

## Baal and Thoth: Unwelcome Apparitions in J. M. Coetzee's *The Master of Petersburg* and *Disgrace*

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They do no more than disavow the undeniable itself: a ghost never dies, it remains always to come and to come-back.  
(Derrida 99)

In his seminar, *Specters of Marx*, Jacques Derrida discusses how one of the essential qualities of the specter is its ability to appear and reappear incessantly. The inability to know when the specter may appear, however, not only enforces its haunting quality but also conveys a despairing sense of what Derrida refers to as empty Messianism from which emits “a curious taste of death” (169). Derrida also contends that with the empty Messianic wait lies the possibility of hope. Leaving the door ajar for the *arrivant* may result in the advent of good tidings. Derrida also contends that one “must possess” the specter “without letting oneself be possessed by it” (132). However, Derrida promptly questions if this is possible as to possess is to be possessed (132). In a number of J. M. Coetzee's novels, the characters feel they are possessed by demons or ghosts; at times they try to flee, at other times they try to control the spirits, as such presences summon memories of a past better forgotten or a future dreaded. For them, the prospect of the *arrivant* is unnerving and uncannily carries in its folds a curious taste of death. In this essay, I would like to discuss the roles of two mythological deities, Baal and Thoth, that symbolically acquire the role of specters in Coetzee's *The Master of Petersburg* and *Disgrace*, respectively. In Coetzee's novels, these ancient gods no longer assume their original mythical role, but instead evolve as premonitions of evil and death. I will also argue why the aforementioned oriental gods can only be perceived here as evil.

*The Master of Petersburg* is set in Russia, partially drawing on the life of Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky and his novels, especially *The Devils*.<sup>1</sup>

The opening of Coetzee's novel begins with Dostoevsky's return to St. Petersburg following the mysterious death of his stepson on October 1869 after a long self-imposed exile. As the novel unfolds, the event assumes larger implications for Dostoevsky. At once, it functions as a harsh reminder of his mortality and an exposition of his failing abilities as an aging writer. In *The Master of Petersburg*, the face of Baal is revealed to the protagonist twice. Both times, Dostoevsky is disturbed by the apparition, which he invariably equates with evil. In contrast, Baal, the Canaan god, generally associated with fertility rites, is hardly seen as evil. He is the god of rain, clouds and thunderstorm (figure 1). As a pre-Biblical god, he has also been given different roles and names, as when he becomes part of the Babylonian deity, his name changes to Haddad.<sup>2</sup> A peasant culture, the Canaan civilization revered Baal. In their myths, Baal beats Yam, the son of El, the highest Canaan God, to occupy a position of second in command to El. Other myths report that he defeated the god of death and destruction Mot after being resurrected by his lover Anat. His resurrection is short lived, as it tends to follow a seven-year cycle, reflecting the seven-year cycle of rain and drought in the Near East. Whatever his role may have been, Baal, the deity, is a giver of life. In contrast, the face reflected back at Dostoevsky is one which is hauntingly evil, a forewarning of death. The first mention of the word Baal in the novel occurs when Dostoevsky attempts to visualize Nechaev. The narrator tells us:

He makes an effort to visualize Sergei Nechaev, but all he sees is an ox's head, its eyes glassy, its tongue lolling, its skull cloven open by the butcher's axe. Around it is a seething swarm of flies. A name comes to him, and in the same instant he utters it: 'Baal.' (44)

The vile image, conjured up in Dostoevsky's mind, is not only reeking of death but of a murderous act. In Near Eastern mythology, Baal, in an attempt to gain independence from the Mother Goddess and develop his own domineering sovereign being, frees himself from his one duty of being the god of rain and a prisoner to the seasons, rising above the natural phenomenon and imitating the rising masculine gods (Sawwah

311). With this new-gained freedom, Baal ascends to the heavens and controls the rains from above, becoming master of thunder and lightning; his weapons are the flood and the storm (Sawwah 311). Moreover, Baal uses his axe to kill the dragon with seven heads and fight the mythical monsters. The one similarity between Nechaev and Baal lies in their defiance of the authorities. However, Baal's axe is not a butcher's axe,



