

Introduction

There is first of all the problem of the opening, namely, how to get us from where we are, which is, as yet, nowhere, to the far bank. It is a simple bridging problem, a problem of knocking together a bridge.

~ J. M. Coetzee, 'What Is Realism?'¹

J. M. Coetzee's 'What Is Realism?', originally presented as a lecture at Bennington College in Vermont, and subsequently published in the journal *Salmagundi*, opens thus. Coetzee's title may well lead one to expect something in the genre of criticism, but this is instead a dramatic fiction about an acclaimed Australian novelist, Elizabeth Costello, who reluctantly travels to America to receive a major literary award at a (fictional) college in Massachusetts.

In real life, Coetzee, the South African author and Distinguished Professor of Literature at the University of Cape Town who created Costello, has recently made history as the first writer to win Britain's influential Booker Prize for a second time.² Awarded for the 'best book of the year' in England and the Commonwealth, the prize was first given to Coetzee in 1983 for *Life & Times of Michael K*, and now, for his latest novel, *Disgrace* (1999), his eighth work of fiction to date. His editor Geoff Mulligan from Secker & Warburg accepted the award on his behalf, reading from a letter which Coetzee had

¹ J. M. Coetzee, 'What Is Realism?', *Salmagundi* 114/115 (Spring/Summer 1997), 60–81.

² See 'J. M. Coetzee Wins Booker Prize — Again', *Monday Paper* [Weekly Paper of the University of Cape Town] 18, 33 (1–8 November 1999), 1–2. In the article, Coetzee is congratulated by UCT's Vice-Chancellor and Dean of the Faculty of the Humanities for his second Booker Prize. 'The University awards the position of Distinguished Professor to individuals who have excelled beyond their disciplines or who are regarded as national assets.' Coetzee was appointed Arderne Professor of English at UCT in 1994; he took up his new post on 1 January 2000.

written in the event of winning the prize: ‘If I do win it’s only because the stars are in a lucky conjunction for me.’ The Booker Prize, he said, ‘remains the ultimate prize to win in the English-speaking world.’³

In a fiction-writing career which now spans twenty-five years,⁴ Coetzee has been the recipient of numerous prestigious awards throughout the world, none of which, however, has generated the publicity and international recognition of the Booker Prize. This latest accolade, which comes at the close of a decade, a century and a millennium, is for a novel which is more explicit about race, place and a contemporary South African context than any of his other novels, save for *Age of Iron*, published in 1990. While both *Age of Iron* and *Disgrace* have been received in some quarters as ‘realism’, it is a mode of writing which Coetzee’s corpus as a whole has productively contested, particularly from the ‘modernism’⁵ of his first novel *Dusklands* in 1974 to the metafiction of his fifth novel *Foe* in 1986.

This thesis focuses on the formative period of Coetzee’s writing career, leading up to *Foe* and his first book of criticism, *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (1988) — a text which markedly resonates with the four novels under discussion in the following four chapters. In this critical study, Coetzee is concerned with the reading of the South African landscape in poetry, painting, and prose. Through discussions of the farm novel and *plaasroman*, the early European travellers in the Cape, and the ‘poetry of empty landscape’, Coetzee concentrates on the ‘imaging’ and hermeneutics of the land, and the way explorers, travellers, missionaries, colonial officials,

³ J. M. Coetzee, acceptance letter for the 1999 Booker Prize. See Fiachra Gibbons, ‘Absent Coetzee Wins Surprise Second Booker Award’, *The Guardian*, 26 October 1999, 1.

⁴ His first novel was published in 1974. See J. M. Coetzee, *Dusklands* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1974). It has been thirty years since Coetzee started drafting this first work on 1 January 1970. See Box 1 of 27, *Dusklands MSS*, item 5, ‘Relaas van J. J. Coetzee I’, J. M. Coetzee Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

⁵ *Dusklands* was hailed as South Africa’s ‘first modern novel’. See Jonathan Crewe, review of *Dusklands*, by J. M. Coetzee, *Contrast* 34 9, 2 (1974), 90–95; Frances Bowers, ‘First SA Modern Novel?’, *The Cape Times* [Cape Town], 5 June 1974, 8.

and settlers 'read' the Cape and its inhabitants. Central to my argument is how the writerly quality of Coetzee's novels plays with a South African literary and geographical space, through travel and the journey but also through settlement — while at the same time culling from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European works (Defoe, Dostoevsky and Byron), and from modernist texts (for example, Kafka, Beckett and Nabokov) in a postmodernist fashion.

The first two chapters on Coetzee's early fiction have a decidedly colonial South African emphasis. At the time of publication, neither *Dusklands* nor its immediate successor, *In the Heart of the Country* (1977), was given the world-wide acclaim of *Life & Times of Michael K* and *Foe*, both of which, as I argue in Chapters Three and Four respectively, have come to most represent the 'Coetzee canon' to date. If *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) was instrumental in establishing Coetzee as a novelist, and his success confirmed with *Michael K*, *Foe* was seen as a departure from South African concerns. With its allusions to Defoe's canon, it has ironically been 'canonised' in its own right, not only in many university syllabuses but even in Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon*.⁶

For *Life & Times of Michael K*, the Booker coverage and reception produced a certain reading of Coetzee, and of South Africa.⁷ This is a major premise in Chapter Three of this study, where I discuss the idea of 'writing South Africa' (to borrow from the title of a recent collection of essays),⁸ in terms of Coetzee's own work. My thesis was in the final stages of revision by the time *Disgrace* was published, subsequently shortlisted, and finally pronounced winner of the 1999 Booker Prize. This new novel certainly

⁶See Appendix D: 'The Chaotic Age: A Canonical Prophecy', under the 'Africa' heading, in Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1994), 560.

⁷See my discussion in Chapter Three of this thesis.

