Genocidal Inscriptions in the Postcolony and Beyond: J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Paul Lynch's *Prophet Song*, and Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones*

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> I want everything cleaned up! Soap and water! I want everything as it was before …. [I]t would be best if this obscure chapter in the history of the world were obliterated from the earth and we swore to make a new start, to run an empire in which there would be no more injustice, no more pain (24).-- The Magistrate, *Waiting for the Barbarians*

Erasing Genocide: J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*

South African author J.M. Coetzee's 1980 novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* is set in an unspecified place and time and chronicles an unnamed Magistrate's struggle to place himself both within and outside of the dictates of Empire. He lives and works at a military outpost and maintains a kind of delusional equilibrium with regard to his position as a benevolent servant of an unspecified regime. When a military commander from the "third Bureau of the Civil Guard" (Coetzee 1980,

2) named Colonel Joll – one of only two named characters in the novel – shows up and disrupts the Magistrate's copacetic existence, interrogating and torturing the peoples native to the region, the Magistrate is forced to recognize his complicity in the imperial project. When he takes in a girl who has been tortured by Joll and his men, he becomes aware that "The distance between myself and her torturers . . . is negligible" (27). Despite the Magistrate's attempts to care for the girl, his motives are also obliquely defined: he bathes her and tries to decipher the marks on her body left by her torturers. He wants to read her body as a text, and he simultaneously wants to erase what has been done to her, to wash away the evidence of torture. He asks,

> Is it the case that it is the whole woman I want, that my pleasure in her is spoiled until these marks on her are erased and she is restored to herself; or is it the case (I am not stupid, these me say these things) that it is the marks on her which drew me to her but which, to my disappointment, I find, do not go deep enough. (64)

The events in the novel are predicated upon the persistent narrative that the "barbarians" – in the case of the novel an amorphous population of brutes that never materialize – are at the proverbial gates, ready to overthrow the order of empire and decimate the law and order rule of what the Magistrate refers to as "the black flower of civilization" (77), and despite claiming that he is not "stupid," his willful ignorance undermines his attempts at resistance; he would rather things go back to what he considers normal than probe the cyclical nature of atrocity. At its core, Coetzee's novel is about the rhetorical and lived implications of designating "the other" – any other –as a barbaric intrusive threat that must be eliminated, but more importantly, it is about the complexities of navigating a space in which one knows that the barbarian threat is a lie.

The novel begins with the Magistrate's recognition of this very fiction:

> The barbarian tribes were arming, the rumor went; the Empire should take precautionary measures, for there would certainly be war.
>
> Of this unrest I myself saw nothing. In private I observed that once in every generation, without fail, there is an episode of hysteria about the barbarians. There is no woman living along the frontier who has not dreamed of a dark barbarian hand coming from beneath the bed to grip her ankle, no man who has not frightened himself with visions of the barbarians carousing in his home, breaking the plates, setting fire to the curtains, raping his daughters. These dreams are the consequences of too much ease. Show me a barbarian army and I will believe. (8)

Additionally, the novel also interrogates the way that language itself – coded, foreign, familiar – becomes a tool in the service of inscribing "otherness" onto the very bodies of those targeted for torture and elimination. As Russell Samolsky notes, the "linkage between the intratextually inscribed bodies and specific future genocides" (2011, 116) is apparent in Coetzee's novel. After a group of prisoners is brought to the outpost connected by a wire threaded through their cheeks, Joll inscribes the word "ENEMY" on their backs in charcoal. The Magistrate observes their plight: "Then the beating begins. The soldiers use the stout green cane staves.… The black charcoal and ochre dust begin to run with sweat and blood. The game, I see, is to beat them till their backs are washed clean" (Coetzee 1980, 105). The prisoners' status as enemies is inscribed in a language that they cannot read onto a part of their bodies that they cannot see. The soldiers beat the word into the body, rendering the text invisible (in that it is "washed clean") but also forcing it into the very bloodstream of those so inscribed. The act is one of inscription and erasure, designation and

culpable deniability. Like the girl whose name we never learn, that the Magistrate never records, these prisoners are nameless enemies, so designated by the state.

