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# The Interdisciplinary Hermeneutic: Reappraising the Socio-cultural episteme

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### ABSTRACT

Foucault discovered three major historical epistemai in modern Europe- the renaissance, the classical and the contemporary period. He noticed so many positivities in the exploration of knowledge. "In Foucault's system, perhaps his most influential early notion was that of the episteme" (Leigh 76). The discursive formation and specific regulations of knowledge outlined during this period. Man has an inquisitive mind and wants to explore the secrets of the universe. He tries to collect knowledge based on reason. The first branch which separates science is the reason. For Foucault, a given period's episteme was presumably present within all fields' language patterns, including literature and theology, although his study concentrated only on three social sciences namely Biology, psychology, and sexuality. "He takes literature very seriously as a cultural phenomenon but treats it as merely another form of discourse until it becomes quasi- autonomous around the time of the Romantics" (Leigh 76). Freud causes this rupture in knowledge. Since then, several scholars study the human body as well as sexuality. The study was equally affected by the socio-cultural conditions of societies. Male researchers draw more attention to the female body and their bio-processes. Labib finds South Africa as a mirror to understand Coetzee's characters. It is through exploitation of culture and language, one society dominates other. In every society, the production of discourse is controlled, selected, organised, and distributed. In this process, a society frames a certain "rules of exclusion" (*The Archaeology of Knowledge* 216). Foucault finds that women are excluded in certain days (menstruation) at the biological process. Though the experts called biologists or doctors are not aware of the exact reasons for the practices. They appear the authority over women's body and their opinion in this case or other cases matters a lot. The approach suggested, "The prohibitions, exclusions, limitations, values and freedoms and transgressions of sexuality, all its manifestations, verbal or otherwise linked to a particular discursive practice" (*The Archaeology of Knowledge* 193). The knowledge is a continuous process, and it does not stop, it keeps moving one or other direction/ directions. Foucault argues that the description of episteme is inexhaustible and can never be closed. "It is a constantly moving set of

articulations, shifts, and coincidences that are established, only to give rise to others" (*The Archaeology of Knowledge* 192).

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century, an attempt made to find new values to reconstruct the European culture. The European consciousness has an extrapolation, though socio-economic problems remain the same. Foucault explains the European consciousness in his work *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and finds term it as,

An archaeology of knowledge a term has several connotations which appeals to Foucault: the notion of depth, of course, of getting below the surface: but also the idea of a science which is not a science and yet is not quite history either, an leans heavy on taxonomy; and again the notion of the past as a succession of layers with little to suggest transition between them (Miel 235-236).

Foucault argues that episteme is positive. It opposes knowledge of ignorance; it makes possible the existence of epistemological figures and sciences. Episteme relates this fact to the process of historical practice. The discursive origin of knowledge has its roots in historical traditions as it mentions earlier that it is a continuous and comprehensive process in the history recorded later when it reaches its zenith. The European nations took initiatives to produce knowledge as they were aware that it would help them lead the world now or in the future. According to Edward Said, "Knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control" (*Orientalism* 36). Leusmann posits that J. M. Coetzee is white Afrikaans and his last name suggests his Boer identity but he speaks English language at home and "who treats language like dangerous snake, with firmness and as well as caution because he distrust its promise to contribute to understand between peoples" (Leusmann, 60). The essay aims to explore the depiction of colonised culture. J. M. Coetzee portrays inferiority of the African culture when he draws the attention of his readers to the beauty and the hygienic conditions of women in the third world countries, and ways of treating diseases the comparison is to establish the superiority of European culture.