⁸See Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly (eds), *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid and Democracy, 1970–1995* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

invites new readings of Coetzee, of the ‘new’ South Africa, and links with his previous novels. It is vintage Coetzee, showing both traces of, and progressions from, his earlier work. By way of illustrating how this is so, I offer below a brief look at Coetzee’s novels in the nineties, the reception of *Disgrace* so far, and towards the end of the Introduction, a more substantial version of my own review of the American edition of *Disgrace*.⁹

In the British press, *The Guardian* describes *Disgrace* as ‘a dark meditation on the new South Africa’. Quoting Gerald Kaufman, chair of the 1999 Booker Prize judges, the article reports that *Disgrace* was “‘the most beautifully written, most beautifully constructed novel” of the six shortlisted and the perfect millennial book in that it rounded off the colonial era and showed how the balance of power had shifted.’¹⁰

Boyd Tonkin, literary editor of *The Independent* and another of this year’s Booker Prize judges, wrote of his ‘appalling sense of satisfaction — above all, that we rightly gave the prize to the first masterpiece to emerge from the new South Africa, J M Coetzee’s *Disgrace* — perhaps the best novel to carry off the Booker in a decade.’¹¹

When *Disgrace* first made this year’s shortlist, Justin Cartwright, a South African writer living in England, assessed the novel for a profile in *The Daily Telegraph*:

I would guess that in its bleak realism it is the product of Coetzee’s deep unease about the dangerous superficiality of the philosophies underlying the new

⁹The U. S. edition of *Disgrace* was published by Viking in November 1999, approximately three weeks after the Booker announcement and three months ahead of schedule. A shorter and much edited version of my review of the novel was published as ‘1999 Booker Prize – ‘Disgrace’, *The Oregonian* [Portland], 12 December 1999. See the online edition: www.oregonlive.com/books/indexssf?/books/criticev/99/12/al_11coetz12.frame.

¹⁰Gibbons, ‘Absent Coetzee Wins’, 1. Comments are from the chair of the 1999 Booker Prize judging panel, Gerald Kaufman.

¹¹Boyd Tonkin, ‘Yes, I Was a Booker Prize Judge — and Proud of It’, *The Independent*, 29 October 1999, The Friday Review, 5.

South Africa and that he was not prepared to risk misinterpretation by clothing his unease in his more familiar allegory.¹²

Adam Mars-Jones, reviewing the book for *The Observer*, more convincingly writes:

Any novel set in South Africa is fated to be read as a political portrait, but the fascination of *Disgrace* — a somewhat perverse fascination, as some will feel — is the way it both encourages and contests such a reading by holding extreme alternatives in tension.¹³

In South Africa, a perceptive review in the *Weekly Mail and Guardian* by Jane Taylor, author of *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, describes the novel from the outset as ‘remarkable’:

the narrative is compelling, wonderful in its evocation of familiar circumstances, beautiful in its simplicity. For any reader with an interest in questions arising around truth and reconciliation, or capital punishment, or global discourses on war crimes, or gender and identity, this is a significant work.¹⁴

Lin Sampson, after writing about her failed attempt to interview Coetzee in the *Sunday Times Lifestyle*, reviews *Disgrace*, but she is not impressed, calling it ‘an excellently written cop-out’.¹⁵ As with Cartwright, she sees it as something of a concession:

Most of his books are evasive, allegorical, mired in metaphor. *Disgrace* might have been a conscious attempt to readdress the situation. And although he has

¹² Justin Cartwright, profile of *Disgrace*, by J. M. Coetzee in ‘The Booker Prize’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 22 September 1999, 12.

¹³ Adam Mars-Jones, ‘Lesbians Are Like That Because They’re Fat. Stands to Reason’, review of *Disgrace*, by J. M. Coetzee, *The Observer Review*, 18 July 1999, 13 [Books].

¹⁴ Jane Taylor, ‘The Impossibility of Ethical Action’, review of *Disgrace*, by J. M. Coetzee, *Weekly Mail and Guardian* [Johannesburg], 27 July 1999. From the online edition: www.mg.co.za/mg/books/9907/990727-disgrace.html.

¹⁵ Lin Sampson, ‘Looking for the Heart of J. M. Coetzee’, review of *Disgrace*, by J. M. Coetzee, *Sunday Times Lifestyle* [Johannesburg], 22 August 1999, 5 [Books].

grappled with a realistically observed contemporary South Africa, what started as an entertaining and well-crafted read became a book with such a flawed ending that one could not escape the notion that Coetzee had tried to reconcile a creeping despondency with the country with some view — however cranky — of a workable future in order to appease a spectrum of political thinking.¹⁶

The South African literary debate, in the lead-up to the country's first all-race elections in 1994, had been dominated by Albie Sachs's controversial call for a moratorium on the slogan: 'Culture is a weapon of the struggle'¹⁷ and the eloquent essays of Njabulo Ndebele, who argued that writers should be 'storytellers, not casemakers'.¹⁸ The determination to create the 'new' South Africa has included, it would seem, hopes for the creation of a 'new' South African literature. In a 1993 article in *The Guardian*, the academic-novelist Elleke Boehmer wrote:

More than anything, South African writing requires new forms for thinking about reality. Not history enclosing and explaining fictions, but fictions nudging — absentmindedly, even irresponsibly — at history's outer edge.¹⁹

A decade earlier, in a 1983 interview, Coetzee had said of the realist forms and common themes that predominated South African literature at the time:

'What we might say ... is that certain fictional situations are written out, or exhausted. For example, white girl and black boy fall in love and are hounded

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Albie Sachs, 'Preparing Ourselves for Freedom', in *Spring Is Rebellious: Arguments about Cultural Freedom by Albie Sachs and Respondents*, ed. Ingrid de Kok and Karen Press (Cape Town: Buchu, 1990), 19–29.