After the Magistrate leaves his post to take the tortured girl back to her people (regardless of what the girl may or may not want; she is never consulted), he returns home to find that he has been branded a traitor and is subsequently imprisoned and tortured. Yet even despite his imbrication within the machinations of Empire, the Magistrate continually asserts his desire to stay out of all that is happening, claiming that "I never wished to be drawn into this…I did not mean to get embroiled in this. I am a country magistrate, a responsible official in the service of the Empire, serving out my days on the lazy frontier, waiting to retire….I have not asked for more than a quiet life in quiet times" (8). Regardless, his status as a civil servant simply doing his job is undermined when men digging latrines unearth a mass grave, evidence of a past genocide, an erasure of a previous "barbarian" invasion. The Magistrate, now himself inscribed via torture the only truth that Joll will allow, orders that the bones be reburied rather than exhumed. He buries the truth of the genocides that preceded him and opts to remain "stupid, like a man who lost his way long ago but presses on along a road that may lead nowhere" (207). The turn from denying his stupidity to embracing his status as stupid and lost forecloses any possibility for action beyond complacency.

In this essay, I want to examine the ways that genocide is always rhetorically justified and inscribed on the body before it is literally enacted, as well as the ways that the act of defining what constitutes a genocide is a shifting, politically motivated, and fraught process of uncertainty, social positioning, and willful ignorance. To claim that a certain event constitutes genocide is to invite denial, or instigate military retribution, or, perhaps most significantly, to endanger one's own existence. Further, I begin this exploration with two symbolic texts – Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* and Paul Lynch's 2023 novel

Prophet Song – as both situate totalitarianism, resistance, and genocide within the space of simultaneity the always eminent, already past, and pervasively present. Neither text focuses on an actual historical event (Coetzee's could be any genocide, while Lynch's is set in a fictional contemporary Ireland), but both illustrate the ways that humanity has and will continue to engage in the same cycles of violent erasure. Finally, I bring these texts into conversation with Edwidge Danticat's 1998 novel *The Farming of Bones* and the ways that its protagonist, unlike the Magistrate, rhetorically exhumes the bones of the Haitians who were murdered during the historical Parsley Massacre of 1937 ordered by Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina, then dictator of the Dominican Republic.

Near the end of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, after Joll flees and the Magistrate has regained some semblance of authority, he wants nothing more than to erase, cleanse, and forget the current and past genocides enacted in the name of Empire and Civilization writ large. He tells the men to fill in the grave and find another place to dig. His earlier sentiment, expressed after Joll first arrives and tortures prisoners, is one of willful ignorance: "I want everything cleaned up! Soap and water! I want everything as it was before" (24), and "it would be best if this obscure chapter in the history of the world were obliterated from the earth and we swore to make a new start, to run an empire in which there would be no more injustice, no more pain" (24).

While many critics read Coetzee's novel as an allegory for apartheid era South Africa (and there is much to support such a reading), I tend to agree with Derek Attridge's assessment that "the work is full of detail far in excess of any allegorical reading" (2004, 49). Further, Abdullah M. Dagamseh's reading of the work similarly "attempts to avoid pinning *Waiting for the Barbarians* as merely an allegory of apartheid South Africa and chooses words such as 'symbolic' and 'representation' that allow the narrative not only to speak to 20th-century apartheid South Africa, but also to allow us to expand the narrative to [the] 21st-century" (2022, 2). In my reading, the novel constitutes a text that could reflect multiple locales and time periods – South Africa during apartheid, Germany

or Poland during the Second World War, the Trail of Tears in the 19th century United States, or Rwanda in the 1990s, for example – that itself interrogates the very nature of allegory.

For example, the Magistrate spends time collecting random wooden slips inscribed with characters that he cannot read. When Joll interrogates him and asks him to interpret the text, the Magistrate claims that

> They form an allegory. They can be read in many orders. Further, each single slip can be read in many ways. Together they can be read as a domestic journal, or they can be read as a plan of war, or they can be turned on their sides and read as a history of the last years of Empire – the old Empire, I mean. There is no agreement among scholars about how to interpret these relics of the ancient barbarians. (151)

Of course, the Magistrate is creating a narrative without correlation in reality; he cannot read the text on the slips, just as the prisoners cannot read the word "ENEMY" inscribed on their backs. But that lack of correlation is, in my estimation, exactly the point: the narrative itself, its veracity or provability, does not matter in any context beyond what Joll and his men want for that narrative to mean. As Joll tells the Magistrate when he asks how Joll knows when a person is telling the truth, "there is a certain tone . . . a certain tone enters the voice of a man who is telling the truth" (9); the Magistrate, however, discerns that "pain is truth; all else is subject to doubt" (10).The defining narrative of Empire (or, more broadly speaking, of power) is one of absolute control of the truth. Empire is the creator of truth; all else is subject to doubt. The idea that "there would be no more injustice, no more pain" (18) as the Magistrate wishes, is, of course, an illusion based on an inability to productively counter the might of hegemonic authority.

