. My health is poor. I have a treacherous wife, an unhappy home, unsympathetic superiors. I suffer from headaches. I sleep badly. I am eating myself out. If I knew how to take holidays perhaps I would take one. But I see things and have a duty toward history that cannot wait. What I say is in pieces. I am sorry. But we can do it. It is my duty to point out our duty. I sit in libraries and see things. I am in an honorable line of bookish men who have sat in libraries and had visions of great clarity. I name no names. You must listen. I speak with the voice of things to come. I speak in troubled times and tell you how to be as children again. I speak to the broken halves of all our selves and tell them to embrace, loving the worst in us equally with the best.

Tear this off, Coetzee, it is a postscript, it goes to you, listen to me.



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