¹⁸ Njabulo S. Ndebele, 'Turkish Tales and Some Thoughts on S. A. Fiction', review of *Anatolian Tales*, by Yashar Kemal, *Staffrider* 6, 1 (1984), 48. Note this article was reprinted in Ndebele's collection of essays, first published by the Congress of South African Writers in 1991, then in 1994 in the UK as *South African Literature and Culture: Rediscovery of the Ordinary* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

¹⁹ Elleke Boehmer, review of *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History from the Inside*, by Stephen Clingman, in the article, 'The Face of Modern Africa: Fiction and Politics', ed. James Wood, *The Guardian*, 25 May 1993, 9. Boehmer has published two novels to date: *Screens Against the Sky* (London: Bloomsbury, 1990) and *An Immaculate Figure* (London: Bloomsbury, 1993).

by the police; or brave black patriot resists sadistic interrogators. One's heart quite rightly sinks when one opens a book and finds that one is being taken once more down these well-trodden paths.

'But I would say that the writers of such books are not so much captives of social and political problems as of stereotyped ways of representing those problems.'²⁰

There has indeed been a shift in South African literary trends in the new democratic age of Presidents Mandela and Mbeki. One could say that Njabulo Ndebele's call for the 'rediscovery of the ordinary'²¹ has merged with Boehmer's challenge for 'stories that juggle generic options',²² something which Michael Cawood Green's debut novella *Sinking* admirably achieves and exhibits in its very subtitle: *A Story of the Disaster Which Took Place at the Blyvooruitzicht Mine, Far West Rand, on 3 August 1964 (Being a History, Romance, Allegory, Prophecy, Survey, Domestic Drama — And None of the Above)*.²³

With *Disgrace*, Coetzee offers his first 'South African' fiction in the post-apartheid era, and he 'juggles his generic options' by opting for third-person narration and more plot.²⁴ *Age of Iron*, on the other hand, published in the year of Nelson Mandela's release from prison and written in the preceding years of a state of emergency (indeed, the narrative is dated '1986–1989'), is an epistolary novel. It features another academic character, Mrs Curren, the retired white classics professor who, after witnessing death

²⁰ Quoted in Hugh Robertson, 'Award-Winning J. M. Coetzee Has Positive Views on Publishing', *Pretoria News*, 18 August 1983, 7.

²¹ As in the title of Ndebele's book cited in n15.

²² Elleke Boehmer, 'What Will They Read Now? The Loosening of the Novel After the Struggle Against Apartheid', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 1 April 1994, 11.

²³ From the title page of Michael Cawood Green, *Sinking: A Verse Novella* (Parktown, SA: Penguin Books South Africa, 1997).

²⁴ One book critic gives all plot and little in the way of review. See Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, 'Caught in Shifting Values (and Plot)', review of *Disgrace*, by J. M. Coetzee, *The New York Times*, 11 November 1999. See the online edition: www.nytimes.com/books/99/11/11/1199disgrace-book-review.html.

in the townships, is challenged for the inadequacy of her words. Now ill with cancer, this narrative is Mrs Curren's final missive from Cape Town to her daughter in America. Whether it is delivered by the enigmatic Vercueil, the vagrant who has set up home with her, is an open question.

Opening and closing the 1990s, then, are Coetzee's most immediate novels in terms of a South African context; both *Age of Iron* and *Disgrace* deal with questions of authority and land ownership and different types of narration. *The Master of Petersburg*, published in the year of South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, however, turns away from an ostensibly realist Cape narrative and returns to international metafiction. A sort of Russian sequel to *Foe*, in this later novel Dostoevsky and the Tsarist empire of the nineteenth century replace Defoe and the burgeoning British empire; issues of state censorship succeed the editorial intervention of the eighteenth-century book trade; and authorship is given an even more precarious position of power.²⁵

This thesis is informed by all of Coetzee's work, but it is a purposefully selective study. Instead of a full survey of Coetzee's corpus, my focus restricts itself to four of his novels; my reading of his first novel, *Dusklands*, in Chapter One, is furthermore a discussion which thoroughly emphasises the second novella in the book: 'The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee' (1974). Chapters Two, Three and Four respectively discuss the novels *In the Heart of the Country* (1977), *Life & Times of Michael K* (1983), and *Foe* (1986). Thus, while this is not a developmental history of his entire corpus, the chapters are sequential and illustrate a certain progression in Coetzee's first two decades as a novelist.

²⁵I discuss this novel elsewhere. See T. Kai [Norris] Easton, review of *The Master of Petersburg*, by J. M. Coetzee, *Chimo* [The Newsjournal of the Canadian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies], 30 (Spring 1995), 56–59.

I have tried to range across Coetzee's corpus as it relates to my chosen texts, while also heeding the structure which has emerged out of my research: long chapters, divided into three or more sections, which discuss issues around the writing and reading of each of the four novels — the processes of production, publishing and reception in local South African and international terms; questions of intertextuality, authorship and colonial representations of the South African landscape — before finally closing with a reading of each novel which aims to illustrate the discursive strands of the preceding sections. My scope thus more widely looks at textual processes and proliferations, comparative 'colonial encounters',²⁶ the imaging of the land, and what Coetzee has called 'the Discourse of the Cape'.²⁷

My work on Coetzee here departs from most other criticism of Coetzee's writings in that its emphasis is on a more *colonial* space.²⁸ Notable exceptions include Mike Marais, who has consistently contributed journal articles on Coetzee (and who has now completed his doctoral thesis on Coetzee while lecturing at Rand Afrikaans University in South Africa) and whose critique is grounded in similar areas to mine — in Coetzee's use of

²⁶ From the title of Peter Hulme's work, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492–1797* (London: Methuen, 1986).

²⁷ J. M. Coetzee, *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 15.