Imagining Genocide: Paul Lynch's Prophet Song

In her review of Paul Lynch's 2023 Booker Prize winning novel *Prophet Song*, Kristen Martin notes the novel's prescience:

> At times, the novel's relentless bleakness made it almost unbearable to read. And yet its plausibility kept me from looking away. There are passages in *Prophet Song* that echo with 2020's brutal police crackdowns on Black Lives Matter marches and . . . president Donald Trump's increasingly autocratic and apocalyptic language. Some of the ghastliest scenes feel pulled from current reports of Israel's relentless bombardment of the Gaza Strip, from Russia's assault on Ukrainian sovereignty. None of these events had yet occurred when Lynch began writing *Prophet Song* four years ago.

Prophet Song, like *Waiting for the Barbarians*, contemplates fictional or symbolic conflict zones, but Lynch's novel is located more specifically in a fictional contemporary Ireland as it succumbs to authoritarian control.[1] As with Coetzee's novel, the catalyzing event is never clear, even as the characters in the novel – a seemingly normal family of six – succumb, one by one, to the brutality of an oppressive regime. The novel is set two years after the National Alliance Party has come to power and passed an Emergency Powers Act in response to some unknown but supposedly ongoing crisis. A new secret police force, the Garda National Services Bureau (GNSB), is established and given unfettered power to terrorize a populace doing nothing more than exercising their constitutional rights.

Like the Magistrate, Lynch's protagonist, a mother named Eilish, struggles to maintain a sense of normalcy, even as her husband is detained by the GNSB, her eldest son Mark joins the resistance, and her middle son Bailey, a boy of only 14, is tortured and killed. Eilish's sister, who is living in Toronto, consistently tells her that "history is a silent record of those who did not know when to leave" (Lynch 2023, 103) as she begs her sister to flee the increasing terror of her daily existence. Such a statement assumes that one can simply choose to leave, and the novel upends that assumption by showing the reasons why people, like

Elish and Coetzee's Magistrate, stay: Elish is caring for her elderly father Simon, and she is caring for her children, trying to make sure that they can live lives as "normal" as possible.

After her husband Larry is taken and never returns, she waits for him. By the time things have gone too far – after she has lost her husband, her son Mark to the resistance, and her son Bailey to torture and murder – she does choose to leave, taking her daughter Molly and infant son Ben, realizing that "she has lied to herself about so many things" (2023, 235). But whether or not she is able to escape remains unknown, as the novel leaves the reader in a moment just before Eilish and her remaining children board a rubber raft, their future precarious and their survival uncertain.

Lynch has said that he wrote *Prophet Song* as an "attempt at radical empathy," a stab at getting Western readers who often read about authoritarianism and genocide happening elsewhere, to see the universality of crisis. He says, "I was trying to see into the modern chaos. The unrest in Western democracies. The problem of Syria – the implosion of an entire nation, the scale of the refugee crisis and the West's indifference." What texts like *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Prophet Song* do is to show us that the enemy of the nation is often as arbitrary and as fictional as the concept of the nation itself, and that, as Eilish's father Simon tells her, the facts she thinks are true are in fact malleable and unstable: "tradition is nothing more than what everyone can agree on . . . if you change the ownership of the institutions then you change ownership of the facts, you can alter the structure of belief" (Lynch 2023, 20).

