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学 号	2119113004
姓 名	陈永康
指导老师	张 燕 教授

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本人（姓名）陈永康 学号 2119113004 专业 英语 郑重承诺：所呈交的毕业论文（设计）（题目：Transgressing Boundaries: A Study of Beatriz's Bodily Subjectivity in Coetzee's *The Pole* from the Perspective of Foucault's Theory of Power）是在指导教师指导下自主完成，毕业论文（设计）选题和研究内容中不存在不正当引用、抄袭、伪造、篡改、代写、买卖等行为，如有违规行为，本人愿意承担一切责任。

承诺人（签名）：陈永康

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**Transgressing Boundaries: A Study of
Beatriz's Bodily Subjectivity in Coetzee's
The Pole from the Perspective of Foucault's
Theory of Power**

**Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts**

**By Chen Yongkang
Under the Direction of
Professor Zhang Yan**

**English Department
College of Foreign Languages
Huaqiao University**

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Abstract: J. M. Coetzee presents a romantic cross-cultural love story in his latest work, *The Pole* (2023). In the novel, the female protagonist Beatriz attempts to resist disciplinary power and construct her own bodily subjectivity through the love affairs with her lover Witold. Grounded in Michel Foucault's theory of power and following the analytical path of "power — body — subjectivity," this thesis focuses on how Beatriz, within the multiple power structures of domestic space, gender relations, and postcolonial national allegory, transgresses spatial, discursive, and cultural boundaries through bodily practices to ultimately achieve the construction of her bodily subjectivity. The study argues that Beatriz's construction of bodily subjectivity does not arise from direct confrontation with power, but is achieved through micro practices of resistance, enabling a gradual transformation from a "docile body" to an "agentive subject" within the very network of power. This process, to a certain extent, not only reflects Coetzee's emphasis on the concept of the "unsymbolizable female body" in his literary creation of the later stage, but also reveals his critical reconstruction of the interrelationship among gender discipline, bodily writing, and national discourse in postcolonial contexts.

Keywords: J. M. Coetzee; *The Pole*; bodily subjectivity; domestic space; gender relations; postcolonial national allegory

摘要：J. M. 库切在 2023 年新作《波兰人》中展示了一段浪漫的跨文化爱情故事。小说中，女主人公比阿特丽兹借由与情人维托尔德的情感互动，不断抵抗规训权力，尝试建构自身的身体主体性。本文以福柯的权力理论为理论基础，从“权力—身体—主体性”的研究路径出发，重点分析比阿特丽兹如何在家庭空间、性别关系及后殖民国家寓言等多重权力语境中通过自身身体实践逾越空间、话语与文化边界，最终实现身体主体性的建构。本文认为，比阿特丽兹身体主体性的建构过程并非源自与权力的正面冲突，而是借助微观的抵抗实践，在权力网络内部完成从“驯顺肉体”向“能动主体”的转化过程。这一转化在一定程度上不仅体现出库切后期女性书写对“非象征化身体”的强调，也揭示了其对后殖民语境中性别规训、身体书写与国家话语之间关系的批判性重构。

关键词：J. M. 库切；《波兰人》；身体主体性；家庭空间；性别关系；后殖民国家寓言

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction to J. M. Coetzee and *The Pole*

John Maxwell Coetzee, born on February 9th, 1940, in Cape Town, is a distinguished contemporary South African writer, critic, and translator. As a descendant of Dutch settlers, Coetzee embodies a complex cultural identity shaped by his heritage. Raised in a bilingual environment, he speaks both English and Afrikaans, which further enrich his literary voice. Coetzee's formative years coincide with the disintegration of apartheid in South Africa, a period marked by profound social and political turmoil. Although Coetzee was born into a white family in a society that might have granted him racial privilege, his family still struggled with poverty and overwhelming debt, which pushed it to the margins of South African society during the apartheid era. This paradox of privilege and deprivation deeply influence his worldview and writing.

Coetzee develops his passion for literature during his college years. In the late 1950s, he got enrolled at University of Cape Town, where he earned a Bachelor's degree in English literature and mathematics. He continued his studies at UCT, obtaining a Master's degree in 1963. He went to the University of Texas at Austin in America as an exchange scholar in 1965, where he earned a Ph.D. in linguistics four years later. Coetzee began his writing career during his college years, and he eventually became a prominent figure in contemporary world literature.

In 1974, Coetzee came out with his first novel, *Dusklands*. This work does not just show off his storytelling skills; it also gives an early glimpse into his interest in themes like colonialism and imperialism. With the release of *In the Heart of the Country* in 1977, Coetzee firmly established himself as a writer deeply rooted in South Africa's social realities. Then, in 1980, *Waiting for the Barbarians* arrived, and it was a huge turning point in his career. This book brings him international fame and firmly places him on the global literary map. Three years later, in 1983, Coetzee won the Booker Prize for Fiction for *Life & Times of Michael K*. The Booker Prize is widely considered one of the highest honors in English literature.

Coetzee has a very productive career, churning out many remarkable works. Some of these include *Foe* (1986), *Age of Iron* (1990), *The Master of Petersburg* (1994), *Disgrace* (1999), *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons* (2003), *Slow Man* (2005),

Diary of a Bad Year (2007), *The Childhood of Jesus* (2013), *The Schooldays of Jesus* (2016), and *The Death of Jesus* (2019). Among them, *Disgrace* is especially significant. It won him his second Booker Prize for Fiction, making him the first writer ever to have achieved this feat. Besides the Booker Prize, his outstanding works also earned him other important literary awards, such as the César Vallejo International Prize for Literature, the Prix Femina Étranger, and the Jerusalem Prize. In 2003, he received the Nobel Prize in Literature. The Swedish Academy praised his exploration of “the surprising involvement of the outsider” (NobelPrize.org, 2003) and his deep ethical thoughts about the struggles of marginalized people’s lives.

Over the course of his writing career, Coetzee’s novels have been characterized by a restrained yet powerful style and tight narrative structure, a style that has manifested itself in a unique moral tension. His novels explore issues of power, justice and alienation, often examining the dehumanizing consequences of the colonial system, apartheid and institutional violence. Set in apartheid or post-apartheid South Africa, most of his works focus on marginalized characters and critique broader political injustices through their personal experiences, while always maintaining a deep humanistic concern. In this sense, his works embody a unique blend of historical insights and humanitarian concern.

In recent years, Coetzee’s creative vision has continued to evolve, influenced as much by his personal experience as by philosophical reflection. His latest novel, *The Pole* (2023), exemplifies this change, continuing his critical focus on social experience while presenting a thematic shift that may come as a surprise to his longtime admirers. Whereas Coetzee’s previous works have often focused on issues of power and oppression, this work turns to a theme that is both timeless and mysterious: love. The novel centers on the romantic relationship between protagonists Witold and Beatrice, charting the trajectory of their emotional development and giving it broader philosophical implications. At its heart, the novel asks an important question: how can love be sustained—and what can it symbolize—in a world increasingly dominated by rationality, disillusionment, and emotional restraint? It becomes a profound meditation on the continuing relevance of romance in contemporary rationalized, calculating relationships. Although the theme of the story marks a shift, *The Pole* still reveals Coetzee’s unique insights into power dynamics that have characterized his writing career. In this novel, Coetzee narrows the focus of his previous narrative of colonial empire to the bodies of the two protagonists, making

them unique symbols of identity that shape their respective subjectivities. The two main characters come from different countries, have an age gap, and do not share a common language. However, through their interactions, the female protagonist, Beatriz, continually constructs her subjectivity through her body as the medium. By experiencing her love affair with Witold, she takes control of her body, and rethinks the unfailing question of “What love is”. Eventually, she achieves “the unity of soul and flesh,” completing the construction of both her bodily subjectivity and individual identity. In this way, Coetzee skillfully provides readers with a fresh perspective on both power and bodily subjectivity, all within the context of love.

1.2 Research Questions and Significance

In literary studies, especially in postcolonial and feminist studies, both body and subjectivity are popular topics that critics focus on. Since the body was released from the domination of consciousness, critics have explored its subjectivity. Nietzsche and Foucault did not want to reconcile the relationship between body and consciousness, and believed that body is entangled with history, power and society (Wang & Chen, 2004: 44). It can be seen that bodily subjectivity is an important part of individual subjectivity whose construction is influenced by a variety of factors. Power dynamics are an important influence on the construction of bodily subjectivity. The construction of women’s subjectivity cannot be separated from the exploration of their bodily subjectivity, which is conducive to the reader’s better understanding of the female body and the construction of both bodily and individual female subjectivity.

