

# Experiencing the Abject Female Body and Writing the Female Self: Body Narrative of *In the Heart of the Country*\*

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*In the Heart of the Country*, the second novel by J. M. Coetzee, has been traditionally read as a disembodied writing that focuses on the problem of writing per se instead of the reality. This paper contends that the work is actually a body narrative that explores the visceral pain suffered by Magda whose infertile body impedes her being a qualified subject. As the heroine in a postcolonial novel, Magda is not just a body that is restricted and constructed by the politics of the body, but also a thinking and writing body that consciously questions and resists the gendered bodily norms under whose yardstick her subjecthood is barred. Written in the metafictional manner, Magda's narrative of the body is not just a record of her corporeal experience, but also a self-conscious negotiation with, and challenge of, the bodily norms under whose yardstick her body has been debased or, in terms of Judith Butler, abjected. Taking her female bodily experience as the starting point, Magda writes a feminine text that values passion, fluidity and non-linearity to disrupt the patriarchal discourse underpinned with logical reasoning. The feminine body narrative endeavors to achieve a new way of communication through which a reciprocal cross race/gender relationship might be established.

*Keywords:* J. M. Coetzee, *In the Heart of the Country*, abject female body, body narrative, feminine text

## Introduction

Composed of 256 pieces of diaries, most of which are the heroin and narrator's conscious critique of various sub-genres of previous writings, *In the Heart of the Country*, the second novel by J. M. Coetzee, has been traditionally read as a disembodied writing that focuses on the problem of writing per se instead of the reality. For instance, Mike Marais maintains that this novel is about its heroin's struggle against "subjection by language" since "language distances or alienates individuals not just from others but from themselves, or, rather, their potential selves" (Marais, 2009, p. 19). Magda's situation of being imprisoned in the network of words has intrigued Freudian or Lacanian reading of the novel. For instance, Sheila Roberts contends that Magda is "a latter-day Electra killing the Father for the loss of the Mother and not vice versa; a Circe prepared to wreak vengeance on all careless men" (Roberts, 1992, p. 29). Teresa Dovey argues that *In the Heart of the Country* is a parodic rewriting of "the pastoral romantic", a literary genre popular in the white writing in Africa, and that

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the novel subverts the genre as a dominant discourse by “inhabiting it in a way that closely approximates the Derridean strategy of deconstruction” (Dovey, 1987, p. 4). Chiara Briganti, in line with Dovey, explores the self-reflexivity of the novel, arguing that the novel “is explicitly engaged in a dialogue with psychoanalytic discourse”, especially “Freud’s *Studies on Hysteria*” (Briganti, 1994, p. 35). These studies overemphasize Coetzee’s self-conscious exploration of the discursive power of the narrating subject at the cost of ignoring his deep concern with the unbearable suffering and the abject existence of the marginalized. Explicitly engaged in dialogues with various sub-genres, *In the Heart of the Country*, however, is a body narrative that explores the pain suffered by Magda, an Afrikaner spinster whose infertile body impedes her being a qualified subject. Written in the metafictional manner, Magda’s narrative of the body is not just a record of her corporeal experience, but also a self-conscious negotiation with, and challenge of, the bodily norms under whose yardstick her body has been debased or, in terms of Judith Butler, abjected.

As a matter of fact, the body narrative nature of Coetzee’s novels, including *In the Heart of the Country*, has been addressed by Brian May who argues, based on the fact that the body, especially that of the racial other, remains silent in Coetzee’s novels, that Coetzeean body resists any interpretation because it “insists on its own thingness” (May, 2001, p. 389). May’s ultimate concern is to demonstrate that the surrealistic style of *In the Heart of the Country* is actually reality-based, the kind of reality that is beyond the reach of words. May’s emphasis on the metaphorical signification of the body, however, has virtually led to his blindness to the corporeal experience of Magda. Coetzee’s concern is more about the lived experience of the body than its metaphorical meaning. Magda’s abject body is portrayed by Coetzee to provide the reader with a possibility of living through the cruelty of colonization and apartheid in South Africa. The point where the characters in the novel fail to read the body is exactly the point for the reader to start to analyze the power that has inscribed, wounded and silenced the body.