²⁸ There are five published full-length works, three collections of essays and two comparative studies on Coetzee to date. See Teresa Dovey, *The Novels of J. M. Coetzee: Lacanian Allegories* (Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1988); Dick Penner, *Countries of the Mind: The Fiction of J. M. Coetzee* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1989); Susan VanZanten Gallagher, *A Story of South Africa: J. M. Coetzee's Fiction in Context* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991); David Attwell, *J. M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993); and Dominic Head, *J. M. Coetzee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Michael Valdez Moses (ed.), *The Writings of J. M. Coetzee*, special issue of *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 93, 1 (Winter 1994); Graham Huggan and Stephen Watson (eds), *Critical Perspectives on J. M. Coetzee* (London: Macmillan, 1996); and Sue Kossew (ed.), *Critical Essays on J. M. Coetzee* (New York: G. K. Hall, 1998); Rosemary Jane Jolly, *Colonization, Violence and Narration in White South African Writing: André Brink, Breyten Breytenbach and J. M. Coetzee* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1996); and Sue Kossew, *Pen and Power: A Post-Colonial Reading of the Novels of J. M. Coetzee and André Brink* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997). The *MLA International Bibliography* presently lists some 250 articles on Coetzee published since 1980. See Chapter One, which situates my thesis in this critical context.

metafiction, in his interrogation of colonialism.²⁹ His angle, however, is on the inscription of the reader in the text, while mine is on the inscription of the *land* in the text and how, in W. J. T. Mitchell's phrase, landscape 'works as a cultural practice.'³⁰ An American doctoral dissertation by Ting-Yao Luo is a reading of space in Coetzee's fiction and, indeed, 'Crossing the White Country: J. M. Coetzee and Postcolonial Agency',³¹ does discuss *White Writing*. Luo's emphasis, however, is a more philosophical and abstract reading of space, and is less engaged with South African discourses and criticism, while my approach explores the internationalism of Coetzee's work in terms of a local geography. Thus, the focus on space here is a textual one: on acts of inscription, through 'naming and plotting',³² the South African landscape, particularly the Cape; and on intertextuality and Coetzee's revisions of colonial genres.

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A brilliantly provocative paper by Alexander Moore entitled 'Thinking African Space', presented at the recent 'Textual Space' conference at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London,³³ challenges the

²⁹ See, for example, articles by Mike Marais such as, "'Omnipotent Fantasies" of a Solitary Self: J. M. Coetzee's "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee"', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 28, 2 (1993), 48–65; 'Looking Backward to the "New South Africa": J. M. Coetzee's Explorations of the Protocols of Travel Writing', *Literator* 15, 1 (April 1994), 21–32; 'Colonialism and the Epistemological Underpinnings of the Early English Novel', *English in Africa* 23, 1 (May 1996), 47–65; "'One of those islands without an owner": The Aesthetics of Space in *Robinson Crusoe* and J. M. Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K*', *Current Writing* 8, 1 (April 1996), 19–32; and 'The Hermeneutics of Empire: Coetzee's Post-Colonial Metafiction', in *Critical Perspectives on J. M. Coetzee*, ed. Graham Huggan and Stephen Watson (London: Macmillan, 1996), 66–81. Hermann Wittenberg has written two brief but incisive papers on Coetzee and space. See his 'Spatial Systems in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*.' *Inter Action* 3 (1995): 142–51 and 'Michael K and the Rhetorics of Walking', *Inter action* 4 (1996): 35–37.

³⁰ W. J. T. Mitchell (ed.) 'Introduction', *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 1.

³¹ Ting-Yao Luo, 'Crossing the White Country: J. M. Coetzee and Postcolonial Agency', (PhD dissertation, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1994).

³² A phrase borrowed from Anthony Vital, 'Reading the Nation'. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association (San Diego, Calif., 1994).

³³ Alexander Moore, 'Thinking African Space'. Paper presented at the conference 'Textual Space: The Geographies of Modern Literatures in Africa, Asia and the Middle East', held

simplistic adaptation of spatial analysis in much of postcolonial studies, arguing for a return to its basis in philosophy and geography.³⁴ Moore is not arguing against the overlapping of disciplines, but rather calls for a greater specificity in what we mean by 'space'. As he says, 'space can easily become a sort of theoretical hold-all.'³⁵

Moore is right to argue for specificity: for just as the global terminology inherent in much of postcolonial studies does not adequately examine the local contexts of writers and their works, so too spatial analysis deserves more refined application. In this respect, in an article for *The Times Higher* on recent theoretical interventions in human geography, David N. Livingstone, Professor of Geography at Queen's University, Belfast, offers an excellent working definition of 'space':

Space, we have come to realise, is not an empty container within which human action takes place, or a mere stage on which the human drama unfolds. Rather, it is constitutive of social interaction. Getting a handle on some of the ways space is produced has done a good deal to open up fresh lines of inquiry at every scale ... These have resulted in a more profound understanding of the ways a variety of sites — the school, the hospital, the asylum, the laboratory, the boardroom — exercise immense social power, of how vast stretches of the globe have been 'imagined' and constructed in ways that consign whole cultures to the margins of western significance, and of the manner in which cartographic representation persistently acts as an instrument of domination or liberation.³⁶

at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 13-14 September 1999. I am grateful to Alexander Moore for permission to quote from his paper in its (as yet) unpublished form.

³⁴The 'Textual Space' conference had one delegate who is pursuing a doctorate in geography, despite the convenors (of whom I was one) having missed the opportunity to publicise to geography departments specifically. While we were aware that we were borrowing from geography, we didn't quite realise that cultural geographers were borrowing from literature! Our delegate had written a paper on one of our guest writers, Romesh Gunsekera.

³⁵With thanks to Alexander Moore for his comments. Personal communication, 9 December 1999.

³⁶David N. Livingstone, 'I Think, Therefore I Theorise', *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 16 January 1998, 18.