Space has a very important significance in the study of literature. As an important means of spatial research, spatial theory is of great significance in the study of modernist and postmodernist literature. Since the development of spatial theory, many theorists have expressed their opinions on it, and one of the important schools is Foucault’s “power space”. Power space reveals the hidden connection between knowledge, power and space, and considers space as a field where various powers meet (Zheng, 2016: 92). Body is often seen as an important expression of space and one of the fields of power struggle in the process of constructing personal subjectivity. Therefore, in order to construct their own subjectivity, women need to struggle in the field of body and master their own body subjectivity.

Coetzee's *The Pole* contains abundant descriptions of body. Through the evolving power dynamics between the two protagonists, the novel portrays the body as a "battleground". By examining Beatriz's bodily subjectivity through the lens of Foucault's theory of power, this study aims to explore how women navigate power dynamics to gain agency over their own bodies, analyze the relationship between "soul and flesh" (consciousness and body) in love, and ultimately construct their individual subjectivity.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

Focusing on the study of Beatriz's bodily subjectivity in *The Pole*, this thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter introduces Coetzee and *The Pole*, outlines the research questions and significance, and presents the overall structure of the thesis. The second chapter provides a literature review, summarizing and evaluating current researches on Coetzee and *The Pole* from both Chinese and Western perspectives. The third chapter explains the theoretical framework, namely Foucault's theory of power with a particular focus on his concepts of "Panopticism" and "Biopolitics". The fourth chapter combines theory and textual analysis of *The Pole* to examine the construction of Beatriz's bodily subjectivity from three dimensions: female bodily subjectivity in domestic spaces, in gender relationships, and as an allegory for postcolonial nations. The last chapter concludes the thesis by summarizing its findings.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Research on J. M. Coetzee

Coetzee, as a renowned author in the world today, has had a significant impact on the development of contemporary English literature. Research on Coetzee has experienced sustained growth both in the West and in China, resulting in the formation of a well-established scholarly framework. A systematic review of existing research and critical paradigms from both regions enables a deeper understanding of Coetzee's ideas, offering valuable insights into the interpretation of his latest work, *The Pole*.

2.1.1 Research on Coetzee in the West

Western academic interest in Coetzee began in the 1980s, with foundational books like Dovey's *The Novels of J. M. Coetzee: Lacanian Allegories* (1988) and Penner's *Countries of the Mind: the Fiction of J. M. Coetzee* (1989). The awarding of the Nobel Prize in Literature to Coetzee in 2003 ushered in a period of flourishing research on his work. Attridge's *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading* (2004) reveals the unique ethical pathways through which literature engages with reality, marking a systemic development of research perspectives. Since then, these works, including *Disgrace*, *Life and Times of Michael K*, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Foe*, *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons*, and *Slow Man*, have been the focus of in-depth research by Western scholars, employing a wide range of theoretical perspectives and forming corresponding research systems. The primary research perspectives include postcolonialism, postmodernism, and ecocriticism.

As a dominant interpretive paradigm, postcolonialism has been at the forefront of Coetzee studies. Gallagher (1988: 281) in her essay titled "Torture and the Novel: J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*" unveils the structural dilemma of moral vacuums and the mechanisms of violence under colonial rule in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Nejat and Jamili (2014: 1289) in their essay titled "Double Colonization in John Maxwell Coetzee's *Disgrace*", adopting a postcolonial feminist lens, points out the "dual colonial plight" of Lucy in *Disgrace*—being both subject to colonial systems and trapped within patriarchal structures. Notably, El idrissi *et al.* (2024: 367) in their essay titled "Countering (His)story: The Politics of Silence and Postcolonial Power in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*" introduces the theory of "silent resistance", and argues

that Coetzee redefines the subjectivity of the colonized by subverting Defoe's colonial narrative.

Postmodernist interpretations have mainly focused on the narrative strategies and philosophical implications of Coetzee's literary texts. Nader and Bakal (2024: 32) in their essay titled "The Postmodern Individual in J.M. Coetzee's Novels: Exploring Issues of Identity, Representation, Intertextuality, and the Self" systematically demonstrates Coetzee's innovative use of postmodernist techniques like intertextuality and fragmentation, emphasizing their revolutionary significance in breaking traditional narrative conventions. Leist (2010: 198) in his essay titled "Against Society, Against History, Against Reason: Coetzee's Archaic Postmodernism" approaches Coetzee's works from an epistemological perspective, and points out how Coetzee's literary practice challenges the truth claims of traditional philosophy. This deconstructive tendency reaches new heights in his allegorical writing of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, where Neimneh (2014: 695) in his essay "The Visceral Allegory of *Waiting for the Barbarians*: A Postmodern Re-Reading of J. M. Coetzee's Apartheid Novels" questions the effectiveness of allegory as a representational tool by exploring the oppression and resistance of body within the novel. It is worth noting that Karmim's (2022: 138) essay titled "'Whose Truth?'"—A Postmodern Postcoloniality/a textual analysis of *Foe* by J. M. Coetzee" makes a cross-theoretical study of Coetzee's *Foe*. He combines postmodern narrative strategies with critiques of colonial discourse, revealing the power dynamics in truth construction.

In recent years, the rise of ecocriticism has opened a new dimension for Coetzee studies. Spini's (2020: 10) landscape network theory in her essay titled "J.M. Coetzee and Elizabeth Costello: Landscapes and Animals" emphasizes the intertwining fates of human and non-human life in colonial ecology, while Neimneh and Muhaidat's (2012: 13) concept of "eco-postcolonialism" in their essay "The Ecological Thought of J. M. Coetzee: The Case of *Life and Times of Michael K*" systematically explains the isomorphism between natural oppression and cultural colonization. Zakarriya's (2017: 222) ecofeminist research in her essay titled "Sexual Identity and Disturbed Intellectual Female Terrain in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* and Jabra Ibrahim's *The Ship*: An Ecofeminist Reading" is fairly enlightening, noting the political metaphor of Susan's body in *Foe*, which exposes the cognitive violence of patriarchy naturalizing women.

2.1.2 Research on Coetzee in China

Chinese scholarship on J. M. Coetzee began relatively later, starting around 2000, with significant development after he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2003. Despite this later start, a distinctive interpretive system has been established. Chinese scholars have primarily focused on Coetzee's works such as *Disgrace*, *Life and Times of Michael K*, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Foe*, and his autobiographical trilogy (*Boyhood*, *Youth*, and *Summertime*). Among these, the most extensively studied is *Disgrace*. Moreover, researchers have employed diverse theoretical perspectives, including postcolonialism, feminism, and ethical criticism.

Postcolonial studies have become the mainstream approach in China. Pioneering research titled "The Cost of Transgression: An Interpretation of Coetzee's Booker Prize-Winning Novel *Disgrace*" (2001) by Zhang and Guo lays the foundation for postcolonial readings in China. Wang's (2006: 153) theory of the "Dual Empire" in her essay titled "A Contrast of Dual Empire Ideologies: On J. M. Coetzee's Allegorical Novel *Waiting for the Barbarians*" breaks through traditional colonial binaries, revealing Coetzee's deep deconstruction of colonial cognitive structures. Cai's (2008: 149) concept of "Island Consciousness" in his doctoral dissertation titled *Island Consciousness: The Writing Situation of Imperial Diaspora Intellectuals/On Coetzee's Literary Theory of Right-Wing Post Colonialism* is highly original and precisely captures the identity dilemma of colonial intellectuals, providing an important theoretical tool for subsequent studies.