Eilish's daughter Molly tells her mother that until these things happen on a personal scale, the crises of other peoples are easy to ignore: "if you want to give war its proper name, call it entertainment, we are now TV for the rest of the world" (160). Eilish's realization near the end of the novel encapsulates the reality of current and past genocides in their dependably repetitive surety:

> And the prophet sings not of the end of the world but of what has been done and what will be done and what is being done to some but not others, that the world is always ending over and over again in one place but not another and that the end of the world is always a local event, it comes to your country and visits your town and knocks on the door of your house and becomes to others but some distant warning, a brief report on the news, an echo of events that has passed into folklore. (293)

Both *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Prophet Song* function as a means of situating the reader within the space of genocide while rendering the time and place of the genocide irrelevant. The things that happen in the novel happen everywhere and all the time. In *Prophet Song*, with the exception of the infant son Ben, the reader never learns what happens to the rest of the family. The same can be said for the Magistrate, whose fate remains unknown at the end of Waiting for the Barbarians as well as for Amabelle, the protagonist of Edwidge Danticat's 1998 novel *The Farming of Bones*, who walks into the Dajabón River "looking for the dawn" (310). Whether she, like her parents, drowns or emerges as if from a baptism is uncertain.

The historical events of the Parsley Massacre in Haiti are the subject of Danticat's novel, and that genocide was predicated on circumstances that feel increasingly similar to current world events playing out in both the Middle East and the United States. It is worth noting the ways that the term "genocide" is being invoked in discussions about the Israeli conflict in Gaza and by the Trump administration's recent (and utterly ridiculous) insistence that white Afrikaners are the victims of genocide in South Africa.

Defining Genocide: Gaza, South Africa, and the United States

According to the United Nations Office of Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, the term "genocide" was coined in 1944

by Polish lawyer Raphäel Lemkin in his book *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* and was recognized as a crime under international law in 1946. Further, "The definition of the crime of genocide as contained in Article II of the Genocide Convention was the result of a negotiating process and reflects the compromise reached among United Nations Member States in 1948 at the time of drafting the Convention. (UN)" According to the Convention,

> genocide means any of the following acts committed with *intent* to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:
>
> 1.Killing members of the group;
> 2.Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
> 3.Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
> 4.Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
> 5.Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. (My emphasis)

The word "intent" is significant in this definition, as intention is difficult to define and determine, and in order to constitute genocide, intent to *physically* destroy a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group must be proven on the part of perpetrators. So "genocide" is both an intellectual or mental and physical act. Gregory H. Stanton founded the NGO Genocide Watch in 1999 with the goals of predicting, preventing, stopping, and punishing genocide. According to Stanton, there are ten non-linear stages of genocide. These are "classification" (establishing that some groups belong in "the nation" while others do not), "symbolization" (aligning rhetorical and symbolic designations to specific groups), "discrimination," "dehumanization," "organization"

(generally by the state), "polarization," "preparation," "persecution," "extermination," and, finally, "denial," both during and after the genocidal process.

Genocide Watch places international conflicts that are indicative of genocide into three categories: escalating crises that require **watching** as there are early signs of potential genocide, crises that have reached preparation phase that requires **warning**, and active genocide **emergencies**, which in 2025 included current crises in Sudan, the DRC, and Myanmar. In December of 2023, the government of South Africa filed suit against Israel at the International Court of Justice maintaining that Israel's actions against Palestinians after the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack violated the Genocide Conventions. The court agreed and ordered that Israel cease and prevent further acts of genocide. In turn, in 2024, Genocide Watch listed the ongoing crisis in Gaza as a genocide, and organizations such as Amnesty International and the United Nations consider the situation in Gaza to be an ongoing genocide. And currently, Genocide Watch has listed grave concerns about the actions of the United States, which it asserts fall into the stages of classification, symbolization, discrimination, polarization, and denial.

It is also important to note that the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention issued a "red flag alert" for the United States after Elon Musk delivered a Nazi salute at the inauguration of President Donald Trump in January of 2025, noting "The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Studies and Prevention is without words after the billionaire Elon Musk gave the Nazi salute twice during his speech at the inauguration of President Donald Trump in the United States of America. Musk's act is a frightening signal of things to come, an offense to the nation, and, possibly, an effort to embarrass and weaken an aging Donald Trump, making him vulnerable to a Musk takeover." (genocidewatch.com, January 21, 2025) Musk has denied that the gesture was a Nazi salute, but regardless, the symbolism speaks for itself. The next month, President Trump established a White South African refugee program,

claiming that White Afrikaner farmers in South Africa – Musk's nation of origin – are the victims of genocide inflicted by Black South Africans. He reasserted this claim to South African President Cyril Ramaphosa during a televised Oval Office meeting in May of 2025.