A 1974 issue of the *Journal of Geography* featured an article (published in the same year as Coetzee's *Dusklands*), which had this striking title: 'A Game of European Colonization in Africa'. It features a board game, where five 'players' — representing England, France, Belgium, Germany and Portugal — 'throw the dice, move, buy the various territories'. The game, 'a sort of Monopoly', notably gives the most expensive price tag to the Cape of Good Hope.³⁷

This is one example from Franco Moretti's newly translated and innovative *Atlas of the European Novel*, which offers a *literary* approach to cartographic representation. In a footnote, Moretti mentions the response to his project, the surprise that here he is making maps, when the rest of the academic world is deconstructing them — revising them as texts, historical and literary. Moretti's concentration is on the journey and geography that generate, and are generated by, the European novel. Defining 'literary geography', Moretti writes that it 'may indicate the study of *space in literature*; or else, *of literature in space*.'³⁸

The analysis of literary space which Alexander Moore proposes is to 'discover what kind of socio-geographical space the novelist is attempting to bring into being', a method which compares 'colonial and postcolonial texts in terms of their different "spatializing" programs: to judge one kind of space-writing against another'.³⁹ Inspired by the work of John Noyes and Paul Carter,⁴⁰ Moore's approach is 'rooted in the supposition that what literature does not do is simply report, comment on, or interpret real social space;

³⁷ Franco Moretti, *Atlas of European Literature 1800–1900* (London: Verso, 1998), 17.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁹ Moore, 'Thinking African Space'.

⁴⁰ See John K. Noyes, *Colonial Space: Spatiality in the Discourse of German South West Africa 1884–1915* (Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1992); Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

rather, literature is as involved in manufacturing real social spaces, spaces outside the text.⁴¹

Moore's paper in fact concludes in the vein of Moretti's definition, comparing two African texts, neither of which, as he says, are 'philosophical treatises'.

They are instead domestic effects of those other texts: on the one hand, the imperial agent John Barrow's early nineteenth-century travelogue written for the edification of the first British governor at the Cape of Good Hope, and on the other J. M. Coetzee's latest novel *Disgrace*, which is set in, or rather over, much the same South African territory that Barrow defines.⁴²

Moore explores how these two figures in their distinctly separate ways contest procedures for defining space and Barrow, as one of the representatives of the 'Discourse of the Cape', discussed by Coetzee in his own *White Writing*, is certainly an intriguing figure for his illustration. As Nigel Penn has written: 'If any one man may be said to have "captured" the Cape and placed it within the cognitive co-ordinates of the Second British Empire it was John Barrow.'⁴³

As Barrow's rather different twentieth-century counterpart, Coetzee provides a new inscription of this geographical space in *Disgrace*, set as it is in the newly divided post-apartheid provinces of the Western and Eastern Cape. This more recent reconfiguration of the region, as Bill Nasson describes below, carries a history which goes back to Barrow and beyond:

Indeed, as we look back across the more recent centuries, it is quite apparent that the colonial and imperial manufacture of South Africa is incomprehensible without the local — and regional — history of the Western

⁴¹ Moore, 'Thinking African Space'.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Nigel Penn, 'Mapping the Cape: John Barrow and the First British Occupation of the Colony, 1795-1803', *Pretexts* 4, 2 (Summer 1993), 38.

Cape; Table Bay may currently not be famous for its maritime buzz, but the port of Cape Town has long been part of the Atlantic world, a silent Clapham Junction of the Oceanic trade routes. Mid-nineteenth-century Liverpool may have been remote from Harwich; it was hardly remote from Cape Town when its Manchester-produced textiles were being floated off.⁴⁴

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My intertextual approach emphasises Coetzee's *responses* to colonial textuality. In the course of my research on 'The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee' (which involved reading back into South African history as well as literature, and reading Coetzee's fictional narrative against its original in translation), my interest in Coetzee's writing became centred on his native space, the Cape, but also on its colonial history — the Cape Colony — and then on to other colonial literatures. The international conference, 'Southern Spaces', held at the University of London in 1993, and the resulting book, *Text, Theory, Space: Land, Literature and History in South Africa and Australia*, co-edited by its convenors Kate Darian-Smith, Liz Gunner and Sarah Nuttall,⁴⁵ greatly influenced the direction of my work on Coetzee and my interest in reading *across* territories in colonial discourse and postcolonial studies. I have as a result brought a comparative and interdisciplinary angle to what is an otherwise very regional focus.

Like Simon Gikandi in his *Maps of Englishness*, the emphasis of my argument is deliberately textual, concentrating on Coetzee's writing and the production and meaning of texts in the colonial enterprise.⁴⁶ To give a sense of the theory behind this study, I refer to the definitions of colonial or

⁴⁴ Bill Nasson, 'Context, History and the Western Cape', review essay of *The Angry Divide: Social and Economic History of the Western Cape* (1989), ed. W. G. James and M. Simons and *Johnny Gomas — Voice of the Working Class: A Political Biography* (1989), by Doreen Musson, *S A Literary Review* 1, 3 (September 1991), 19.

⁴⁵ Kate Darian-Smith, Liz Gunner and Sarah Nuttall (eds), *Text, Theory, Space: Land, Literature and History in South Africa and Australia* (London: Routledge, 1996).

⁴⁶ Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

colonialist discourse proffered by Peter Hulme and Elleke Boehmer, who are respectively quoted below:

Underlying the idea of colonial discourse ... is the presumption that during the colonial period large parts of the non-European world were produced for Europe through a discourse that imbricated sets of questions and assumptions, methods of procedure and analysis, and kinds of writing and imagery⁴⁷

It is in the light of this textuality of empire that the theoretical term, *colonialist discourse*, is probably best understood. Colonialist discourse can be taken to refer to that collection of symbolic practices, including textual codes and conventions and implied meanings, which Europe deployed in the process of its colonial expansion⁴⁸

It should be clear here that my aim, as Gikandi also points out, is not to 'aestheticize colonialism',⁴⁹ by concentrating on colonial textuality, nor is this a project which relies on a particular theoretical model. Instead, the thesis features a selective use of ideas from metafiction, postmodernism, and poststructuralism alongside critical studies on colonial space and travel writing. Paul Carter's *The Road to Botany Bay*, Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes*, Sara Mills's *Discourses of Difference*, Kay Schaffer's *In the Wake of First Contact*, Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism*, and Coetzee's own *White Writing* are significant influences on (and the latter of course is integral to) the present work.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Hulme, *Colonial Encounters*, 2.