Feminist research in China shows interdisciplinary characteristics. Wang (2013: 158) in her essay titled "Coetzee's Novels and Feminism" insightfully explores Coetzee's narrative experiments that transcend gender limitations, even as a male writer. Meanwhile, Liu's essay titled "Gender, Colonialism, and Animal Ethics: Rape and 'Butchering' the Dog in *Disgrace*" (2017: 142) introduces an animal ethics perspective that uncovers the power dynamics between metaphors of animal plight and the silencing of women in *Disgrace*. Shi (2016: 228) in her essay titled "Coetzee's Concept of Subjectivity Through Susan's 'Substance' Problem" outlines the trajectory of colonial women's subjectivation from silence to the construction of discourse, as Susan's quest for 'substance' evolving from a desire to be recognized in a male-dominated discourse to an ethical commitment to giving voice to the marginalized Other, embodying a shift from self-assertion to ethical responsibility that redefines her subjectivity.

Ethical studies highlight the depth of Chinese scholarly interpretations. Jiang's essay "Confession, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation in Coetzee's Novel *Disgrace*" (2007: 37) reconstructs the moral landscape of post-apartheid South Africa through the ethical narrative in *Disgrace*, while Hu and Cai's essay "Ethical Dilemmas: Representations of Utopian Society in *The Childhood of Jesus*" (2015: 136) unveils the triple ethical dilemmas in *The Childhood of Jesus*, demonstrating the complexity of Coetzee's ethical thoughts. Jin's "The Ethical Implications of Vegetarianism in Coetzee's Works" (2020: 118) innovatively studies vegetarian ethics in Coetzee's works, linking dietary politics with colonial and gender-based violence, and expanding the boundaries of ethical criticism.

2.2 Research on Coetzee's *The Pole*

As Coetzee's latest work released in 2023, *The Pole* demonstrates the profound depth of the author's thoughts in his later years, showcased through his mature narratives. Despite attracting attention from scholars both in China and the West after its publication, systematic academic research on the work remains in its early stages. Therefore, it will be possible to identify the current gaps in the scholarship through an examination of existing research on *The Pole* from both China and the West.

2.2.1 Research on Coetzee's *The Pole* in the West

Western scholars' research on *The Pole* is still in its initial phases, with existing studies offering relatively shallower analyses and lacking text-based research from relevant theoretical perspectives. Kusek's "From the Heart of the Country to the European Core: J. M. Coetzee and *los polacos*" (2023: 286) is the first Western study of this work, and his exploration of Polish identity in *The Pole* provides an innovative perspective, revealing how Coetzee reconstructs South African narratives through his Polish cultural genes. Book reviews mainly focus on cross-cultural themes, with Fry's book review titled "*The Pole* and Other Stories by J.M. Coetzee Review—If This Is His Final Book, It Is a Great One" (2023) emphasizing the dialectical relationship between language barriers and emotional resonance, while Wilson's review titled "In Other Words/J. M. Coetzee's interlingual romance" (2023) highlights the narrative function of music as a transcendent medium. It is important to note that Ntabeni's (2023) critical review in his "*The Pole* by J.M. Coetzee: a review" points out that

while the work continues Coetzee's signature minimalist style, it also exhibits limitations in thematic depth and character development, offering an important perspective for further research.

2.2.2 Research on Coetzee's *The Pole* in China

Chinese scholars have shown great interest in *The Pole* ever since its publication. The translation works of Fu (2023) and Li (2024) have laid a solid foundation for understanding the text within the Chinese context. Despite this, research on the work in China remains limited, with studies generally lacking depth and systematic theoretical approaches. In this context, Yi's essay titled "A Life-and-Death Gaze Turned Inward: On J. M. Coetzee's New Novel *The Pole*" (2024: 87) is the first Chinese study of this work, pointing out the cultural self-reflexive traits that transcend the narrative of love in the novel. Book reviews of *The Pole* in China generally focus on the cross-cultural love theme. However, Zhang's book review titled "Coetzee's Narrative Traps and the Existential Crisis of Middle-Aged Women" (2024) introduces an existential dimension by addressing Beatriz's midlife crisis, uncovering the core issue of modern individuals' loss of value.

In general, for one thing, Western scholarship on *The Pole* remains somewhat superficial in its thematic interpretations, often lacking deep theoretical engagement. However, Coetzee's existing Western research findings have provided some fresh insights to exploring this work: Beatriz's construction of subjectivity clearly differs from classic female figures like Lucy, and her body politics and discourse practices in a cross-cultural field may become an important key to understanding Coetzee's late feminist ideological shift. For another, by looking at the trajectory of Chinese scholarship on Coetzee, the analysis of power dynamics in postcolonial contexts has already formed a mature paradigm, particularly with rich research accumulation in the dimensions of gender, discourse, and body (Zhang, 2013: I). This provides a direction for research on *The Pole*: Beatriz's construction of bodily subjectivity not only relates to feminist issues but may also be implicitly seen as a contemporary interpretation of the postcolonial nation. Her three-dimensional connection of gender, discourse and history through body politics may become the key to decoding Coetzee's late ideological thoughts.

To sum up, through a systematic review of existing research, it becomes clear that there are three structural limitations in the current academic interpretations of *The Pole*. Firstly, current thematic analyses of *The Pole* tend to concentrate on more explicit dimensions such as cross-cultural relationships and diasporic identities, while relatively less attention has been paid to nuanced issues like body politics and micro-power dynamics. In particular, the interplay between the protagonist's bodily practices and spatial power relations remains an area that warrants further investigation.

Secondly, theoretical engagement in the current scholarship on *The Pole* appears to be relatively limited. While some studies provide insightful readings, few have incorporated systematic theoretical frameworks to deepen the analysis. Both Western and Chinese academic discussions of the novel remain relatively sparse, which poses challenges for the sustained and comprehensive development of Coetzee studies.

Thirdly, there is a gap in research regarding the characterization of female characters and the transformation of Coetzee's feminist thoughts in his later works. Beatriz, as the female protagonist of *The Pole*, is portrayed distinctly from other female characters Coetzee has created, especially Lucy in *Disgrace*, particularly in terms of the construction of bodily subjectivity. Analyzing Beatriz's character and the issues of gender and space that are embodied in her can shed light on the shift in Coetzee's feminist ideas in his later years.

Therefore, building on these existing research gaps, this thesis proposes to use Foucault's theory of power as a framework and follows the analytical path of "power—body—subjectivity" to examine Beatriz's practices of bodily subjectivity in *The Pole*, so as to partially explore Coetzee's creative transformation in his later years.

3. Theoretical Framework

Michel Foucault (1926-1984) was a prominent French philosopher of the 20th century, and his ideas have exerted a significant influence on various fields of the humanities, including literature, sociology and psychology. Foucault's theoretical system revolves around the core of "knowledge—power—subjectivity", revealing how power penetrates into the capillaries of society through the production of knowledge, discursive practices, and disciplinary techniques, and at the same time providing ideological tools for individual resistance, emphasizing the dynamics and complexity of power. In literary studies, Foucault's idea of power provides an effective theoretical tool for issues such as power relations, identity politics, and the construction of subjectivity in literary texts.

3.1 A Brief Introduction to Foucault's Theory of Power

"Power" has always occupied an important position in Foucault's thoughts. In the mid-20th century, after the upheavals of two world wars, the traditional social structure and value system in the western society experienced a huge impact, and a variety of new critical thinking emerged one after another, such as existentialism, structuralism and post-structuralism. In this context, in order to critically reflect on totalitarianism, Foucault was influenced by Nietzsche, Hegel and Marx, and produced new thoughts on power, which matured in the 1970s, and was finally systematized into his theory of power, which had an important impact on many fields.

In Foucault's view, power is not singularly concentrated in the state apparatus or the legal system, but is ubiquitous and pervasive in every corner of society, forming a kind of "micro-physics of power". Political power is the basic manifestation of power, its purpose is to regulate individuals through a variety of means, so as to achieve the normative expression of the ruler's political wills. Knowledge is the key to this process: power produces knowledge, and knowledge reinforces power. Knowledge is both the means by which power manifests itself, and the product of its operation. Foucault sums up this interaction in the concept of power/knowledge, according to which power and knowledge form each other, and power is expressed and exercised through discourse.

The body is the immediate object of power, and power uses disciplinary techniques to directly influence the expression of bodily subjectivity, inhibit the

discursive power of the individual, and discipline the individual into a “docile body”, thereby realizing the reproduction of power and ensuring the stability of established power. In addition, power is closely linked to space, and its operation takes place everywhere, with the prison being the most typical site. Panopticism is the basis for the realization of power and the central mechanism by which sites of power operate.