**Keywords:** Discursive formation, Episteme, Identity, Philological disciplines, Hermeneutic.

**Introduction:** *Dusklands* consist of two novellas, namely "The Vietnam Project" and "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee". In "The Vietnam Project" Eugene Dawn is a cipher, working on the American army project in Vietnam. His job is to prepare a ground for psychological warfare. Coetzee supervises Eugene Dawn, and Dawn is scared of the boss. At Harry S. Truman Library, A girl (the assistant) flirts Harry. Eugene Dawn is married to Marilyn and has one kid named Martin. Every Wednesday Marilyn installs Marcia, a pregnant black teenager in her house and goes for shopping. Eugene Dawn carries 24 photographs in his briefcase, and one of the pictures shows the open sexual relationship. Clifford Loman, an American, is copulating with a Vietnamese woman. Second and third picture draw readers attention to American brutality on the severed head of a man and extermination of the Annamese tiger. American has eliminated villages, and 95% of villages wiped off the map. Marilyn Dawn has an aura and beauty, but she has an estranged relationship. Eugene Dawn takes Martin to a motel at Dalton, Marilyn and

police reached there and asked for Martin's custody. Eugene Dawn is not ready to hand over the kid. At last, he finds himself in the mental hospital.

**Part II** "The narrative of Jacobus Coetzee" Jacobus Coetzee is an explorer. He finds two African natives, namely Hottentots and Bushmen. Hottentots are living

with Dutch who colonised Africa. Dutch settled there are known as Afrikaans and play with Hottentots children, and it is difficult to decide "who copies whom"? (*Dusklands* 87). Hottentots baptised to Christianity, but it is their way to protect themselves. Then Bushman is like a wild animal who cut and mutilate them to take revenge. Coetzee took six men namely Barend Dikkop, Jan Klawer, Mijnheer, Jan Plaatje and two Tamboer brothers to journey in the land of the great Namaqua. The people of Namaqua (Hottentots) are known for their hospitality and generosity, Coetzee and his men carried gifts, including tobacco and rolled copper. Coetzee went to meet their chief, who was old and sick. He was suffered from cancerous diseases and treated with urine. They were living in forty huts and had separate five huts for menstruating women. When Coetzee fell sick there, his men disowned him and were copulating with Hottentot women. Their desertion irritated him, but he could not do anything. He was treated there with Bushmen pharmacopoeia. Once treated, he along with Jan Klawer moved back to his land. But rest of his Hottentot desert him which makes him dejected. He took another journey to Namaqua to punish deserters.

The protagonist Eugene Dawn works as a cipher fears that his boss Coetzee will reject his proposal on American warfare. He finds, Coetzee has no sympathy and "power speaks only to power" (*Dusklands* 4). The protagonist works in the Harry S. Truman Library, where four security cameras used to oversee the activities. Eugene Dawn is aware that his boss would take his report as the binary oppositions, Orient or Occident though he declined. "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" (*Dusklands* 10). West and East or Occident and Orient civilizations had old trade relations, but this relationship has changed forever after the sixteenth century. Now Occident or Western Civilization produced vast literature to prove its superiority in almost in every field. According to Edward Said, "The former dominate: the latter must be dominated, which usually means having their land occupied, their internal affairs rigidly controlled, their blood and treasure put at the disposal on one or another Western power" (*Orientalism* 36).

In psychological warfare, their purpose aims to destroy the Vietnamese people's morale and boost their own forces' confidence. The protagonist Dawn studied Franz Boas' anthropology in which it believes that the culture is made weak through deep internal penetration or destroying it and imposing new culture. "If we wish to take over the direction of a society, we must guide it from within its cultural framework or else eradicate its culture and impose new structure" (*Dusklands* 31). America wants to establish a permanent colony in Vietnam, and it is not possible without destroying their local culture. The new laws and forms of language hold sway, enabling them to introduce them to the new representation system. Edward Said finds a cultural race to establish its superiority at the cost of the other cultures, and it appears that people of rich countries or Western nations want to see homogenous cultures. "Cultures have always been inclined to impose complete transformations on other culture, receiving these other cultures not as they are but as for the benefit of the receiver, they ought to be" (*Orientalism* 67). America broadcasts programs including Rene Descartes' voice to destroy their indigenous culture, but "the Saigonese prefer U.S. Armed Forces Radio of its pop music"

(*Dusklands* 32). The protagonist finds another comparison to compare both civilisations. Nguyen LocBinh, a colonel in the National Police, draws an enormous Vietnamese audience. He enjoyed "a Vietnamese elder- brother relationship with his audience, particularly with women" (*Dusklands* 33). But in the western civilisation, Eugene Dawn compares America with the authority of the father. He finds his infallibility and ubiquity, he commands. 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-52s." (*Dusklands* 33). The father (America) puts down the rebellion of the band of the brothers, they cannot sustain and lost the battle. The sky or rain declares as the father who fertilises the earth. It is the sons of the land desire to overthrow the sky-god (America), and the earth mother hides her sons.