⁴⁸ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 50. As Boehmer defines her use of this term in her Introduction, in contrast to *colonial* literature (literature written during the colonial period both in Britain as well as the rest of Empire), *colonialist* literature 'was specifically concerned with colonial expansion. On the whole it was literature written by and for colonizing Europeans about non-European lands dominated by them' (3).

⁴⁹ Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness*, xviii.

⁵⁰ Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay* (1989); Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992); Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991); Kay Schaffer, *In the Wake of First Contact: The Stories of Eliza Fraser* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994); and Coetzee, *White Writing* (1988).

‘White Writing’ in my thesis title alludes both to this important critical *work* (as a collection of seven essays on South African white writers in the years leading up to the Second World War) and to ‘white writing’ — as Coetzee’s allusion to *l’écriture blanche*⁵¹ suggests — as *text*. For the distinction between ‘work’ and ‘text’, I refer to Barthes, who describes *intertextuality* as a network of texts, an ‘open, infinite process’ as opposed to the ‘closed object’ of the ‘work’.⁵² As the main part of my title indicates, *textuality* and the *land* are the central threads in my reading of Coetzee’s fiction, and it may be useful to provide some definitions here as well.

On the most literal level, *textuality is ‘writing’*, as the chapter heading by Barbara Johnson illustrates in Lentricchia and McLaughlin’s *Critical Terms for Literary Study*. Johnson’s contribution cited below sums up the definition given by Barthes and offers, for me, the best explication of what ‘textuality’ is exactly and how, in the following four chapters, I attempt to read back on Coetzee’s intertextuality:

What interests Barthes is the *tension* between the concept of Literature and the concept of textuality. While Literature is seen as a series of discrete and highly meaningful Great Works, textuality is the manifestation of an open-ended, heterogeneous, disruptive force of signification and erasure that transgresses all closure — a force that is operative even within the Great Works themselves.⁵³

⁵¹See Richard Begam, ‘White Writing in *Foe*’, in *The Writings of J. M. Coetzee*, ed. Michael Valdez Moses. Special issue of *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 93, 1 (Winter 1994), 117: ‘Coetzee has indicated that “there is an echo” of *écriture blanche* in “white writing,” but the meaning he assigns to the phrase is, he says “clearly set out” in *White Writing* [Begam’s personal correspondence]. See also David Attwell (ed.), *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*, by J. M. Coetzee (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 144. Attwell is speaking of Coetzee’s essay, ‘The Agentless Sentence’: ‘I notice ... that deconstruction, in the form of Derrida’s “White Mythology,” comes into your work at this point.’ See also Luo, ‘Crossing the White Country’, 38; Robert Young, *White Mythologies* (London: Routledge, 1990).

⁵²See Brenda K. Marshall on Barthes’s ‘From Work to Text’ in her *Teaching the Postmodern: Fiction and Theory* (London: Routledge, 1992), 126–27. See also my discussion in Chapter Two, in the second section entitled: ‘Intertextuality and the “Myth of Filiation”’: Shakespeare, Defoe and Colonial Discourse’.

⁵³Barbara Johnson, ‘Writing’, in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, 2nd. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 40.

Johnson's definition helpfully links textuality with canonicity, showing how texts circulate and how, through their varied reception, they come to be referred to as 'classic' or 'Great Works'. Thus simultaneously textuality is writing as process, without origin or source, while at the same time it can generate multiple readings and references to specific 'classic' works. *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe* are examples of such works which have proliferated through other readings, as I discuss in Chapter Four.

A poststructuralist concept, 'textuality' is equally related to Foucault's idea of discourse. As Sara Mills explains:

By analysing the rules of discourse, Foucault has given us a vocabulary to describe how it is that there are surface regularities across a wide range of texts, and by showing that these are representational practices rather than 'scientific' accounts, he enables resistance to such practices.

...

Discourse becomes not simply a grouping of written texts within a particular discursive formation, but, at one and the same time, the site of struggles for meaning and also a means of constituting humans as individuals.⁵⁴

As it is described by *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, textuality is more recently being 'associated with questions of power: not only the power play between text and subtext, but of the competing claims and ideologies which make themselves evident in a text.'⁵⁵ Note, however, Dennis Porter in *Haunted Journeys*, who states: 'In opposition to discourse theory stands the theory of textuality, or of "writing" in the strong modern sense'.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, 68. See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

⁵⁵ Alex Premonger and T.V.F. Brogan (eds), *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 1277.

⁵⁶ Dennis Porter, *Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 6.

Intertextuality is defined in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia* as ‘those conditions of textuality ... which affect and describe the relations between texts, and in most respects is synonymous with textuality.’⁵⁷ Or as Linda Hutcheon puts it in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*:

among the many things that postmodern intertextuality challenges are both closure and single, centralized meaning. Its willed and wilful provisionality rests largely upon its acceptance of the inevitable textual infiltration of prior discursive practices.⁵⁸

* * *

In the main part of my thesis title, I have deliberately referred to ‘the land’ — a more encompassing term — rather than ‘landscape’, although it is the latter term which I use in much of my discussion. For it is in mapping and naming, in imaging and possessing, that space becomes place,⁵⁹ that land becomes *landscape*. As Simon Schama notes, ‘landscape’

entered the English language, along with herring and bleached linen, as a Dutch import at the end of the sixteenth century. And *landschap*, like its Germanic root, *Landschaft*, signified a unit of human occupation, indeed a jurisdiction, as much as anything that might be a pleasing object of depiction.⁶⁰

And as Neville Dubow has written in his essay contribution to David Goldblatt’s new book of photographs on South African architecture:

For the markings on the landscape go beyond its surface: they are testimony to the ways in which contestation over land, and what lies beneath it, has

⁵⁷ Premonger and Brogan (eds), *The New Princeton Encyclopedia*, 620: ‘It originates in the crisis of representation and the absent origin that would guarantee meaning, centrality, and reference. Without an ultimate referent that would make possible the self-presence and meaning of a text, texts are by definition fragments in open and endless relations with all other texts.’