Foucault’s concept of panopticism—elaborated in *Discipline and Punish*—serves as a metaphor for modern disciplinary societies. In the panoptic system, power functions through surveillance, normalization, and examination. Taking the architectural model of the panopticon, with its central watchtower and peripheral cells, Foucault outlines a system of hierarchical observation, where individuals are constantly visible and thus object to discipline. Normalizing judgment reinforces conformity through rewards and punishments, shaping behavior and suppressing deviation. Examination combines surveillance with assessment, objectifying body and producing knowledge about individuals for the sake of control.

These mechanisms, taken together, form a genealogy of power—a historical account of how modern forms of discipline emerge and spread. As panoptic technologies proliferate across various institutions (schools, hospitals, military, etc.), society becomes enveloped in a vast disciplinary network. Within this matrix, individuals are continuously observed, assessed, and regulated, producing a population of docile, compliant bodies.

3.2 Contextualizing Body and Subjectivity in Foucault’s Theory of Power

Body, as a major keyword in Foucault’s theory of power, is closely linked to power. As the most basic possession of the individual, it fully participates in the process of subjectivity construction, serving as both the object and site of power’s operation.

Power, in Foucault’s point of view, is decentralized and productive—it does not merely repress but also reproduces subjects. The body is a product of this productive power: it is shaped, normalized, and conditioned by external surveillance and internalized discipline. This is precisely because in social activity, micro-power disciplines the human body through the gaze of others to fulfill social expectations and norms. Thus, to Foucault, the body is the site where power operates, the product of power and social disciplining under which it becomes a docile body shaped by

social norms. Under the panopticism, people all face the same external gaze, the sociality of the body expands outward, the individualized expression is eroded, creating the homogeneity of social body expression, and ultimately the body loses its own subjectivity.

In his 1978 lectures at the Collège de France, Foucault introduced the concept of biopolitics, which is concerned with the governance of life itself. He distinguished between anatomo-politics, the regulation of the individual body, and demo-politics, the regulation of the population by means of statistics, spatial organization, and public health. Although it lies within these systems of control, Foucault emphasizes the dual nature of the body: it is both an object of discipline and a potential site of resistance.

Space also plays an important role in Foucault's theory of power. The body is a micro-space in which power operates, but also a space in which resistance is potential.

Despite the docility of body rendered by disciplinary mechanisms, there are certain practices through which the individual can reclaim bodily subjectivity, challenge normative expectations, and thus realize the expression of subjectivity.

Foucault's exploration of subjectivity also stems from his focus on desire and pleasure. Although the body is subject to disciplinary control, it harbors desires of its own, notably sexual desires, which are difficult to repress completely. These desires become a source of resistance and expression. Subjectivity is therefore not an inherent essence, but a product of power relations. It is produced by the various discursive practices, disciplinary mechanisms and knowledge systems that act on the body.

Yet where there is power, there is resistance (Foucault, 1995: 240). Foucault famously asserts that power produces resistance, which is not external or revolutionary, but rather immanent to the very relations of power. This resistance takes the form of counter-subjection, which includes three main strategies: counter-discourse, bodily practices, and technologies of the self.

1. Counter-discourse involves challenging dominant narratives and reclaiming definitions of the self (Foucault, 1978). For example, feminist critiques of biological determinism undermine patriarchal constructions of gender.
2. Bodily practices allow individuals to express autonomy through corporeal acts—such as tattooing or performance art—that defy norms and reclaim bodily agency and subjectivity (Foucault, 1995).
3. Technologies of the self, a concept Foucault explores in his later works, draw on ancient ethics to describe how individuals can transform

themselves through self-writing, meditation, or restraint. These practices aim to cultivate a self not defined by power but by aesthetic self-creation—a “care of the self” (Foucault, 1988).

Together, these dimensions form a triangular relationship between power, body (space), and subjectivity. Power operates through the body, yet the body can also resist and redefine itself, laying the groundwork for the emergence of bodily subjectivity. The construction of subjectivity is thus a dynamic interplay of discipline and resistance, in which the individual reclaims subjectivity through bodily self-expression and ethical self-fashioning.

In conclusion, Foucault’s theory of power provides a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding the mechanisms by which the body is disciplined and subjectivity is constructed. Through the model of the panopticism, he reveals in a genealogical manner how power operates through the objectification and disciplining of the body. The notion of biopolitics extends this exploration to the demographic level, while emphasizing the possibility of bodily resistance and ethical self-construction. Ultimately, Foucault points out that subjectivity is not a fixed essence, but is the result of constant production, contestation, and reconfiguration in relations of power.

4. A Foucauldian Interpretation of Beatriz's Bodily Subjectivity in *The Pole*

The construction of women's subjectivity is a major issue in literary creation. Foucault points out that the body is not only an object of power discipline, but also a battlefield for subjectivity. In literature, the female body often becomes the intersection of the male gaze and social discipline, harboring the possibility of confrontation and the construction of subjectivity. *The Pole*, as Coetzee's latest novel, shows a new reflection on female subjectivity in his later years. Therefore, this chapter will apply Foucault's theory of power to explore the construction of Beatriz's bodily subjectivity in *The Pole*, and analyze its power dynamics in different spatial fields and allegories of the postcolonial nations.

4.1 Beatriz's Bodily Subjectivity in Domestic Spaces

Within the domestic space—a highly regulated and disciplined arena of power—the female body is subjected to intersecting discourses of aesthetics, morality, and gender roles. Beatriz's body is shaped into a docile figure, deprived of agency and subjectivity. Yet through bodily practices, traces of her bodily subjectivity begin to emerge. The domestic space thus functions both as a boundary of confinement and as a fissure through which her subjectivity tentatively resists disciplinary control.

4.1.1 Discipline of Beatriz's Body Behaviors in Domestic Spaces

In Michel Foucault's theory of power, the domestic space functions not merely as a private sphere, but as a crucial extension of social disciplinary mechanisms. It serves as a microcosmic site where power infiltrates daily life through subtle and continuous regulation, producing what Foucault terms the "docile body" (1995: 136). Within this space, the female body becomes a key target of power, functioning both as a laboring entity within the household and as a symbolic bearer of gender norms and societal expectations. These layered functions suppress the expressive autonomy of the female body. Thus, the domestic space becomes a boundary in the construction of female bodily subjectivity.

As a middle-class wife and mother, Beatriz's body is subject to the dual disciplinary forces of external societal expectations and internal familial ethics. Her

bodily behaviors, gestures, perceptions, and modes of expression are deeply shaped—if not constrained—by these intersecting structures of power. From the representation of her physical appearance to her expressions of desire and attitudes toward aging, Beatriz's bodily subjectivity is continuously eroded through objectification and normalization.

One revealing instance lies in Beatriz's physical image is immediately inscribed within the system of gendered social surveillance. In the novel's opening description, Coetzee draws significant attention to the visual portrayal of Beatriz:

She is tall and graceful... She might have been sexy when she was young... now, in her forties, she goes in for a certain remoteness. She walks—without swinging her hips, gliding across the floor erect, even stately. (Coetzee, 2023: 6)

The “remoteness” here should not be understood merely as a personal temperament but rather as a bodily strategy developed under conditions of social and disciplinary pressure. Her deliberate avoidance of swinging her hips—a body part traditionally associated with female sensuality—reveals how her bodily comportment responds to the male gaze and the cultural expectations attached to femininity. For Beatriz, especially as a traditional Spanish woman, bodily modesty and restraint become mechanisms of social respectability, aligning her body with familial reputation and decorum. This shift in her walking posture exemplifies the boundary that domestic space imposes upon her bodily performance. Such unnatural posture may, over time, even affect her physical well-being—revealing that docility is not merely symbolic but material. Her bodily control is thus not an expression of freedom but an instance of self-discipline, a hallmark of Foucault's theory of internalized power.