### **Self-consciousness of Her Abjectness: Magda’s Motive of Selfwriting**

According to Judith Butler<sup>1</sup>, the abject refers to those populations who are currently denied subject status by the standards of physical norms erected for everybody in the world, populations “whose living under the sign of the ‘unlivable’ is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject” (Butler, 1993, p. 3). The dominant ideals reinforce the power of certain groups, for instance, men and heterosexuals, over others. These others, including women, homosexuals, transsexuals, who live with differently abled bodies or differently shaped bodies, are treated socially as outsiders, the abject, and are subject to social punishments. Abjection, thus, is a

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<sup>1</sup> Butler’s account of abjection is an adaptation of Juliet Kristeva’s term, but is crucially different from that of Kristeva’s. For Butler, it is a category of exclusion created by discursive norms. For Kristeva, the abjection, however, is a psychological response to something that disgusts us. The term is introduced by Kristeva in response to Lacan’s argument that the sense of self or subjectivity is inescapably imprisoned in the symbolic order. For Kristeva, our sense of self is not established solely through a conceptual positioning in the symbolic order, but prior to that in a bodily way. Something closely related to us yet rejected by us, something abject, evoking a bodily reaction of nausea, or a sense of abjection, blurring the boundary between being and non-being. Kristeva proposes that an open wound, excrement, nail clippings, menstrual blood, even the skin on the top of milk can all invoke such responses. These responses are, for Kristeva, a reaction to aspects of the world that threaten our sense of boundaries between ourselves and the world, or between ourselves and others. Introducing the term of abjection in her account of the formation of the subject, Kristeva offers a picture in which the establishing of self necessarily depends on the other, and therefore, justifies a model of the necessity of a non-violent inter-subjectivity, which provides us with a basis for ethical thought. In Judith Butler’s theoretical framework, however, the term “abjection” refers to individuals’ correction and self-correction under the social norms imposed on them.

question of ontology that describes the process whereby certain persons are excluded from particular normative ideals of subjecthood. Alongside those subjects who can “lay claim to ontology” because they “count or qualify as real,” there are those who “do not have claim to ontology” (Butler, 1993, p. 3) and who are, in some sense, unreal because their material bodies do not “matter.” Although these bodies fail to qualify as subjects, as bodies that breathe and talk, they are not inert objects either. As a result, these bodies occupy an in-between zone that disrupts the boundaries between the subject and object, destabilizing the border between the self and the world.

Magda lives in an abject body, and, as the narrator of the novel, she is deeply aware of the relationship between her abject existence and her “wrong body,” stating it clearly in the narrative that her life is wrong because she “was born at the wrong time, in the wrong place, in the wrong body” (Coetzee, 1982, p. 51). The “wrongness” with Magda’s body could be understood on several levels. First, living on a remote farm dominated by her patriarchal father, Magda’s female body has predetermined her subservient existence. Second, in the colonial situation where women’s productivity and fertility are urgently needed and valued to enhance the bio-power of the colonial state, her infertility makes her body an abject one. And third, as a woman who is deeply aware of the power of the bodily norms on whose scale her body is constantly weighed and who simultaneously attempts to challenge the norms, Magda is caught between the role of the traditional woman and the new one, attempting to correct her body with reference to the bodily norms on the one hand and resisting them on the other. All of these elements reveal Magda to be an ambivalent being, a woman who inhabits the position of a white colonist yet “is not one of the primary agents of colonization but who lives in the conditions created by such agents, and who endures the consequences this position entails” (Attwell, 1993, p. 56).

Meanwhile, as the narrator of the novel, Magda is clear that her “wrongness” is more closely associated with political and cultural norms than with her physiological morphology. The recurring image of the body being inhabited by the body of another is employed by Magda to metaphorically express the political, social and cultural impacts on the body. For instance, at one point, Magda, in her reflection on her place in the power network in which she is positioned, imagines her body as an empty shell, inhabited by the “fullgrown law” whose “sex drooping [drips] through my [her] hole.” She feels like she is being gnawed through by the “fullgrown law” which renders her “sloughed, crumpled, abandoned on the floor” (Coetzee, 1982, p. 84). Through presenting Magda’s meditation on her psychological and emotional experience of living in an abject body, the novel reveals the social codes that define the gender role and the boundaries between the proper and the abject bodies, exposing them to the reader’s scrutiny.