*Figure 1. (L) Baal. Image number: AN32519001. Reproduced with kind permission of the British Museum. Copyright Trustees of the British Museum.*

*Figure 2. (R) Baal with Thunderbolt. Musée Louvre. Reproduced with kind permission of the Musée Louvre. Copyright Musée Louvre.*

as he uses it to defy the evil forces. Even though Nehaev believes he is fighting evil, he incarnates evil itself. Earlier in the novel, Dostoevsky describes Nechaev whom he associates with Baal, making a distinction between the spirit and the man. Initially, Nechaev “struck [him] as an unprepossessing, morose, intellectually undistinguished, and distinctly ordinary young man” (44). Unfortunately, however, a “dull, resentful, and murderous spirit” has “elected to reside in this particular young man” (44). In a later reference to Nechaev, Dostoevsky describes him as “the Mongol left behind in the Russian soul after the great nihilist of all has withdrawn into the wastes of Asia” (60). In Dostoevsky’s mind, the dark spirit is mysterious, invoking faraway places. The spirit, residing in Nechaev, attracts followers through its demonic forces. It is ironic that the spirit, or possibly Nechaev’s soul, whom Dostoevsky chooses to name Baal typifies all that is evil while the followers of the Canaan god Baal revered him because he fought evil. The association with the East is probably what prompts Dostoevsky to associate evil with what he perceives as an ox bearing the head of a pre-Biblical god. The notion of a seeming uncivilized culture, perhaps even one that believes in many gods or a god that is suspect, is what brings about this association. The East will always be the other; a dichotomy is created, East versus West; what is eastern is unrefined and therefore immoral. In his canonical book, *Orientalism*, Edward Said states: “The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, ‘different’; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, ‘normal’” (40). Said later describes the depiction of the Orient by the West. In his words:

In the depths of this Oriental stage stands a prodigious cultural repertoire whose individual items evoke a fabulously rich world: the Sphinx, Cleopatra, Eden, Troy, Sodom and Gomorrah, Astarte, Isis and Osiris, Sheba, Babylon, the Genii, the Magi, Nineveh, Prester John, Mahomet, and dozens more: settings, in some cases names only, half-imagined, half-known; monsters, devils, heroes; terrors, pleasures, desires. The European imagination was nourished extensively from this repertoire. (63)

Coetzee's educational background and upbringing may have possibly helped cultivate a similar perspective on the Orient. The European influence that shaped his intellect is confirmed by him during an exclusive interview with David Attwell. Coetzee describes himself in the following manner:

Seen from the outside as an historical specimen, I am a late representative of the vast movement of European expansion that took place from the sixteenth century to the mid-twentieth century of the Christian era ... I say that I represent this movement because my intellectual allegiances are clearly European, not African. ("Exclusive Interview")

The narrow concept of the Orient, resulting from an ethnocentric European perspective, or even one that views the culture as merely exotic, imposes a limited and preset structure. In his essays "Cruelty and Memory" and "Cultural Politics," Said suggests that Coetzee's review of Naguib Mafouz's novel *The Harafish* in his collection of essays *Stranger Shores*, falls within this framework.<sup>3</sup> In that particular structure, the East is at once primitive and mysterious, more likely the source of evil than otherwise. Evil emanating from the East is both frightening and haunting.

Similarly, in Dostoevsky's mind, sex is often linked with something demonic. As an aging author, he is very much concerned with his writing capabilities and sexual prowess. He tells us:

He is conscious of his age; in his voice he hears no trace of the erotic edge that women would once upon a time respond to. Instead there is something to which he does not care to give a name. A cracked instrument, a voice that has undergone its second breaking. (55)

The "cracked instrument," with its phallic insinuation, must help him assert his *raison d'être* in spite of the years weighing heavily on him. His dying body becomes more acceptable to its owner if especially desired by a much younger other, or perhaps made to perform in the presence of a child, such as Matroyona. He tells us he "stares at her with what can

only be nakedness” (24). A few lines later he persuades himself that a “certain shame passes over him, but it is superficial and transitory” (24).