Another significant aspect of bodily regulation emerges in Beatriz's sexual desire, which—once expressive and mutual—is now nearly extinguished within her long-term marriage. Her body is no longer approached as a site of pleasure or intimacy, but rather relegated to silence and repression—“She is getting used to doing without sex... the body's faint cry for union will die away” (Coetzee, 2023: 28). This “faint cry” symbolizes the residual desire of a body still capable of affect and sensation, yet increasingly denied by Beatriz herself. Foucault's genealogy of sexuality emphasizes how power does not merely prohibit sex, but produces discourses of sexuality that shape how subjects relate to their desires. In this light, Beatriz's repression is not a biological result of aging but the outcome of moral discourse, in which the “faithful wife” (Coetzee, 2023: 11) becomes a functional role, and her body a regulated

apparatus stripped of erotic self-agency. Though the novel notes that she once enjoyed “great passion” (ibid.) with her husband, such passion is now replaced by a rational, duty-bound denial of the body’s call. Her identity as a good wife is inextricably tied to this desexualization, informed by conservative norms of chastity, loyalty, and familial respectability.

A further example of this internalized discipline can be seen in Beatriz’s bodily awareness which is marked by anxiety and shame toward aging—a product not of internal discomfort but of externally imposed aesthetic norms. Her attempts to conceal signs of age, such as the aging signs on her hands and throat, reflect how deeply she internalizes ageist surveillance—“Her own hands are nothing special... Sometimes she discreetly hides them. Hands betray one’s age, as does one’s throat, as do the folds of one’s armpit” (Coetzee, 2023: 27). Aging, in its biological reality, is a natural manifestation of the body and can be seen as a moment of subjective truth. However, under the logic of modern biopolitical aesthetics, aging becomes a marker of social failure—something to be corrected or hidden. Beatriz’s response is not to embrace her body’s transformation but to view it as a betrayal, a deficit. In this sense, she not only experiences external gaze, but becomes her own inspector, regulating her appearance in line with normalized beauty standards. Her body is no longer a medium of self-expression but a surface of signification, constantly subjected to visual scrutiny and moral judgment.

To sum up, Beatriz’s bodily behaviors within the domestic space clearly illustrates how women are subjected to both visible and invisible forms of disciplinary power. From the calculated control of her posture and self-image, to the suppression of sexual desire, and the concealment of aging, her body is progressively stripped of affective agency and converted into a symbolic object molded by patriarchal logic. The domestic space—disguised as intimate and personal—emerges as a deeply regulated site where the female body becomes silent, functional, and passive. As such, it constitutes the most insidious boundary in Beatriz’s journey toward bodily subjectivity, where expression is muted, and the self becomes a prisoner of the norms it has come to internalize.

4.1.2 Limited Exploration of Beatriz's Bodily Subjectivity in Domestic Spaces

Although Beatriz's body is long subjected to discipline and suppression within the domestic space, her physical movements and spatial transitions reveal an emerging awareness of bodily subjectivity and suggest a limited form of resistance against the disciplinary structures of the family. According to Foucault's theory of power, space is not a neutral container but an essential instrument of power. As Foucault (1995: 143) notes in *Discipline and Punish*, disciplinary space is organized through meticulous partitioning that seeks to eliminate irregular distribution and uncontrollable movement, thereby ensuring that individuals remain visible, traceable, and efficiently regulated. In other words, power arranges and distributes bodies in space in order to normalize and regulate them. Beatriz's movement through different spaces—her departure from home, her reception of others into domestic space, and her control over spatial boundaries—reflects a limited transgression of her assigned role within the domestic structure and an attempt to construct a sense of bodily subjectivity through spatial agency. As Foucault (1986: 24-25) emphasizes in his discussion of heterotopia, certain spatial heterogeneities are capable of disrupting the continuity of dominant discursive regimes, thereby enabling individuals to engage in identity experimentation and modes of power evasion. Beatriz's spatial transgressions reflect the agentive potential afforded by such heterotopic spatial strategies.

The first instance of spatial transgression takes the form of Beatriz's bodily escape from the disciplinary space of the home. The body, while being the object of discipline, also contains the potential for resistance. Movement across spatial boundaries constitutes a challenge to the dominant spatial order and simultaneously awakens a sense of agency within the subject. In her first private meeting with Witold, Beatriz initially refuses his invitation to Girona, but eventually departs alone, motivated by an intimate and self-reflective desire:

She is curious, deeply curious. But not about the wider world, and not about sex. What then is she curious about? About herself. About why, despite all, the thought of driving to Girona for the day tickles her fancy, makes her smile. (Coetzee, 2023: 21)

“Fancy” and “smile” here reflect an embodied emotional response based on her bodily reactions. Her departure is not merely a geographical relocation but a symbolic suspension of her prescribed social roles. She travels as a woman, not as a wife or mother. As Foucault (1995: 143) emphasizes that disciplinary mechanisms operate by

structuring individuals within space, Beatriz's physical removal from the domestic space thus acts as a disruption of the spatial fixity that underpins disciplinary power, allowing her to escape, however briefly, the mechanisms of surveillance and moral scrutiny and to reencounter her body as a sensing and responsive entity.

The second transgression is more subtle and involves a partial regaining and redeployment of power over the body in domestic space. The body is no longer merely an object to be controlled; it also functions as a site of spatial agency. In Beatrice's situation, the symbolic connection between her body and domestic space is particularly striking—the house in Sóller is not only a functional domestic space, but also becomes an extension of her bodily subjectivity. When she invites Witold to Sóller in her husband's absence, she carefully choreographs the arrangement of the space: at first, Witold is housed in a separate cottage, separate from the main house. Only after a series of gradual interactions does she allow him access to the bedroom: "She hears the back door open, hears his footsteps, hears him enter the bedroom" (Coetzee, 2023: 51). This spatial progression from the cottage to the main house and finally to the bedroom symbolizes Beatrice's emotional trajectory from emotional distance to partial intimacy and eventually physical acceptance. Her choreography of space marks a gradual reconfiguration of bodily boundaries, embodying a reassertion of spatial authority and a tentative expression of bodily subjectivity. This practice of spatial separation and transformation constitutes, in a sense, a micro-heterotopic structure, that allows her to withdraw from the entanglement of social roles and familial discourses for a moment. The rhythm of this spatial unfolding reflects her internal negotiation around the body between defense and openness, control and vulnerability.

Foucault (2007: 252) emphasizes that space is not a neutral context, but plays a fundamental role in the organization of society and the operation of power. Through the reconfiguration of space—dividing and regulating access—Beatrice begins to reposition herself not just as a body occupied by a regulated space, but as a subject involved in the distribution and deployment of space. Although this practice remains confined to the interior of the home and does not lead to complete emancipation, it has heralded a shift: instead of being merely a body to be manipulated by others, Beatrice has become a body capable of arranging and delimiting space.

In sum, Beatriz's bodily practices within the domestic space may not constitute a radical rupture from the disciplinary regime, yet her spatial transgressions—both her

departure from home and her manipulation of space within the household—reveal a limited articulation of bodily subjectivity under the pressure of disciplinary power. These micro-transgressions of space, while insufficient to dismantle her assigned social roles, open a small fissure through which she begins to shift from “a body positioned by space” to “a body capable of positioning space”. In this light, space ceases to function solely as a container of control and emerges as a tactical site for the potential reconfiguration of power and selfhood.

4.2 Beatriz’s Bodily Subjectivity in Gender Relationships

In contrast to the domestic space, gender relationships constitute a more subtle but equally pervasive boundary that regulates the female body through desire, discourse, and symbolic roles. For Beatriz, this boundary is not only shaped by male gaze and societal norms, but also internalized through long-standing patterns of docility and silence. However, within her entanglement with Witold, Beatriz gradually begins to confront and transgress this boundary, embarking on a journey from being a symbol in someone else’s discourse to becoming the author of her own bodily subjectivity.

4.2.1 Power Dynamics in Gender Relationships

In gender relationships, Beatriz’s body continues to be subjected to disciplinary forces and power asymmetries, preventing the full emergence of bodily subjectivity. Unlike the more visible and structured mechanisms of domestic discipline, power in gender relations operates through subtler yet equally pervasive modes—through gaze, language, and desire. Foucault (1978: 93) suggests that power is omnipresent not because it dominates everything, but because it originates from all directions. In this sense, gender relations are not exempt from surveillance and regulation; rather, they function as a particularly intimate field in which the female body is redefined, appropriated, and silenced. The interactions between Beatriz and Witold reveal that emotional intimacy does not dissolve power differentials; instead, it produces a new boundary wherein Beatriz’s body remains entangled in dynamics of objectification and subjection.