This statement is a demonstrable lie (Dale), but given South Africa's history of apartheid – state sanctioned segregation constituting legitimate crimes against humanity that sought to disenfranchise, brutalize, silence, and murder Black South Africans – the assertion by Trump was intentionally inflammatory and dangerous. Further, South Africa's apartheid history underpins "South African criticism of Israel is the ANC's [African National Congress] longstanding support for the Palestine Liberation Organization and what he saw as the growing view that Israel was practicing its own brand of apartheid in the occupied territories" (Feinstein qtd. in McGreal 2024).

Resurrecting Genocide: Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones*

I end this essay with an analysis of the ways that Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* serves as an act of resurrection of the stories of lives lost an erased during the 1937 Parsley Massacre in the Dominican Republic. Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina ruled the Dominican Republic from 1930 until his assassination in 1961. The Dominican Republic, a former Spanish colony which occupies two thirds of the island of Hispaniola, shares the island with Haiti, a former French colony that occupies the other third. In the early days of his rule, Trujillo gained international recognition for allowing Jewish immigration from Europe during the 1930s, a time when other more affluent nations were limiting Jewish immigration. He established the Dominican Republic Settlement Association in Sosúa. While one could categorize this immigration policy decision as an admirable response to the Jewish refugee crisis, doing so, according to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "would flatten the complex situation of this small nation and the personality of General Trujillo. Trujillo . . . .

He viewed the European refugee crisis as an opportunity to increase the white population of the Dominican Republic." (ushmm.org, n.d.) Trujilo, who was of mixed-race ancestry, wore makeup that whitened his skin, and in 1937, while championing European immigration, he ordered Dominican troops to massacre black Haitian sugar cane workers, ostensibly in response to the Haitian government's support of Dominican exiles seeking to overthrow him.

Edwidge Danticat's 1998 novel *The Farming of Bones* tells the story of Amabelle Désir, a Haitian woman who, as a child, is taken in by the Ignacios, a Dominican family, after her parents drown in a flash flood. The family cares for Amabelle, but her status in relation to them is clear: she is a servant, even as she is raised alongside Señora Valencia. The two girls are playmates as children, but Amabelle is never fully considered her equal. She notes, "I had called her Señorita as she grew from a child into a young woman. When she married the year before, I called her Señora. She on the other hand had always called me Amabelle" (63). Early in the novel, Amabelle helps the Señora, now married to Señor Pico, a staunch supporter of Trujilo and member of his military, deliver twin babies, a boy and a girl. The girl is darker skinned, and Señora Valencia worries about her, asking "Amabelle do you think my daughter will always be the color she is now? . . . My poor love, what is if she is mistaken for one of your people?" (12). The twins, the light skinned boy named Rafael by Señor Pico "for the Generalissimo" (36) and the darker, weaker girl, born with the umbilical cord wrapped around her neck, named Rosalinda after the Señora's mother who died in childbirth, represent the twin nations of the Dominican Republic and Haiti. That Rafael dies soon after his birth while Rosalinda thrives is, of course, a testament to the resilience of the Haitian people and the ultimate collapse of Trujilo's dictatorial control.

The novel explores the vilification of Haitian sugar cane workers in the Dominican Republic and the ensuing Parsley Massacre of 1937, a genocidal event also called "el corte" (the cutting) ordered by Trujilo,

that resulted in the slaughter of at least 20,000 Haitians . In a speech that Amabelle and the Señora's family hear on the radio, Trujilo designates the Haitians as enemies intent upon destabilizing the Dominican Republic: "Tradition shows a fatal fact . . . that under the protection of rivers, the enemies of peace, who are also the enemies of work and prosperity, found an ambush in which they might do their work, keeping the nation in fear and menacing stability" (97). The rhetoric is the familiar dehumanization of the other, and this speech, like the fearmongering that the Magistrate knows is fiction, is similarly a fabrication and justification for the subsequent torture and murder of innocent peoples.