Set in an isolated farm and in the tradition of the farm novel where, as Coetzee states in his *White Writing*, women are “imprisoned in the farmhouse” and “confined to the breast function” (Coetzee, 1988, p. 72), the subversive power of *In the Heart of the Country* lies in that its heroine, Magda, shares little in common with the heroines in the traditional pastoral novels which are discursively implicated in the formation of Afrikanerdom. It is Magda’s body, instead of her will, that renders it hard for her to be the ideal Afrikaner woman who is either a heroic mother or a docile daughter, the characters who frequently appear in the traditional pastoral novel. Her physical characteristics are antithetical to the Afrikaner ideal. She is weak, scrawny, dried up, and sterile. Her breast is “flat sour” (Coetzee, 1982, p. 42), and her womb is “a withered apple” (Coetzee, 1982, p. 50). Such a body does not fit in the spirit of the epoch of Afrikaner’s colonial expansion in which this novel is set. In an age in which a bigger population was urgently needed by the Afrikaners both to inhabit the vast land

they have conquered from the indigenous people and to strengthen their force to combat the British, the reproductive function of women was strongly emphasized. Women were responsible for both continuing and strengthening the Afrikaner race and sustaining its purity: "it was because of her willingness to accompany her husband into the wilderness that the racial purity of Afrikanerdom had been preserved. It was to the woman that God had entrusted the task of bearing and raising Afrikaner children in the true civil faith" (Moodie, 1975, p. 17).

### **Writing Self and Revealing the Colonial and Gendered Body Norm**

The first thing that impedes Magda to live up to the bodily norms of the colonial society is that she refuses to get married, the first step for a woman who lives in the period of colonial expansion to contribute to the project of colonialism. Different from other farm girls who take marriage as their salvation, Magda is disinclined to marry a farm boy. She refuses to adjust to the existing social, political and cultural codes, and she refuses "to be plain placid empty-headed heiress anxious not to be left on the shelf, ready to commit herself body and soul to the first willing fellow to pass by, a pedlar even, or an itinerant teacher of Latin, and breed him six daughters, and bear his blows and curses with Christian fortitude" (Coetzee, 1982, p. 22). Obviously, the reason that Magda is not ready to "commit herself" to any fellow is that, in the marriage system in the colony, women have been debased to a body to be used, to "breed him [man] six daughters," and to be abused, to "bear his [man's] blows and curses" (Coetzee, 1982, p. 22).

Magda is acutely aware of how the gendered politics of the body has constructed willingly subordinate women like her mother, but still, she has difficulties in transgressing the bodily norms. What is worse, she constantly assesses her own body in accordance with the value system of Afrikaner colonialist and patriarchal codes. As a result, she develops a deep self-hatred of her own body which she thinks hinders her to be a "true" woman, and consequently she experiences the pain of living in an abject body. Magda worries about her body because she looks "like the popular notion of the barren woman" (Coetzee, 1982, p. 42). She complains that "even decades of mutton and pumpkin and potatoes have failed to coax from me the jowls, the bust, the hips of a true country foodwife, have achieved no more than to send my meager buttocks sagging down the backs of my legs" (Coetzee, 1982, p. 21). Without the "bust" and the "buttocks" of a "true country foodwife," it would be impossible for her to be either a good daughter or a good wife of the colony. She regrets that even her will as strong as "wire sheathed in crepe" cannot bring "miracles" from her body to fight against the destiny of the anatomy. Deeply conscious of the importance of fertility for a colonial woman, she is left wondering: "Who would give me a baby? Who would not turn to ice at the spectacle of my bony frame on the wedding-couch, the coat of fur up to my navel, the acrid cavities of my armpits, the line of black moustache, the eyes, watchful, defensive, of a woman has never lost possession of herself" (Coetzee, 1982, p. 10).

Strictly focused on the consciousness of Magda who is in a very unstable condition, the above narrative could be Magda's fantasy, rather than an objective description, of her body. But Magda's self-deprecation or, worse, her self-curse, results from her psychological response for failing to meet the bodily norms established for the white females. The self-deprecation even destabilizes her sense of self as a white. She conceives of herself as "a miserable black virgin," a "black bored spinster, whose story is "a dull black blind stupid miserable story, ignorant of its meaning" (Coetzee, 1982, p. 5). Jane Poyner reads Magda's conception of

herself as a “black virgin” in terms of Fanon’s theory of the “fact of blackness” and explains, not unreasonably, that the mis-identification indicates Magda’s or Coetzee’s attempt to subvert the concept of “blackness” as a “biological category” (Poyner, 2009, p. 39) and to emphasize its constructedness. Obviously, Poyner takes Magda’s misconception or even fantasy of her body as a narrator’s self-conscious disruption of the concept of race which functions as both the biological and ideological foundation of colonialism. But Poyner’s reading, while focusing on the problem of race, underplays the issue of gender. Identifying herself with a “black virgin” indicates more of Magda’s self-contempt of her sexually unattractive body than her challenge of the white-black boundary. What is implicitly expressed in Magda’s misconception of her body is also Coetzee’s critique of the patriarchal sexual codes and their impact on white females’ psychological perception of their physical bodies.