In their love affairs, Beatriz’s body is consistently objectified and symbolically appropriated through Witold’s idealizing gaze and discursive practices. He projects

onto her the figure of a pacifying, quasi-spiritual feminine presence—“‘You give me peace,’ says the Pole. ‘You are my symbol of peace’” (Coetzee, 2023: 23). These phrases encapsulate how Beatriz’s body is not experienced as her own but is rendered into a symbolic site for the male subject’s psychic and existential needs. Her bodily subjectivity is overwritten by Witold’s discourse, her presence co-opted into his personal narrative. Foucault (1982: 781) suggests that one way power operates is by “subjectivizing” individuals through external definitions and discourses. In this case, Beatriz becomes “the one who gives peace,” not one who speaks, desires, or perceives. Her body is again confined to a representational function, sustaining a power imbalance that bars the articulation of her own bodily agency and subjectivity.

Despite her departure from the traditional domestic order, Beatriz remains tethered to the codes of female docility and decency. Even outside the home, she bears the symbolic mark of “a good wife and mother” (Coetzee, 2023: 10), and is quick to defend this socially sanctioned identity when challenged—“You astonish me. You know nothing about my husband. My husband is not ‘a man of affairs.’ Nor am I ‘a woman of affairs’” (Coetzee, 2023: 25). Beatriz’s automatic rejection of such insinuations reflects not only her public persona but also the internalized regulatory framework that governs her bodily identity. She knows of her husband’s extramarital affairs, yet refrains from interfering—“She is incurious about her husband’s affairs, deliberately so. In return, he is careful not to involve himself with women from their own social circle” (Coetzee, 2023: 27). This marital mode exposes a paradoxical bodily condition: her own desires remain unfulfilled, but she maintains the appearance of fidelity and propriety. Her body thus continues to serve as a passive bearer of gendered moral values—chaste, self-controlled, and loyal. As Foucault (1995: 202) notes, power operates most effectively not through direct coercion, but by shaping individuals to regulate their own behavior according to established norms. Beatriz’s body, even within a seemingly liberated context, still functions under these norms as a disciplined and silenced entity.

Besides, even though Beatriz is significantly younger than Witold, her internalized shame around bodily aging reveals the lingering effects of the male gaze and the aesthetic codes imposed upon the female body. In a moment of intimacy, she scrutinizes her own body in anticipation of his gaze—“What does she see? How thin, even spindly, his legs are. She hopes he will not notice the tracery of blue veins on her inner thighs” (Coetzee, 2023: 52). The visibility of the “blue veins” becomes a site of

anxiety, a sign of aging that she instinctively wishes to conceal. This bodily shame is not natural but produced through years of surveillance and normalization—what Foucault (1995: 170) refers to as “the internalization of the gaze”. Beatriz becomes the first judge of her own body, experiencing it not as a source of sensation and identity, but as an object to be inspected and managed. In this moment, her body does not resist the power structure—it confirms it.

In short, in her affair with Witold, Beatrice’s bodily subjectivity is consistently and deeply conditioned by gendered power relations. Her body is named, symbolized, gazed at, and ultimately silenced—placed within a relational structure in which male desire constructs meaning and justification. Despite her attempts to engage in intimacy and struggle for her own subjectivity, she remains trapped within the boundaries of docility, symbolic function and internalized shame. Gender relations, like familial relations, are spaces where power operates and where the construction of the female body is realized not through self-expression but through external regulation. As such, these relationships constitute yet another boundary to be breached in Beatrice’s journey towards bodily subjectivity.

4.2.2 Expression and Construction of Beatriz’s Bodily Subjectivity

Although gender relations continue to function as a space of power and a boundary that represses the emergence of Beatriz’s bodily subjectivity, as Foucault (1995: 240) famously noted that where there is power, there is resistance. Beatriz does not passively surrender to this disciplinary structure. Rather, through her experience of sexual pleasure, her awakening of bodily awareness and her assertion of spatial control, she gradually expresses and constructs her bodily subjectivity. Her body thus shifts from a “docile body” to an “experiential body,” and eventually toward a “strategic body^①”.

Beatriz’s rediscovery of sexual pleasure is the most immediate expression of her bodily subjectivity. In her long-term marriage, she had denied her need for sex and silenced her bodily desires, conforming to the social image of feminine chastity. However, during her sexual encounter with Witold, she experiences an unexpected

^① The term “strategic body” is developed here in contrast to Foucault’s “docile body” (1995), to describe a body that, through conscious and bodily practices, reclaims agency and subjectivity within power structures. While not explicitly named as such, this conceptual contrast draws on the critique of Foucault and the emphasis on embodied agency in Judith Butler’s works, as discussed in McNay’s essay titled “Subject, Psyche and Agency: The Work of Judith Butler” (1999).

and vivid sensation of pleasure—“There is a moment on the second night when out of the past there reemerges the delicious feeling of falling... one is, briefly, pure experience” (Coetzee, 2023: 55). This description revives a childhood memory of bodily joy—“pure experience”—which not only signifies a release of desire but also marks Beatriz’s reappropriation of her own sensory body. In Foucault’s framework (1982: 781), subjectivity is not given a priori, but is formed through reflective practices within power relations. At this moment, her body is no longer a passive object of gaze but becomes the source of experience and expression. Her affirmation of sexual pleasure signals a rejection of moral discipline and a re-engagement with her own embodied desire.

Built upon this sensual experience, Beatriz’s bodily consciousness gradually awakens within the dynamics of power, and she begins to resist the symbolic roles imposed on her body through discursive practices. When Witold idealizes her as embodiments of “peace” and “angel”, Beatriz responds with sharp clarity—“I embody neither peace nor anything else. The fact is, you know nothing of who or what I am” (Coetzee, 2023: 30). This statement is a powerful negation of the symbolic body. She refuses the reduction of her body to a metaphor within someone else’s narrative and instead affirms herself as a complex subject with agency and judgment. This declaration of bodily subjectivity reclaims her autonomy against the symbolic projections imposed upon her. It exemplifies Foucault’s notion (1995: 208) that resistance permeates every capillary of power through language, gesture, and action.

In addition to discursive resistance, Beatriz demonstrates effective control over her body through spatial and psychological management within the sexual relationship. She is not only the emotional initiator but also the one who regulates the spatial boundaries of intimacy. She invites Witold to Sóller, arranges for him to stay in a cottage, and gradually opens the space of bedroom to him. Eventually, she allows him to enter her body—“She helps him as best she can with the lovemaking... Sometimes, while he is about his erotic business, her mind drifts idly... She cannot bring herself to caress him” (Coetzee, 2023: 51, 55). In this sexual encounter, Beatriz both experiences physical pleasure and maintains emotional distance. Her ability to think about daily chores and life beyond the moment of sex reflects a kind of divided awareness. Her reluctance to caress Witold is not simply a reaction, but an embodied rejection—a bodily intuition of discomfort and a recognition of unequal dynamics. This selective engagement suggests that she no longer treats her body as a tool for

pleasing others but reclaims it as a site of self-perception and self-expression.

Besides, after the encounter, Beatriz performs a decisive spatial gesture—she asks Witold to leave her bedroom. This act is not only a reassertion of spatial boundaries but also symbolically expels his body from her bodily space. In Foucault's view (2007: 252), space itself is a strategy of power; the redistribution of space reflects the reconfiguration of power relations. Beatriz's control over spatial arrangements becomes an indirect assertion of her bodily sovereignty.

Overall, Beatriz's bodily subjectivity is not forged in a dramatic rupture, but constructed gradually through subtle, accumulative experiences. From her rediscovery of sexual pleasure to her reclamation of discursive agency, and from her regulation of bodily intimacy to her assertion of spatial control, Beatriz sketches a trajectory from silence to expression, from docility to subjectivity. Her body becomes the inscribed surface of experience, as Foucault (1980: 148) puts it, "the body is the surface of the inscription of events... the locus of the dissociation of the self". It is upon this surface that Beatriz begins to write her own story of embodied subjectivity and transgress the boundary of gender relationships.