The modus operandi of the genocide that ensued depended upon one's pronunciation of the word "parsley," or "perejil" in Spanish. Amabelle discusses the importance of parsley to the Haitian people:

> we used pesi, perejil, parsley, the damp summer morningness of it, the mingled sprigs, bristly and coarse, gentle and docile all at once. . .we savored for our food, our teas, our baths, to cleanse our insides as well as our outsides of old aches and griefs, to shed a passing year's dust as a new one dawned, to wash a new infant's hair for the first time and – along with boiled orange leaves – a corpse's remains one final time. (62)

The name of the plant, with its multiple culinary, ritual, and cleansing applications, was the litmus test for membership within the nation; troops scrutinized pronunciation of the word "perejil" to determine who to slaughter, as Haitians, whose first language was Haitian creole, were likely to "mispronounce" the Spanish word. Of course, this linguistic purity test was hardly definitive, and dark-skinned Dominicans were also slaughtered because based on appearance alone, it was often impossible to distinguish Haitians from Dominicans.

Unlike the Magistrate who fails to provide – or even learn – the name

of the "barbarian" girl, *The Farming of Bones* begins with the Amabelle's act of naming her lover: "His name is Sebastien Onius" (1), and Amabelle's narrative situates the story of Sebastien, a cane worker who disappears as the massacre begins, as a named being, a person whose story – like those of the real victims of the massacre – would be erased without her act of witnessing his existence. And she repeats his name throughout the novel, raising him from the dead just like the saint for whom he is named; Saint Sebastian was presumed to have been killed during the Roman emperor Diocletian's persecution of Christians, but he was, according to legend, rescued and healed by Irene of Rome. Shortly afterwards he went to Diocletian to warn him about his sins, and as a result was clubbed to death. Sebastien's mother Mimi tells Amabelle that she named her son after the saint "who died not once, but twice" (240). The "farming of bones" likewise has dual meanings, the second manifest after the murder of the first; we learn that the phrase describes the process of cutting and harvesting sugar cane, a dangerous and difficult task, but Amabelle's story – and Danticat's novel itself – farms the bones of those killed during the massacre, restoring them to the historical record from which they have been omitted.

Eliana de Souza Ávila reads the novel as

> A fictional metatestimonio of the 1937 massacre . . . as told by the adult Amabelle Désir. Danticat's novel testimonio focuses on the "sanctioned ignorance" of Haitian historiography in the context of continued U.S. financial support for the Trujillo administration in the aftermath of the slaughter, its historiographic suppression clearly echoing the obliteration of Haitians' protagonism in then1791-1803 revolution–clashing with the inception of the enlightenment and its establishment of modernity's Eurocentric chronopolitics in the wake of colonialism. (2014, 23)

Further, she asserts that the novel "refocuses . . . whether and how genocide testimonials, as obliterated histories, can re-member geocultural knowledges" (23). Survivor testimony is at the heart of the novel as characters desperately seek to tell their stories and have those stories recorded, but their attempts to narrate the massacre are met with indifference and outright resistance.

After the massacre, Yves, another survivor, tells Amabelle that "there are officials of the state, justices of the peace, who listen to those who survived the slaughter and write their stories down" and that "the Generalissimo has not said that he caused the killing, but he agreed to give money to affected persons" (Danitcat 1998, 231). Both Amabelle and Yves are beaten and nearly killed as they flee for the border, and both wait in line for weeks to have their testimony recorded only to be rebuffed along with thousands of others. When the crowd is told that the justice of the peace has left and no more testimonials will be heard, "the group charged the station looking for someone to write their names in a book, and take their story to President Vincent. They wanted a civilian face to concede that what they had witnessed and lived through truly did happen" (237). The rage at being denied results in the crowd setting fire to the station.

Janice Spleth notes that "genocide studies have long recognized the ineffectiveness of classical social sciences approaches either in raising awareness about the magnitude of suffering that results from genocide or in creating a climate in which such behavior can be avoided by future generations" (2012, 148). Further, others have sought to humanize overwhelming statistics by focusing on the stories of survivors and other forms of literature – like *The Farming of Bones* – and Jennifer Harford Vargas asserts that "*The Farming of Bones* valorizes creative forms of testimony as well as oral and corporeal modes of testifying to and passing on histories of oppression, modes that are not conventionally considered authoritative" (2013, 1166). Amabelle's narrative throughout the novel shifts from introspective vignettes

during which she details childhood memories, the subjects of her nighttime dreams, and her intimacy with Sebastien to testimony set in the present of the novel, during which Amabelle is initially skeptical of the warnings she hears (noting "there were always rumors, rumors of war, of land disputes, of one side of the island planning to invade the other" (Danticat 1998, 140)) to her flight to the border to escape the massacre. The font changes within the text between the bold text of Amabelle's interior memories and the regular text of her testimony.