Magda’s pain is intensified by her awareness of the power of bodily norms. Although Magda is not inclined to get committed to any man, she well understands that the only way for her to gain self is, paradoxically, to lose “possession of herself” to a man who would give her a baby. Unwilling to follow the tradition, yet unable to live beyond the traditional principle, Magda is rendered a Hamlet-like figure, powerless to act. Susan Gallagher contends that Magda is a self-consciously rebellious woman, an “anti-Mary” in “defiant rebellion against her father and her destiny” (Gallagher, 1991, p. 94). Gallagher’s interpretation ignores the psychological contradictions battling inside Magda all through the narrative. The rebellious power of *In the Heart of the Country* does not lie in portraying a self-consciously resisting woman-figure, but in exploring the painful consciousness of an abject woman who vacillates between being assimilated by the existing bodily norms or following the heart of her true self. For instance, she keeps on thinking about how to turn herself into a physically attractive woman. She ponders upon “cosmetically tempering” her face to make her a pleasant, “true woman,” plucking her eyebrows, “doing something about her teeth,” taking fruits and morning exercises to change the complexion of her face. She considers making all these efforts on the grounds that marriage can redeem her from loneliness. But, in another moment, she is keenly aware that the physical “correction” and marriage cannot bring her what she desires: “I do not have it in me to believe that the mating of farmboy with farmgirl will save me. Whatever save may mean, at least for the time being. [...] I believe myself reserved for a higher fate” (Coetzee, 1982, p. 41). The “higher fate” Magda thinks she is reserved for is to challenge, especially through her writing, the gendered politics of the body that has appropriated the female body and degenerated women to an abject existence.

Susan Gallagher observes that “the traditional Afrikaner discourse holds that moral domesticity makes women the ‘heart’ of the country” (Gallagher, 1991, p. 94). In other words, if Magda wants to grab something to live on in this “heart of the country,” she must accept the traditional role of the productive and perseverant wife and mother. But the problem with Magda is that she refuses the prescribed role of good daughter or mother, “to be used as a tool, to bring the house to order, to regiment the servants” (Coetzee, 1982, p. 41). Situated in the power structure of patriarchy and colonialism, Magda’s failure to perform the normative role naturally makes her existence dubious and abject. The recurring image of insects and animals to which she frequently compares herself may suggest her sense of abjection or alienation: she thinks of herself variously as “thin black beetle with dummy wings who lays no eggs and blinks in the sun” (Coetzee, 1982, p. 18); a snake “licking the eggslime off herself before taking her bearings and crawling off to this farmhouse to take up

residence behind the wainscot” (Coetzee, 1982, p. 38); or a black widow spider that would hide in a corner and “engulf whoever passes in my venom” (Coetzee, 1982, p. 39). Rejecting the facile definition of womanhood prescribed by the law of Father, Magda experiences her abject existence, feeling herself being metamorphosed to animals, even losing the sense of being at all and fantasizing herself as a phantom. But this sense of alienation and nothingness is negated by the irreducible materiality of her body. She writes: “I touch this skin and it is warm, I pinch this flesh and it hurts. What more proof could I want? I am I” (Coetzee, 1982, p. 89). These words suggest that, although her spinster body hinders her in getting recognition from the law of Father so as to achieve her subjecthood, she clings to a hope that she may prove her being with her bodily agency. She means to undermine the gender and race hierarchy with both her violent actions and her feminine writing.