The child’s presence not only excites him, as when he makes love to her mother while she lies in the adjacent room, but also functions as a conduit to the *arrivant* (56). Towards the end of the novel, we see him composing *The Devils* with the door left ajar. He may be leaving the door open for the *arrivant*, or a possible muse, that will assist him in writing again. The protagonist writes, “Throughout, he is aware of the door open a crack, and the child watching. His pleasure is acute; it communicates itself to the girl; never before have they experienced such dark sweetness” (244). This act is an allusion to Stavrogin’s confession in Dostoyevsky’s *The Devils*, added as an appendix in later publications; in it Nikolai writes that he purposely leaves the door open when he makes love to one of his mistresses, the maid, so that Matryosha, the daughter of the lodgers in the next room witnesses (Dostoyevsky 683). The link between the sexual act and writing is hereby confirmed. To perform sexually, one needs a youthful stimulus; likewise, the aging author needs a youthful presence in order to create again. This need itself invokes a sense of shame. Furthermore, shame that is associated with the sexual act stems from the fact that sex is partially viewed as evil. Unorthodox practices have to be suppressed, projected onto the other, or regarded as a trait from another culture. This belief extends to the perception of the East as a place of deviant sexual activity. Said describes how the Orient, which to the western psyche is a “living tableau of queerness,” invokes an association between it and “freedom of licentious sex” (103, 190).<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the appearance of Baal’s face, the *arrivant*, carrying in its folds a doom-like quality that is born of licentiousness and mystery, can only invite evil. When Dostoevsky attempts to confront the “stick-figure,” he is met with a veil, as with the Orient, which is invariably shrouded, mysterious and haunting (237).

Likewise, the epileptic seizures Dostoevsky suffers from cause him further discomfort and shame. He describes them as “the burden he carries with him through the world” (69). He adds, to “no one has he ever confessed how much of his time he spends listening for premonitions of them, trying to read the signs,” dreading them (69). In spite of his effort

to understand the attacks, he quickly adds that the trances do not provide any illumination (69). In a description of another seizure at a later stage, he wonders if describing them as possessions would have been more accurate. "Possession" paints a picture of something demonic over which one has no control. Trying to anticipate the seizures resembles his wait for the *arrivant*. He hopes that the seizures can be a premonition of something good, even though, in his mind, they are associated with everything that is evil. Derek Attridge remarks that there is always something Dostoevsky is waiting for "or trying to bring about" (120). Furthermore, he states that it is "a novel of waiting" and "waiting without any clear sense of what would constitute the longed-for arrival" of the unpredictable *arrivant* (120).

Derrida writes about the specter's ambiguous visibility:

The specter, as its name indicates, is the *frequency* of a certain visibility. But the visibility of the invisible. And *visibility*, by its essence, is not seen, which is why it remains *epekeina tes ousias*, beyond the phenomenon or beyond being. The specter is also, among other things, what one imagines, what one thinks one sees and which one projects—on an imaginary screen where there is nothing to see. (100–101)

In some respects, the imaginary screen becomes the mirror from which Dostoevsky's face stares back at him. He is seen projecting what is inside of him onto the in/visible demonic face in the mirror. He projects the evil within onto the face of the spirit that he perceives as Nechaev and calls Baal; the latter develops into a deity of his own creation. At times in the novel, the specter presents itself as the image of "a young man with heavy brows and a thin, tight mouth" or a mockery of himself in the form of a crumpled stick-figure, "an old-man" (49, 237).