4.3 Beatriz's Bodily Subjectivity in the Allegory of Postcolonial Nations

Within the postcolonial cultural discourse, the female body is often absorbed into a gender-nation allegory that casts it as symbolic territory or maternal nationhood—forming the final boundary in the construction of female bodily subjectivity. In Coetzee's *Disgrace* and *The Pole*, however, this structure is approached in contrasting ways. Lucy's body is inscribed with meanings of reconciliation and endurance, while Beatriz resists such inscription through emotional distance and spatial autonomy. Meanwhile, the allegorical burden shifts: in *The Pole*, it is Witold's male body that comes to symbolize national trauma, forming a reversed gender-nation allegory. In this context, through a series of bodily practices—reclaiming perception, occupying space, and redefining value—Beatriz gradually disentangles her body from symbolic appropriation, successfully transgressing the last boundary.

4.3.1 Allegorical Opposition between Male and Female Bodies in Postcolonial Contexts

According to Foucault (1995: 138), power uses disciplinary techniques to control individuals and transform them into “docile bodies”. This process is not only a manifestation of micro-power, but also a central mechanism in the functioning of the state apparatus—namely, the construction of the “national body” to ensure the stable functioning of power in society. In the postcolonial context, colonial nations, through violence and power discourse, destroy the original subjective structures of the colonized nations and objectify them into a “docile national body,” thereby achieving the remolding of identity, culture, and land. The country, as a geographical space, is also an extension of national will. Hence, within postcolonial criticism, the female body is often symbolically associated with national territory and imagined as a “national body” that must be protected, domesticated, or conquered. This symbolic structure constructs a gender-nation allegory logic in cultural representations, subordinating the female body to the instrumental rationality of nation-building. In this way, the gender-nation allegory in postcolonial contexts builds up the last boundary in the course of constructing Beatriz’s bodily subjectivity.

In *The Pole*, Coetzee constructs an allegorical binary through the bodies of Beatriz and Witold that intertwines cultural difference and gender relations. This gender-nation allegory is significantly different from Coetzee’s earlier representation in *Disgrace*.

In *Disgrace*, Lucy, a white woman living alone in rural post-apartheid South Africa, has her body inscribed with national and historical meanings. She lives on a remote farm in the Eastern Cape, where the land once belonged to Indigenous peoples, and her residence on it echoes the colonial legacy of land appropriation. When Lucy is sexually assaulted by local Black youths, including Pollux, this act of violence is not only an extreme expression of individual gender relations, but also a metaphor for the allegorical logic of postcolonial vengeance and historical redress (Poyner, 2000: 72). Her femininity and whiteness intersect in such a way that her body becomes a contested site, shaped by the violence and guilt of national history. In the context of the “new South Africa”, her embodied identity becomes a palimpsest of political history and racial justice.

Indeed, Lucy’s post-traumatic choices further reinforce the allegorical function of her body. She chooses to stay on her land, endures a silence that her father cannot

understand, and even decides to raise her rapist's child. While these actions ostensibly reinforce the reconstruction of her bodily subjectivity, they actually give her the role of "national mother," mediating historical violence through sacrifice and perseverance. Her silence and resilience are thus not merely personal choices, but allegories of reconciliation and maternal nationalism. In this sense, Lucy's transformation from a colonizer to a symbolic mother of the postcolonial nation exercises an embodied subjectivity deeply rooted in cultural and historical narratives.

Beatriz in *The Pole*, by contrast, resists this mode of symbolic inscription. Lucy ultimately accepts her body as a site for national redemption—a vessel that symbolically accommodates reconciliation between post-apartheid South Africa and its history of violence. However, Beatriz explicitly rejects such symbolic expectations and refuses to embody the allegorical role of the "national body". Coetzee performs a subversive inversion of the traditional gender-nation allegorical structure in *The Pole*: the bearer of national trauma is no longer the female body but the male—Witold's body is constructed as the metaphorical embodiment of a traumatized nation.

As a man born in 1943 under Nazi occupation in Poland, Witold's biographical background alone already implies a legacy of historical trauma and collective displacement. His embodied experience can be seen as a symbolic projection of the structural trauma borne by Poland as an invaded and partitioned nation. This trauma is first manifested at the most basic physiological level—the inability to satisfy hunger, one of the most fundamental bodily needs: "with nothing to eat but cabbage-potato-soup" (Coetzee, 2023: 10). Under the dual pressure of bodily deprivation and national trauma, Witold's body is shaped into what is described as "cadaverous" (Coetzee, 2023: 16)—emaciated, loose-skinned, and taciturn. These characteristics all reflect the historical imprint of war, exile, and material scarcity upon the individual body.

This bodily trauma not only dulls Witold's perceptual faculties but also renders him a "mute body": he consistently avoids speaking about his homeland, his family, or his past. His bodily posture is thus imbued with symbolic repression and silence. The fragmentation of his body and the dislocation of his identity compel him to seek an external object onto which he can project his idealized emotional and existential desires. Through such projection, he seeks a locus for emotional anchoring and bodily validation—a means to articulate his fragmented self. In this sense, Beatriz becomes the target of his symbolic projection. Beatriz herself perceives this mechanism, describing him as "roaming the world in search of a lost object" (Coetzee, 2023: 28),

a phrase that connotes both an emotional longing and a cultural impulse to restore Witold's bodily integrity. Witold's body, therefore, may be read as an embodied metaphor of a postcolonial nation in trauma.

Beatrice, however, refuses to be the end point of this allegorical narrative. Although Spain and Poland do not directly share a colonial past, the dynamics of their relationship subtly reflect the residual structures of colonial discourse: a male drifter from Eastern Europe projects emotional dependency and cultural aspirations onto a woman situated in the socio-economic stability and cultural centrality of Western Europe. Nevertheless, Beatrice categorically rejects these projections and regains control of her bodily narrative, maintaining clear physical and psychological boundaries, but without giving emotional shelter. When Witold proposes a trip to Brazil and implicitly mentions a love affair, Beatrice responds firmly: "We are strangers, you and I... We belong to different realms" (Coetzee, 2023: 23). This is not only a refusal of emotional closeness, but also a symbolic beginning: she will not play the role of a "Beatrice" to Witold's "Dante".

Hence, unlike Lucy's silent acquiescence, Beatriz's refusal of her body to be symbolized—her calm detachment and rejection to yield to the emotional and cultural expectations imposed upon her by Witold—becomes a gesture of resistance. She is not to be understood, forgiven, or reconciled with. Her body does not become a land to be cultivated or a womb to bear national meaning. Rather, she upholds her bodily subjectivity and defends the closure of her cultural boundaries, presenting a different form of female bodily subjectivity—one that disrupts rather than fulfills the logic of national allegory.

This symbolic framework of gendered nationhood resonates with what Foucault (1978: 139) identifies as biopolitics—the deployment of state power over life itself through the management of populations, reproduction, and bodily norms. While anatomo-politics governs the individual docile body, biopolitics extends to the symbolic and reproductive functions of bodies within the state's ideological project. In this sense, the female body in postcolonial allegory is not only disciplined but biologically and symbolically conscripted as a vessel for national continuity and healing (McClintock, 1995: 65). Beatriz's rejection of this conscription disrupts not only the symbolic order but also the biopolitical logic that seeks to regulate womanhood in service of the nation.

In short, the allegorical structure of gender and nation in Coetzee's work thus unfolds differently in the two novels. In *Disgrace*, the female body carries the burden of national memory and historical reconciliation. Nonetheless, in *The Pole*, the structures are reversed: The male body becomes a site of historical trauma and repression, while the female body becomes a counter-symbolic space that resists nationalization and refuses to be narratively inscribed as the Other. This reversal not only reflects a deepening of Coetzee's approach to female subjectivity, but also triggers a new reflection on the relationship between bodily subjectivity and national ideology. The construction and defense of one's own bodily subjectivity appears here as a form of resistance against the allegorical hegemony of the gender-nation allegory in postcolonial narratives, which is seen as a serious violation of the boundaries of cultural power structures.

4.3.2 Disconnecting Beatriz's Body from the Postcolonial Gender-nation Allegory

As Foucault (1995: 138) posits, disciplinary power does not solely operate through means of coercion or violence. Instead, it functions via everyday practices that make the body docile but useful. This understanding extends beyond the control of individuals and applies to the formation of collective identity in postcolonial settings. In such contexts, power reshapes cultural memory and national allegories by dictating who and what can be represented. Frequently, within these frameworks, the female body becomes a symbolic site for national traumas, acts of reconciliation, or the creation of national myths. It is utilized as a tool within the logic of the postcolonial gender-nation allegory, cast as a container to embody collective meanings, and thus, female corporeality is subordinated to the goals of the nation.