### Writing the Female Body and Protesting Body Norms

Magda’s abject experience finally results in acts of violence. When she discovers that her father sleeps with Klein-Anna, their black servant Hendric’s wife, a woman whose body is fertile and sensual, able to arouse and satisfy all of her father’s desire, she shoots through the bedroom window and fatally wounds her father. Magda’s challenge of her father is not only restricted in her attempt of patricide. She tries to demystify her father’s body in her writing. The image of her father represented in the episode where he lies wounded in bed is totally different from the one that has created the “absence” of Magda and her mother. It is narrated by Magda that the father that she has always admired for his high stature and graceful demeanor has lost his greatness and become an old, weak man. It is emphasized that the mystified phallus is not that strong and big as Magda has imagined: “the sex is smaller than I thought it would be” (Coetzee, 1982, p. 89), and she thinks it is hard to believe that she comes from “that poor little thing” (Coetzee, 1982, p. 89). Magda provides a detailed description of her father’s disgraced, decaying body which is in sharp contrast with the gentleman’s body with “waxed riding-boots” and well-ironed “coat and tie” that she has earlier described. The discrepancy suggests that the power of the father’s body, like that of “the King’s body”<sup>2</sup> analyzed by Michael Foucault in his *Discipline and Punishment*, operates metaphysically rather than physically. Once de-throned, the bodies of the King or the father, no different from that of women, or the condemned, are vulnerable and mortal.

As the heroine of the novel, Magda’s bold action of patricide proves futile in her attempt to undermine the patriarchal order. However, as the narrator or the writer of her story, Magda has successfully resisted the destiny of being used as a reproductive body. Intellectually dwelling on the problem a woman with an “abject” body in the colonial and patriarchal situation faces and writing down her bodily consciousness in an unusual and fluid style, Magda has transcended the traditional female role as a passive body, proving that she is not just a body but a thinking body. The subversive power of Magda’s writing lies in that she manages to replace the codes of patriarchal discourse with her *écriture féminine*. Associating the rational and the logical discourse with the symbolic realm of the Law-of-the-Father (as defined by Lacan), French feminists, including Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva, describe feminine discourse as subjective and instinctive, refusing the

<sup>2</sup> Foucault argues that the sovereignty of Monarchy operates by means of the two-body theory, where the king’s body is glorified and mythologized as two bodies. One is the natural body, subject to decay. The other is the aevum, a holy, mystical, eternal body, and a secular perpetuity through which the dignity of kingship has survived all human frailty and monarchic misfortune. Foucault contends that this mythical idea has penetrated deeply into English legal thought. See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. p. 76-77.

traditional values of clarity, logic, and linear continuity while questioning the supposed superiority of rational discourse over instinctive or discontinuous discourse. The distinctive characteristic “widely recognized” as forming the feminine discourse is that, according to Ann Jones, it is “a language of the mind and the body, conveying both ideas and the reality of the body itself” (88). Magda’s writing, both in its content and form, is permeated with the characteristics of *écriture féminine*<sup>3</sup>. First, as far as the form is concerned, devices such as the repetitive structure, ambiguous expressions, and abrupt shifts are employed to disrupt the patriarchal discourse that prioritizes order, rationality and linearity. Second, on the plane of its content, Magda’s writing is focused on her bodily consciousness, trying to convey “both ideas and the reality of the body itself” (Jones, 1985, p. 88). Her diaries express her visceral feeling of living in a body that is marked as abject by the gendered politics of the body.

Magda’s attempt of writing the body is also her urgent desire, as has been pointed out previously, to go beyond the realm of rational language to a different mode of communication, a physical union in which the master/slave or mind/body dichotomy is overcome. The desire is especially discernable in the passage that describes her struggle for a new medium to communicate with Klein-Anna:

I want a home somewhere else, if it has to be in this body then on different terms in this body, if there is no other body, though there is one I would far prefer, I cannot stop these words unless I cut my throat, I would like to climb into Klein-Anna’s body, I would like to climb down her throat while she sleeps and spread myself gently inside her, my hands in her hands, my feet in her, my skull in the benign quiet of her skull where images of soap and flour and milk revolve, the holes of my body sliding into place over the holes of hers, there to wait mindlessly for whatever enters them, the song of birds, the smell of dung, the parts of a man, not angry now but gentle, rocking in my bloodwarmth, laving me with soapy seed, sleeping in my cave. (Coetzee, 1982, pp. 108-109)

In this stream-of-consciousness passage driven by Magda’s fantasy, it is hard for the reader to make sure what Magda exactly wants to express, but the reader will not fail to feel Magda’s keenness of transgressing the boundary of race to establish a reciprocal relationship where her body and mind and that of Klein-Anna were as if integrated into one, a state never possible in the realm of logical reasoning. The possibility, however, is exactly the power immanent in the narrative of *In the Heart of the Country*, which tries to rekindle the fire of love and compassion in an age dominated by instrumental rationality.