⁵⁸ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988), 127.

⁵⁹ See Erica Carter, James Donald and Judith Squires (eds), ‘Introduction’, in *Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993), xii.

⁶⁰ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 10.

shaped the forces which have formed our landscape — its myths, its metaphors, its memories, and its memorials.⁶¹

Edward Said's influential *Orientalism* (1978) is widely regarded as 'the founding text' of the academic field of colonial discourse studies (which has, of course, been followed up by his more recent and more wide-ranging *Culture and Imperialism* [1993]), but Bernard Smith's *European Vision and the South Pacific* (1960) preceded Said's work by many years. And though, as noted by the editors of *Text, Theory, Space*, Coetzee does not refer to Smith's study in *White Writing*, the two books share similar concerns regarding European schemas of representation of the 'Other'.⁶²

Coetzee's concerns in *White Writing* are, he writes, 'with certain of the ideas, the great intellectual schemas, through which South Africa has been thought by Europe; and with the land itself, South Africa as landscape and landed property.'⁶³ The intertextuality between his fiction and criticism during this time is similar to what has been described as a 'borderline discourse' in reference to metafiction,⁶⁴ an overlapping which Benita Parry considers questionable in a review of *White Writing*:

But what Coetzee's discussion of such unpromising material achieves is to offer a perspective from which to view both his own parodic subversions of pastoral discourses in his novels and the radical departures effected by a more recent literary production — white and black — about which it is rumored that he is to offer a further book of critical essays.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Neville Dubow, 'Constructs: Reflections on a Thinking Eye', in *South Africa: The Structure of Things Then*, by David Goldblatt (Cape Town: Oxford University Press), 23.

⁶² See Darian-Smith, Gunner and Nuttall (eds), *Text, Theory, Space*, 5; Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1960).

⁶³ Coetzee, *White Writing*, 10.

⁶⁴ Mark Currie (ed.), 'Introduction', *Metafiction* (London: Longman, 1995), 2.

⁶⁵ Benita Parry, review of *White Writing*, by J. M. Coetzee, *Research in African Literatures* 22, 4 (Winter 1991), 197–98. Note, this further book of essays on South African literature has to date not appeared, Coetzee having followed *White Writing* with a collection of essays on censorship, *Giving Offense* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

Parry's review warns of the dangers of reading Coetzee's novels in terms of the insights of his criticism, if only because this offers too neat a package and might preclude one from reading his own works as 'white writing'. Kenneth Parker additionally perceives a certain geographical divide in the reception of Coetzee's fiction and non-fiction.

As a critic, J. M. Coetzee is probably best known for his collection of essays *White Writing* (1988). Coetzee's critical reputation is noteworthy for two features: first, that it depends most on the appraisals of European and North American, rather than South African, critics; and second, that the European and American responses tend to obscure affinities both with his fiction and with the rest of his critical output, much of which has less to do with the natal space of South Africa than with the imagined space of a Europe of the past that has never ceased to be the affective literary homeland for white writers, especially those who write in English.⁶⁶

My approach is not to read his novels alongside *White Writing*, but to explore the *tension* of the intertextuality of Coetzee's fiction with the 'Discourse of the Cape'. As my research progressed, it became clear that it was not his representation of the Cape that interested me, but how he *problematized* and *displaced* that representation. Coetzee's interaction with Cape history has been evident from his earliest novels; his essays in *White Writing* seem an obvious extension of that interest into criticism. In the words of Christopher Hope:

J. M. Coetzee is interested in the ways in which white writers, in the first half of the century, struggled to lay claim to the land by means of language, to write

⁶⁶Kenneth Parker, 'J. M. Coetzee: The Postmodern and the Postcolonial', in *Critical Perspectives on J. M. Coetzee*, ed. Graham Huggan and Stephen Watson (London: Macmillan, 1996), 82. I would only question Parker's compartmentalisation of Coetzee's critics into the three geographical identities of South African, European and American; for he does so without accounting for any sense of postcolonial hybridity and the dispersal of many South African scholars, such as himself, in these other geographies. Secondly, *White Writing* has not been examined with Coetzee's fiction at any length by critics in any geography.

themselves into the place, a concern which is everywhere present in Coetzee's own novels.⁶⁷

I would argue that reading his fiction and critical work as complementary lends itself to an even more critical interrogation of what 'white writing' actually constitutes. Is Olive Schreiner, because she is an antipastoral writer, excluded from this definition (she is of course included in Coetzee's *White Writing*)? Is Coetzee, because he counters Schreiner's antipastoralism with something even more antipastoral, and because he as a critic interrogates the genre, exempt from this category? In Justin Cartwright's *Not Yet Home*, Nadine Gordimer denies there is such a thing as 'white writing'.⁶⁸ As I refer to it in this thesis, it is not about simply distinguishing literatures racially, but about understanding a whole process of encounters, epistemologies, and identification with the colonial history of the continent. Or, in Coetzee's words, "'white writing" is a catchall term for a certain historically circumscribed point of departure in writing about (South) Africa, and perhaps about colonized worlds in general.⁶⁹

There is a certain emphasis on gaps and silences in *White Writing*, which Shaun Irlam notes in his review of the book: 'With an alert and responsive eye, he discloses the mystifications and blind-spots inherent in European schemata for thinking Africa'.⁷⁰ As Coetzee says, 'demystification ... is after all a procedure for taking apart things — myths, tropes, rhetorical

⁶⁷ Christopher Hope, 'Language as Home: Colonisation by Words'. *Weekly Mail* [Johannesburg], 22–28 July 1988, 15.