In order to recall the spirit of his dead stepson, Pavel, or even to invite the demonic Baal who can aid him in his writing, Dostoevsky repeatedly slips on Pavel's suit. Though "the jacket is loose and the trousers too long, he does not feel clownish in it" (19). At some point, he tells us that wearing the suit is a gesture to the dead boy, "a gesture of defiance and love" (71). On the other hand, Attridge sees in his action "an attempt to

effect a union with the dead stepson that will exceed anything attained in life" (120). Gary Adelman also observes that on a number of occasions Dostoevsky is even seen sniffing Pavel's suit, in search of Pavel's presence (353). Adelman points that by "attaching himself to the life of his dead stepson and the stepson's friends in order to further his art, he has become a sort of literary vampire" (357). This enhances the demonic aspect of writing. Stephen Watson recognizes the diabolic element of writing: "Dramatised through another of Coetzee's minutely realized theatres of cruelty, *The Master of Petersburg* is a meditation—imbued with the passion of the guilt-ridden, the despairing, the damned—of the diabolism that can lie at the heart of the creative process itself" (49). Dostoevsky confirms this when he looks in the mirror, and the reflection is "only a seedy imposture and, beyond that, something surreptitious and obscene" (71). At a later stage, he wonders if he can build up a "body within the suit till at last the face is revealed, even if it is the ox-face of Baal" (238). Towards the end of the novel, the suit surprisingly fits. This occurs when he begins writing in Pavel's diary. When he looks in the mirror, he finds a young man "with all the arrogant strength of youth ... wearing a white suit, perfectly tailored" (242). However, Pavel will not be the name he will give himself (242). At this stage, he sees himself "beyond the human, beyond man," capable of anything (242). Ultimately, he has succeeded in summoning a specter even though it is the ox-face of Baal (238). In some ways, he has encompassed the evil spirit he first perceived as residing in Nechaev.

Dostoevsky believes by invoking the ox-face Baal, he has somehow conquered age. He finds that he can write again. Dostoevsky's Baal, who hides behind a mask or embodies a dead young man reflected in the mirror, however, will always evoke the uncanny. This portrayal revises the attributes of the Canaan god, who is also seen as the conqueror of death. In the myth, Baal defeats Yam, the sea god, to expand his sovereign power on a larger realm. When he succeeds, he no longer recognizes the authority of the god Mot, god of death, the desert, and the underworld. In order to challenge him, Mot invites Baal "to his abode in order to taste his own fare, mud. Terrified and unable to avoid the dreadful summons to the land of the dead, Baal coupled with a calf



in order to strengthen himself for the impending ordeal, and then set out. El and the other gods donned funeral garments, poured ashes on their heads, and mutilated their limbs” (Cotterell). By choosing to wear Pavel’s suit and write in his stepson’s diary, Dostoevsky establishes a link between the dead and the living, youth and old, good and evil. The face reflected in the mirror evolves into an apparition of the ox-faced Baal that Dostoevsky hopes would also challenge the god of death. In order that Dostoevsky not concede defeat in his fight against his diminishing faculties, he, in turn, has welcomed the *arrivant* in the form of the ox-faced Baal. A merging occurs. This action has invited the demonic specter to enter his soul, in order that creativity can once again flow. His invitation to the specter follows his failed gamble with God. He reflects:

God must save him, God has no other way .... He is in the old labyrinth. It is the story of his gambling in another guise. He gambles because God does not speak. He gambles to make God speak. But to make God speak in the turn of a card is blasphemy. (236–237)

As God has not responded to his pleas, Dostoevsky seeks solace in this sinister Baal. The turn of the card can only reveal the demonic specter, the face resulting from the Baal-Dostoevsky fusion which can aid him in writing “perversions of the truth” and of the “crooked road” to “take children into dark places” at the mercy of “the dance of the pen” (236).