In addition, in her writing that “springs from the archaisms of the instinctual body” (Leland, 1989, p. 93), Magda aims to disrupt the bodily hierarchy based on the categories of race and gender through repeatedly making reference to bodily functions, especially excremental ones. The above passage in which “the song of birds” and “the smell of dung” are juxtaposed has already hinted this feature of Magda’s narrative. In another place, Magda writes against the social demands for “proper and clean” bodies and uses disturbingly scatological language to describe her and her father’s feces:

Every sixth day, when our cycles coincide, his cycle of two days, my cycle of three, we are driven to the intimacy of relieving our bowels in the bucket-latrine behind the fig-trees in the malodour of the other’s fresh faeces, either he in my

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<sup>3</sup> As has already been pointed out in the previous discussion, *In the Heart of the Country* is composed of 256 pieces of diaries by Magda, whose awareness of abject existence has made her a very unstable and unreliable narrator. Her narrative, consequently, is not driven by linear order or logical argumentation but by her emotional response to the bodily norms according to which her subjecthood is barred. Or, in Magda’s words, her weapon is lyricism: “Lyric is my medium, not chronicle” (71). Understood in this context, Magda is writing for the possibility of a new woman, free from the bondage of patriarchal bodily norms, through evoking the emotional response of the reader rather than logical argumentation.

stench or I in his. Sliding aside the wooden lid I straddle his hellish gust, bloody, feral, the kind that flies love best, flecked, I am sure, with undigested flesh barely mulled over before pushed through. Whereas my own (and here I think of him with his trousers about his knees, screwing his nose as high as he can while the blowflies buzz furiously in the black space below him) is dark, olive with bile, hard-packed, kept in too long, old, tired. ... Where exactly the bucket is emptied I do not know; but somewhere on the farm there is a pit where, looped in each other's coils, the father's red snake and the daughter's black embrace and sleep and dissolve. (Coetzee, 1982, p. 32)

In a civilized society, excrement and other bodily wastes have traditionally been abhorred and considered taboo for their filthiness. Juliet Kristeva, however, proposes a different interpretation for the abhorrence against filth: "it is not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abhorrence but what disturbs identity, system, order," and that "filth is not a quality in itself, but it applies only to what relates to a boundary and, more particularly, its other side, a margin" (Kristeva, 1986, p. 6). In terms of Kristeva, excrement and its equivalents, such as decay, infection, disease, and corpses, being that part both inside and outside the body, stand for the danger to identity and the threat to the boundaries. Kristeva, therefore, defines the bodily waste, especially excrement and menstrual blood, as the abject. What Kristeva tries to draw our attention to, with the category of the abject, is the existence of that which is in between self and other, both me and not me, and consequently that which reminds us of the constructedness and instability of the boundary which is taken to constitute a single subject. To put it literally, Kristeva thinks that the bodily waste disrupts and transgresses the bodily boundaries.

In light of Kristeva, Magda's scatological description of her and her father's bodily waste is an attempt to disrupt the bodily hierarchy prescribed by the racialized and gendered bodily norms. The disgusting, abhorrent bodily waste, in sharp contrast to the image of father riding on his horse in his waxed riding-boots described in the passage preceding the quote above, reminds the reader that the father is not only a body that is decently dressed up and elegantly eats, it is also a porous body that defecates. The hierarchically formed race and gender order is thus dissolved in the form of the interwoven male and female turds or the "embrace" of "father's red snake and the daughter's black [snake]."

### Conclusion

Focusing on the bodily consciousness of Magda, *In the Heart of the Country* explores various political and cultural norms that have inscribed the bodies of women, especially of white women, in the colonial and patriarchal context. As a heroine in a postcolonial novel, Magda is not just a body that has been restricted and constructed by the politics of the body, but also a thinking and writing body that consciously questions and resists the gendered bodily norms under whose yardstick her subjecthood is barred. Taking her female bodily experience as the starting point, Magda writes a feminine text, with its emphasis on passion, fluidity and non-linearity, to disrupt the patriarchal discourse underpinned with logical reasoning, so as to achieve a new way of communication through which a reciprocal cross race/gender relationship might be established. Magda's writing is also her effort of rewriting self and probing for a new possibility for her and other women living in the colonial and patriarchal situation where their bodies are appropriated by the colonial state and man as well.



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