The protagonist Eugene Dawn praises the beauty of his wife, Marilyn Dawn. He dreams her and watches her nude pictures. He finds her physically entrancing and fails to have satisfactory relations with her. "I point to 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 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" (*Dusklands* 19). Professor J. C. Kannemeyer finds common points in the character of Marilyn. He opines that Marilyn has exceptional beauty.

Kannemeyer posits, "It is not coincidence that her name recalls Marilyn Monroe, one of the great sex goddesses of the twentieth century" (*A Life in Writing* 230). The protagonist is unable to carry healthy relations with his wife. He is preoccupied with his work. Though, he married to a swim model. He finds her "tall blondeness, clear brown lines, hauteur and mystery of the swimwear model I married" (*Dusklands* 63). J. M. Coetzee highlights her exceptional beauty, as he appears to be supportive of racism in his works. Marilyn has a maid at her house, and the narrator or protagonists describes her as "a pregnant black teenager in the house" (*Dusklands* 16). The people of other colours or nationalities did not depict well. They are marked 'Other' based on their colour or culture.

Jacobus Coetzee was an explorer in the eighteenth century and explored the land of the Great Namaqua. The protagonist Jacobus Coetzee is the only source to know the Great Namaqua, and he moulds and makes our understanding. The narrator uses binary oppositions to explain the people of Namaqua. He makes differences between Hottentots and Bushmen, even between Hottentots. There is one group of Hottentots who imitate the European lifestyle. They converted to Christianity. "They know that being baptised is a way of protecting yourself, they are not stupid, they know it wins sympathy when they accuse you of mistreating a Christian" (*Dusklands* 88). Edward Said opined that identity constructed in the society where one group enjoys power at the other group's cost. According to Said, "The construction of identity is bound up with the disposition of power and powerless in each society and is, therefore, anything but mere academic wool-gathering" (*Orientalism* 332). They take part in Sunday prayers and use the rest of the day to stuff themselves at the Europeans' cost. Coetzee agrees that the Hottentots gains a lot from the European civilisation, but it is also true that they lose something simultaneously. Leigh argued that literature emerges as a powerful tool in the

modern period and even replaced religion which enjoyed much power in the medieval period. "Foucault recognises that literature often assumed the power that once was held by religion" (79). Another group, a wild Hottentots, lives in the ideal state of nature. The construction of identity is a continuous interpretation and reinterpretation of their differences from us. "Each age and society re-creates its "others" (*Orientalism*, 332). They welcome travellers in their region and offer them good hospitality. They are still away from the corruption of modern-day civilisations. "A wild Hottentot, the kind of Hottentot that met us that day, one who has lived all his life in a state of nature, has his Hottentot integrity" (*Dusklands*100). Jan Klaver, an aged Hottentot, was working in farms of the

protagonist. He was given a medal for his loyalty which he wore in his neck. This medal gives him authority. "It gave him authority, he said, like that of the Hottentot kapteins who carried staff of authority from the castle" (*Dusklands* 95). Foucault finds an individual or institute does not exercise power; it passes through several channels and becomes the vehicle to carry power to the grass-root level. According to him, "Power in its exercise goes much further, passes through much finer channels, and is much more ambiguous, since each individual has at his disposal a certain power, and for that every reason can also act as the vehicle for transmitting a wider power" (*Power/Knowledge* 72).