Sebastien occupies both the space of Amabelle's interior narrative as well as her testimony about the massacre. Near the end of the novel, she asserts his existences repeatedly: "His name is Sebastien Onius and his story is like a fish with no tail, a dress with no hem, a drop with no fall, a body in the sunlight with no shadow"; "His name is Sebastien Onius. Sometimes this is all I know"; "His name is Sebastien Onius. Seven years before his own death, he saw his father die"; "His name is Sebastien Onius and his spirit must be inside the waterfall cave at the source of the stream where the cane workers bathe" (281-83). Amabelle has told us Sebastien's story over the course of the novel, both the story of their intimacy and the story of his life up until the time of his disappearance. Despite there being no one to record her testimony, Amabelle refuses to let his name be erased. And via Amabelle's fictional narrative, Danticat's novel does this same work for the real victims of the massacre whose stories and bodies were erased.

Ultimately, however, the novel "centers the body in its testimonial project" (Vargas 2014, 1174). Amabelle's body, by the end of the novel, is "a map of scars and bruises, a marred testament" (Danticat 1998, 227). he returns late in her life to the Dominican Republic to confront the Señora who tells Amabelle that she helped people escape the massacre: "I hid them because I couldn't hide you, Amabelle. I thought you'd been killed, so everything I did, I did in your name" (299) even as she seeks to absolve her husband for his role in the massacre: "Pico merely followed the orders he was given . . . . I have pondered this so

very often" (300). And at this point in the narrative, Amabelle wants whatever relationship she has with the Señora to end.

In all three of these works of fiction – Coetzee's, Lynch's, and Danticat's – the tortured body constitutes the clearest articulation of abject othering. The barbarian girl is blinded and hobbled by her torturers, and the Magistrate's attempts to wash her wounds away are, of course, unsuccessful. In *Prophet Song,* Eilish searches a morgue, opening body bag upon body bag, for her son Bailey. When she finds him, she sees the obvious signs of torture: "she whispers, my beautiful child, what have they done to you?" (Lynch 2023, 276). And in *The Farming of Bones,* Amabelle's body is, as previously noted, "a map of scars and bruises, a marred testament" (Danticat 1998, 227). To record the events as they unfold, or even after they have transpired, proves difficult if not impossible. The Magistrate attempts to write in order to preserve an account of what has happened. He asks if he is to write "a testament? A memoir? A confession? A history of 30 years on the frontier? All day I sit in a trance waiting for words to come" (Coetzee 1980, 79), and he gives up after staring at the blank page for three days. After waiting for weeks, Amabelle and Yves are turned away without being able to give their testimony. But Amabelle tells Sebastien's story, and Danticat's novel reclaims the stories of the fictional ciphers who stand in for the real people who were murdered during the Parsley Massacre. There is this testimony and this chronicling of an unconscionable act of genocide.

That said, perhaps George Santayana's adage that "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (1905, 284) is not true. History illustrates that those who know the past, who have learned of and from it, and who have witnessed its grand atrocities will nonetheless repeat it. The stages that lead to genocide, despite being clearly enumerated and visible, will endlessly repeat. Such an assertion is no doubt bleak, but recorded history of our species seems to indicate that it is true. At the end of the novel, after Amabelle has confronted

the Señora, the Señora tells her "we lived in a time of massacres . . . . Before Papi died, all he did was listen on his radio to stories of different kinds of . . . cortes, from all over the world" (Danticat 1998, 300). And we do live in a time of massacres; we always have. As the narrator in Lynch's novel tells us, "the end of the world is always a local event, it comes to your country and visits your town and knocks on the door of your house and becomes to others but some distant warning, a brief report on the news, an echo of events that has passed into folklore" (Lynch 2023, 293). Perhaps in our retellings of various ends of the world we will someday figure out the kind of narrative that can keep us from repetition. Until then, may the prophets keep speaking.

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