As with Dostoevsky, David Lurie in Coetzee’s *Disgrace* has his own demons with which he has to contend. When Lurie decides to seduce one of his students, the University dismisses him and he escapes to his daughter’s farm in the Eastern Cape. By retreating to Lucy’s farm, he hopes that he can rid himself of the demons that have weighed him down in Cape Town. He reflects:

This is not what he came for—to be stuck in the back of beyond, warding off demons, nursing his daughter, attending to a dying enterprise. If he came for anything, it was to gather himself, gather his forces. Here he is losing himself day by day. (121)

What could have been a harmonious rural retreat, even if superficially, is quickly disrupted when three young men attack Lurie and his daughter. Lurie is unable to protect his daughter from the men who rape her. Following the assault, Lurie finds himself at the mercy of uncanny apparitions that have taken center stage in his life. In her essay, "Pursuing Ghosts: The Traumatic Sublime in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*," Kimberley Wedeven Segall sees that the images of "ghostly figures serve as troubling *memory sites*" and that "these mnemonic images resist a complete erasure of the past, especially in a postcolonial setting where there is a historical legacy of violation" (42). In her discussion of Freud's uncanny, Segall further states that images of "victimized persons create startling symbols of remembrance, and these reminders...suggest an unresolved issue or past injustice" (42). On the farm, the demons do not depart but quite the contrary; they become unwelcome reminders of past events, unjust events of a personal and collective scale. As with Derrida's ghost who never dies, they remain "always to come and to come-back" (Derrida 99). Derrida also stipulates, "It is a proper characteristic of the specter, that no one can be sure if by returning it testifies to a living past or to a living future, for the *revenant* may already mark the promised return of the specter of living being" (99). Uncertainty about when and why the specter will choose to reappear leaves the door open for the possibility of something positive to happen. Lurie is reluctant to welcome the specter as the latter develops into the image of himself that he finds very unsettling. The "dying enterprise" he refers to is the living self that he can no longer take care of (121). The burns on his face resulting from the attack have exposed a side of himself that Lurie has long preferred concealed. The hat he buys to keep off the sun fails metaphorically to hide this exposed self or the unwelcome specter virtually residing within (120). He questions if "he will be bold enough to expose it to the gaze of others," but more importantly, will he be able to expose his spectral face to himself (120)? He is unlikely to be capable of confronting his exposed image. The narrator writes: "The demons do not pass him by. He has nightmares of his own in which he wallows in a bed of blood, or, panting, shouting soundlessly, runs from the man with the face like a hawk, like a Benin mask, like Thoth" (121).

Lurie avoids the “face like a hawk” but the latter uncannily torments him and he is unable to shed that image. What separates him from the face that is often portrayed wearing the head of an ibis is the mask (figure 3). According to the *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, “Hermē, the Egyptian philosopher, or Thoth,” was the “councillor of Osiris, King of Egypt, to whom is attributed a host of inventions—amongst others the art of writing in hieroglyphics, the first code of Egyptian laws, harmony, astrology, the lute and lyre, magic, and all mysterious sciences” (Brewer). The operative word in regards to Lurie’s remembrance of him is mysterious. Once again, Thoth, as with Baal earlier, assumes an eerie role, dubious in its purpose, at once frightening and inviting. Thoth is the divine record keeper and the mediator between the worlds of the dead and the living (figure 3). Having written *The Book of the Dead*, Thoth is assigned to question the souls of the deceased. This link to the underworld adds an impish quality to the Egyptian record keeper.<sup>5</sup> This association develops into a force that is somewhat luring yet prohibitively frightening, a force that can potentially hasten Lurie’s fall into the world of Hades. The hawkish face that compels Lurie to remember the Benin mask accentuates the mystery that shrouds Coetzee’s Thoth.

In Yoruba culture, the carved Benin mask represents the spirits of the ancestors or at times ancient kings, some of whom can be evil (figure 3). Customarily, the Benin mask is worn in traditional ceremonies to ward off evil spirits (figure 4). It also functions as a barrier between the mortal face and the gods of the underworld. Nonetheless, this particular image haunts Lurie, as the barrier no longer exists. He runs from the record keeper, from the Benin mask, unwilling to be questioned over the deeds in his life. Yet his deeds assume the role of the specter that will frequently visit, in the form of Thoth who hides behind the Benin mask. Segall writes that the figure of Thoth represents “an early precursor of Lurie’s sense of guilt in the figure of the judge. Symbolically the traumatic sublime changes a figure of female oppression and a figure of fear into the spectre of judgement” (44). Lurie obsesses over the specter of judgment typified by Thoth eclipsing his face behind a Benin mask. The image that is conjured up is disturbing; in this context the mask in itself is not only ghostly but also the face that it obscures is very unset-