The sole narrator Coetzee draws our attention to his skin colour. When he, along with his Hottentots reached there, wild Hottentots stood before them. It appears as they have not ever seen a white man. "We look at each other like men, for the last time. They had never seen a white man" (*Dusklands* 101). The protagonist carries presents, including tobacco to the Hottentots, and they are eagerly waiting for their gifts. He finds a child who looks like European because of his colour but appeared awkward creation of the god. "A child strayed into the hut and stood at my bedside pondering me. It had no nose or ear, and both upper and lower foreteeth jutted horizontally from its mouth. Patches of skin had peeled from its face, hands, and legs, revealing a pink inner self in a poor imitation of European coloring" (*Dusklands* 128).

Edward Said discusses his talk with an Arab clergyman who had come to the United States of America. He stated that he belonged to a protestant community comprising a few sects, and it brought them to conflict with the constituents in the Ottoman Empire. He argues, "Modern ecumenism ought generally to go in the direction of dissolving small sects and preserving the dominant community, rather than encouraging these sects to remain independent from the main church" (*Culture and Imperialism* 49). He concludes that the Western civilisation is superior to the rest of the societies, their culture, religion, language, and skin colour symbolise their superiority. The protagonist makes fun of their physical appearance. He finds them unimpressive physically and imagines them in Christian clothes. "He is short and yellow, he wrinkles early, his face has little animation, his belly is slack. Put him in Christian clothes, and he begins to cringe, his shoulders bend, his eyes shift, he cannot keep still in your presence but must incessantly twitch" (*Dusklands* 100). Homi Bhabha in the location of culture finds that it reveals deep the psychic which separates the body and soul, the fragile skin black and white. This underlines the "process of identification" (*The Location of Culture* 63). Bhabha posits, "This process is visible in the exchange of looks between native and settlers that structures

their psychic relation in the paranoid fantasy of boundless possession and its familiar language of reversal” (63). Edward Said argues that human plays a pivotal role in the creation of history. “Since the struggle for control over territory is part of that history, so too is the struggle over historical and social meaning” (*Orientalism* 332). Each scholar has a long tradition of humanistic learning derived from secular anthropology's efflorescence, which included the eighteenth-century revolutions in the philological disciplines. History and natural sciences are different from each other. Man has made history, and there was a particular hermeneutic way of studying history that differed in intent as well as a method from the natural sciences" (*Culture and Imperialism* 53).

The European philosophers portray other civilisations as wild and savage. They compare their culture based on god/goddess, religion, rituals and organised society. The protagonist Coetzee finds wild Hottentots believing in tribal demi-god, the sacrificial gathering, wizard, and magic contest. He projects himself sometimes “as their father” (*Dusklands* 99) or god. “I looked like a god, a god of the kind they did not yet have the Hottentots are primitive people” (109). Jan Meil studied Foucault and finds that knowledge created to emphasis the differences or distinctions in culture, language and customs. According to Meil, “Knowledge is no longer sought through resemblances but through distinction” (Miel 237). The discourse prepares intentionally to underrate the people of Namaqua. They are labelled as primitive though they are “blessed with great rulers” (*Dusklands*108). Hottentots are not aware of agriculture, and they spend their time in pantomime and dancing. Edward Said in *Orientalism* argues the people other than Europe are labelled as magician once for all. The explorers and philosophers compose their literature and depict them primitive, wild and rural civilisation. "It shares with magic and with mythology the self-containing, self-reinforcing character of a closed system, in which objects are what they are because they are what they are, for once, for all time, for ontological reasons that no empirical material can either dislodge or alter" (Said 70). The protagonist finds himself bored, but this sentiment is not available to the Hottentots. The protagonist draws one more difference regarding death. The Hottentot chief was sick with a cancerous disease, and about to die. The protagonist finds him in a pitiable able condition and treated with urine. But when the protagonist himself becomes sick, he prefers to die in a battleground. He narrates that the gun is the only mediator and therefore, saviour. "The gun is our last defense against isolation within the travelling sphere.

...The gun saves us from the fear that all life is within us" (*Dusklands*122).

The West used culture as the biggest weapon to annihilate the traditional beliefs among people, their inherent capacities and ultimately given them the identity of other people's culture and language. The Western-trained or English educated writers adopted the English language with great ease, subsiding their own culture and language, but few defend their culture by saying that their language, culture and heritage is exclusively for Africa's development.

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