Nonetheless, in *The Pole*, Coetzee subverts this established convention. Beatriz reclaims her bodily subjectivity through a series of understated yet impactful embodied actions. She gradually severs the connection between her body and the allegorical gender-nation structure, steadfastly refusing to be a receptacle for male desire, historical storytelling, or national representation. This act of defiance does not come in the form of bold political pronouncements or blatant resistance. Instead, it is achieved through the micro-practices of de-symbolization. That is to say, Beatriz's resistance unfolds through a series of subtle transgressions that, when taken together,

systematically break down the symbols and expectations that have been imposed upon her body.

A fundamental step in this detachment process is marked by Beatriz's renewed perception of her own body, which signals a reawakening of her bodily subjectivity. While she once experienced shame and anxiety about aging under social scrutiny, a distinct shift occurs before her first sexual encounter with Witold:

She is still a good-looking woman: there is that to hold on to. *Amazing, the way you have kept your looks!* says Margarita. *Two children and you still have the figure of an eighteen-year-old!* Well, let him marvel at his luck. (Coetzee, 2023: 51)

At this moment, Beatriz no longer gazes at her body through the lens of shame but instead affirms it as a source of lived experience. She accepts the natural signs of aging while also recognizing the vitality that remains. This dual perception signifies a reclaiming of bodily subjectivity, such a refusal to be objectified by the gaze or reduced to a symbol is a radical mode of resistance. It defies the logic of instrumentalization, objectification, and ultimate allegorization that has traditionally defined the female body's role in postcolonial gender-nation narratives. In this quiet but crucial way, re-perceiving her body becomes Beatriz's first act of rejecting the symbolic order of the nation.

Following this reawakened self-perception, Beatriz's spatial mobility becomes a manifestation of her emerging bodily subjectivity, enacting a symbolic reversal. After Witold's death, she travels to Warsaw to retrieve the things he has left to her and chooses to spend a night in his apartment:

Alternatively, she could spend the night in Warsaw, fly out in the morning. She could make herself at home in this apartment, explore the neighbourhood, get a meal somewhere, authentic Polish food... sleep in the dead man's bed. (Coetzee, 2023: 68)

The very phrases "make herself at home" and "sleep in the dead man's bed" signify a spatial assertion of bodily sovereignty. In the traditional postcolonial gender-nation allegory, the male body often represents invading force, while the female body is imagined as land to be conquered or a home to be claimed. Here, Beatriz pointedly reverses that structure. She enters Witold's his home, occupies his bed, and asserts control over the space not as a passive subject but as a symbolic agent. Her body becomes not the occupied but the occupier—reconfiguring traditional narratives of conquest, intimacy, and gendered geography.

Most crucially, Beatriz's redefinition of her bodily value marks the deepest layer of the formation of her bodily subjectivity. She not only rejects the symbolic projections that male desires cast upon her body, but articulates, with clarity, the existential need for bodily recognition—"But one needs to be reassured every now and again, if one is a woman. One needs proof that one can still make an impression.' ... 'Yes, you do. But not enough'" (Coetzee, 2023: 69). This statement is not a plea for male validation, but a reaffirmation of bodily subjectivity. As a woman, Beatriz acknowledges the human desire to be seen, to "make an impression"—but the affirmation she seeks originates primarily from her own bodily experiences and her conscious reclamation of that experience. Her relationship with Witold becomes not a narrative of submission or national reconciliation, but a site of embodied learning and spiritual detachment. Through this process, her body essentially disentangles itself from the structure of postcolonial gender-nation allegory.

In summary, Beatrice's bodily subjectivity is not simply constructed by the allegory of traditional female roles or the narrative of national redemption. Rather, her bodily subjectivity is constructed through a series of subtle transgressions: the reappropriation of bodily knowledge, the reorganization of spatial power and the redefinition of bodily value. Together, these practices constitute a deconstructive response to the postcolonial logic of gender-nation allegory. The female body is no longer a tool of historical reparation, emotional compensation or cultural projection. Instead, it becomes a "unsymbolizable body"—a body that refuses to be read, mourned or appropriated. With quiet yet assertive actions, Beatrice finally transcends the limits imposed by postcolonial nationalist gender symbolism. Thus, the unsymbolized female body is juxtaposed with the male body borrowed from Witold, completing Coetzee's myth of opposition between the sexes. Beatrice's body takes on characteristics of domination and decolonization, and resolutely refuses to subject the female body to allegorical forces.

5. Conclusion

Coetzee's novel *The Pole* presents an impressive romantic story. Compared to his early works, the romantic relationships in *The Pole* are more introspective, complex, and symbolically structured: Witold's love for Beatriz is a "self-destructive" romantic quest, a man's emotional obsession amid cultural dislocation and aging anxiety; while Beatriz's response to Witold is calm and rational, a restrained interaction and echo from a middle-aged woman struggling with the gender power structure. This seemingly unequal love relationship precisely constitutes a battleground of gendered power dynamics, allowing Beatriz to reconstruct her bodily subjectivity within this emotional tension. At the same time, Witold's allegorically inscribed male body introduces a reversed symbolic structure, positioning Beatriz's corporeality as a counter-narrative rather than a vessel of redemption.

Drawing on Foucault's theory of power, this thesis presents the multiple disciplinary mechanisms Beatriz endures as a woman in social and domestic spaces. Under the triple pressure of discursive power, familial expectations and gender structures, Beatriz's body is gradually reduced to what Foucault terms a "docile body": she is a decent representative of the socialite, a compliant bearer of the motherhood, and a qualified woman in the domestic space who is silent and submissive. Her subjectivity is dissolved by social discourse, her bodily behaviors are constrained by familial structures, and her emotional expression is suppressed through self-surveillance. However, as Foucault (1995: 240) emphasizes, "As long as there is a power relationship, there is a possibility of resistance", there is always the possibility for the individual to resist.

Beatriz's awakening unfolds amid the tension between structural discipline and bodily self-awareness. In her romantic relationship with Witold, she gradually recognizes the male gaze, confronts her own desires, and refuses to be named, projected, or symbolized through counter-disciplinary practices. By rearranging power dynamics in domestic spaces and asserting bodily boundaries in intimacy, Beatriz ultimately transitions her body from a "viewed object" to a "self-affirming subject". Within the allegory of postcolonial nations, her body no longer bears the burden of national salvation or symbolizes a cultural matrix. Instead, her detachment from symbolic domestication not only resists gender-based allegorization but also refuses the cultural and emotional projections imposed by a displaced male subject. Through disconnection, therefore, she refuses to be interpreted, disentangling herself

from the gendered functions constructed by postcolonially national narratives and becoming an “unprojectable body”.

Crucially, this refusal acquires additional significance when considered in relation to the inverted symbolic structure Coetzee constructs: Beatriz’s unsymbolizable female body stands in stark contrast to Witold’s metaphorically wounded male body, which bears the weight of historical trauma and cultural nostalgia. Beatriz’s resistance is thus not only gendered, but also national in its scope—a deliberate rejection of being mapped, mourned, or domesticated within the symbolic imagination of another.

In a nutshell, this thesis offers a nuanced analysis of Beatriz’s construction of bodily subjectivity in *The Pole*, exploring her experiences across three critical boundaries—domestic space, gender relationships, and postcolonial national allegory. Through spatial reconfiguration, discursive resistance, and behavioral control, Beatriz’s bodily subjectivity emerges as an act of defiance, challenging the normative structures that seek to inscribe meaning upon her body.

Beatriz does not use violent means of resistance, but her silence, calmness, and non-confrontational strategies are precisely a form of subjective practice that grows quietly within a disciplined society. This mode of resistance reflects the shift in feminist thinking in Coetzee’s later years: the construction of bodily subjectivity, or even individual subjectivity, stems more from self-perception and the refusal of imposed boundaries and meanings, rather than from radical confrontation with external structures. Beatriz’s strategic epitomizes a micro-victory she accomplishes in the cracks of power networks—a subtle form of resistance that maximizes bodily subjectivity through minimal speech and action.

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