ting, which is contrary to the function of the African masks in general as with the Nigerian Ibibio mask which “must be pristine” to please the ancestors (Nuttall 346). Thoth is no longer the inventor of sciences and writing but a foreign apparition that inspires fear. It represents the other, which evolves into a sinful deity, similarly to Baal in *The Master of Petersburg*. As with Dostoevsky, Lurie’s own deeds are projected and inscribed on the Egyptian god of wisdom and magic. Hence, the ibis-headed Thoth evolves into a Benin mask, shrouding the face of its original bearer yet failing to ward off the uncanny specters from the past. The Benin mask serves as the barrier between Lurie and his deeds. It fails to protect him as the reminders of his earlier life continue to torment him. It is worth mentioning that at the time of the interrogation by the University committee over his affair with Melanie Isaacs, he is

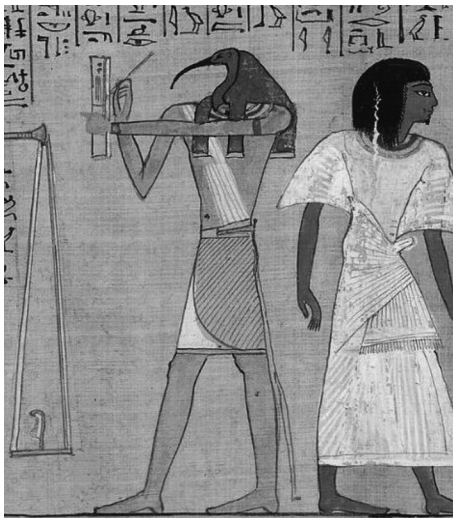


Figure 3. (L) Thoth. Image number: AN36515001 Reproduced with kind permission of the British Museum. Copyright Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 4. (R) Benin Mask. Image number: AOA 1910.5-13.1 Reproduced with kind permission of the British Museum. Copyright Trustees of the British Museum.

not perturbed at all. He does not even indulge in a serious dialogue with them. He admits to guilt but shows no repentance. His failed life, compounded by his inability to protect his daughter during the attack, is what he obsesses over. Concerning Melanie Isaacs, he feels no remorse, only regret that the affair has ended. When he visits the student's parents to offer his apology, he tells them that he is being punished by "trying to accept disgrace" as his "state of being" (172). He has no regret over the affair and this becomes readily apparent when he fantasizes about having sexual relations with Melanie and her sister, Desiree, in the same bed, an experience he describes "fit for a king" (164).

Both Lurie and Dostoevsky fear the specters that are revealed to them in the form of ancient masked figures. Onto these apparitions, they project their own psyches. With age these visitations become more frequent, at once reminders of disturbing actions and representations of earlier selves from which one is not able to dissociate. By associating the ox-faced apparition and the hawkish man hiding behind a Benin mask with Baal and Thoth, respectively, the inside demons are externalized to evolve into alien and frightening figures, at best to be avoided. Given that the original gods are part of a culture that is already suspect, such a projection is both valid and successful. Faced with such sinister visions, one can only flee or surrender as Dostoevsky's Baal and Lurie's Thoth will remain always to come and to come-back (Derrida 99). Furthermore, Derrida stipulates that by forcibly invoking the appearance of the specter the implications can be disastrous. Dostoevsky's endless search for signs is in some ways his way of expediting the *arrivant*. At the end, Dostoevsky sits behind his desk and begins composing a novel. He has allowed in the *arrivant*, allowed it to reside inside his soul. However, as Dostoevsky tells us giving up one's soul "tastes like gall," he can no longer recognize the face that stares back blindly at him (250).

Lurie, on the other hand, spurns the *arrivant*. His figurative attempt at fleeing fails. Following the attack on him and his daughter, Lurie admits that he will never be able to embody the soul of a woman so that he may understand what Lucy was subjected to; however, he feels it is possible "if he loses himself" he could probably "be the men [the rapists], inhabit them" (160). His final endeavour at appeasing the specter

comes in a metaphoric offering. In what symbolically appears as a sacrificial act, Lurie is seen in the final page of the novel surrendering the stray dog to which he has grown attached to euthanasia (220). Earlier he tells us:

Of the dogs in the holding pens, there is one he has come to feel a particular fondness for. It is a young male with a withered left hindquarter which it drags behind it ... he has been careful not to give it a name ... he is sensible of a generous affection streaming out toward him from the dog ... he has been adopted. (214–5)

With Lurie, we will never know if his sacrifice is accepted or if it is his way of coming to terms with his earlier demons. In regards to his relationships with other humans, nothing appears to have changed. In the presence of animals, however, some humility has emerged; to be seen sacrificing his favourite dog is at once a grand gesture and his way of trying to ward off the demons, closing the door on the *arrivant* as for him it will never carry in its folds good tidings. As with Thoth who mediates between the worlds of the dead and the living, Lurie becomes the messenger who accompanies the crippled dog on its journey into the other world.<sup>6</sup>

## Notes

- 1 For clarity, I will refer to Coetzee's character as Dostoevsky and the real author as Dostoyevsky.
- 2 Baal is a "god worshiped in many ancient Middle Eastern communities, especially among the Canaanites, who apparently considered him a fertility deity and one of the most important gods in the pantheon." Hadad is also the god of "thunder, and rain," and "Baal-Hadad" was represented as a bearded deity, often holding a club and thunderbolt and wearing a horned headdress. The bull was the symbolic animal of Hadad, as of the Hittite deity Teshub, who was identical with him" ("Baal" and "Hadad").
- 3 Said writes: "Mahfouz has been characterised since he became a recognised world celebrity as either a social realist in the mode of Balzac, Galsworthy, and Zola or a fabulist straight out of the Arabian Nights (as in the view taken by J M Coetzee in his disappointing characterisation of Mahfouz)" ("Cruelty"). And in another essay, Said remarks: "I recall a long and genuinely appreciative article in the *New*

*York Review of Books* (September 22, 1994) by the fine South African novelist J M Coetzee about Mahfouz's *Harafish* that, for a writer of Coetzee's remarkable talents and sophistication, was astonishingly crude, framed in generalities about Islamic backwardness, and all sorts of really rudimentary inaccuracies about style and even Mahfouz's problematic novel *Awlad Haritna* that one wouldn't dare write about novels in Spanish, or Russian, or even Japanese. Of course Coetzee was only using English translations, many but not all of them poor, and clearly he did not know very much about the traditions and milieu that Mahfouz has worked in, but the point is that he could write without that knowledge and still be considered an adequate and even competent authority because Arabic culture is supposed to be—that way, deserving of that kind of flawed attention" ("Cultural"). Please also refer to Coetzee's *Stranger Shores* 226–239.

- 4 The concept of perverse sexuality is often associated with anything that exists outside the ethnocentricity of the European consciousness. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon finds that this concept also applies to the African black man: "The Negro is the incarnation of a genital potency beyond all moralities and prohibitions" (177). The non-European/Western other is perceived as primitive, and hence incapable of exercising control over his instincts.
- 5 Similarly, Dostoevsky's descent into the underworld introduces a diabolical element. On a number of occasions in the novel, he mimics Orpheus' descent into the underworld (Coetzee, *Master*, 5, 106, 152). Dostoevsky, however, breaks the rule and looks back (54). There is no return and his salvation can be hoped for from someone or something external to himself.
- 6 In her essay "Metamorphosis and Sexuality: Reading the Strange Passions of *Disgrace*," Pamela Cooper interestingly states: "Lurie dreams of Thoth, the hawk-faced, Egyptian god of writing, while the dog-gods Anubis and Wepwawet, guides and guardians of the dead, are everywhere intimated" (35).

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