⁶⁸ Justin Cartwright, *Not Yet Home: A South African Journey* (London: Fourth Estate, 1996), 16.

⁶⁹ J. M. Coetzee, 'Interview', by Richard Begam, *Contemporary Literature*, 33, 3 (1992), 423. Cited in Claudia Egerer, *Fictions of (In) Betweenness*. Gothenburg Studies in English, no. 68. (Göteborg, Sweden: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1996), 101.

⁷⁰ As quoted on the back cover of the paperback edition of *White Writing*. Shaun Irlam, review of *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*, by J. M. Coetzee, *Modern Language Notes* 103, 5 (December 1988), 1147–50.

figures — to show how they work.⁷¹ Roland Barthes's *Mythologies* influenced Coetzee's writing during this period,⁷² and 'Foucault's shadow' is also hovering over this collection,⁷³ but Coetzee has changed his view in more recent years. Now less enamoured of demystification (or at least more suspicious of it), he writes: 'In other words ... a demystifying criticism privileges mystifications. It becomes like Quixote scouring the plains for giants to tilt at, and ignoring everything but windmills.'⁷⁴ In the following four chapters, my approach has some tendencies towards demystification, but it more closely employs the notion of the palimpsest, of the text as a series of layers of previous inscriptions.

In my first chapter, 'Travels in the Cape: The Many Journeys of "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee"', I discuss the various revisions of an actual 1760 explorer narrative by J. M. Coetzee's remote ancestor, Jacobus Coetsé. Here I look at the notion of the journey and its counterpart in narrative, along with ideas about translation, reconstruction, and the novel and originality. My approach is both literary and historical: from readings in Cape history, South African travel writings and narratives of exploration to critical writings on travel and exploration literature.

My second chapter, 'Gender, Genre and Colonial Space', reads *In the Heart of the Country* as a rewriting of narratives of settlement and particularly the pastoral (as has already been suggested in Teresa Dovey's work).⁷⁵ The pastoral is seen to be a patriarchal genre, against which Magda, the colonial

⁷¹ J. M. Coetzee, *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*, ed. David Attwell (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 105.

⁷² Attwell (ed.), *Doubling*, 105.

⁷³ See Coetzee, *Doubling*, 247: 'Foucault's shadow lies quite heavily over my essays about colonial South Africa (I think in particular of the essay on anthropological writings about the Hottentots that forms part of *White Writing*.) He is also very much a presence behind the essays on censorship I have been working on recently.'

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁷⁵ For example, see Dovey, *The Novels of J. M. Coetzee*, 150.

daughter, rebels. I also explore the implied space of the Karoo, the adaptation of *In the Heart of the Country* into a film ('Dust', 1985), and passages of early drafts of the novel from Coetzee's manuscripts. Furthermore, I locate the novel intertextually with the regional writings of Olive Schreiner, Pauline Smith and the farm novel tradition, and the prototype of this tradition in Afrikaans, the *plaasroman*, as represented by C. M. van den Heever: these three writers are not only representative of early white settler writing in South Africa, but are themselves discussed in Coetzee's own *White Writing*.

Coetzee's first two novels thus immediately offer two genres of 'white writing' — the novel of exploration and the novel of settlement. What marks the genres is a preoccupation with discovery (in the first instance) to one of possession through the farm operations of cultivation, livestock, and fences. Where Jacobus Coetzee is marking out a space from the northern Cape to what is today Namibia, the narrator Magda in *In the Heart of the Country* is questioning her space in both the pastoral and realist traditions (she refuses to 'plot' her story in the conventional sense, nor does she write a diary in the Victorian drama she could depict for herself). My final section of this chapter has an architectural focus. Magda's occupation in 'the great house' in the interior (in the desert landscape of what seems to be the Karoo) is, in its very openness, containing. As Coetzee says in his Jerusalem Prize address, 'there is a South African literature of vastness. Yet even that literature of vastness, examined closely, reflects feelings of entrapment, entrapment in infinitudes.'⁷⁶

Following my discussion of *In the Heart of the Country* as a parodic return to the colonial novel of settlement, in Chapter Three, "'Writing South Africa": Cape Provincial and the "Classic" in *Life & Times of Michael K*', I look at this Karoo counterpart as a *reconfiguration* of colonial settlement. Coetzee's

⁷⁶ Coetzee, 'The Jerusalem Address' [1987], in *Doubling*, 98.

mapping of the Cape in *Michael K* subverts the ‘mastery of space’ which Jacobus Coetzee believes to belong to him as an explorer; and in *K*’s natural ease in living off the land and travelling off the roads, the farm novel of Magda in *In the Heart of the Country* is disrupted and diffused. While asserting its textuality, *Life & Times of Michael K*, is equally concerned with land and, as Dominic Head has suggested, ‘the control of social space’.⁷⁷ As Coetzee’s ‘classic’ Booker Prize-winner, descriptions of the ‘national’ and ‘postcolonial’ abound on this novel. What I wish to examine are the implications of these readings on Coetzee and the ‘South African’ novel. I propose instead Coetzee’s idea of the ‘provincial’.

Surrounding these two ‘Karoo’ texts, then, are revisions of the imperial genres of exploration and travel writing. My thesis closes with the most open-ended of Coetzee’s novels: the self-reflexive fifth novel *Foe*, widely read as a metafictional exercise, a rewriting of Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*. This final chapter, ‘The Female Castaway: Her Story, History and Textual Captivity in *Foe*’, is both a follow-up to my discussions of gender and genre in *In the Heart of the Country*, and a break with the South African emphasis of the other three chapters. While it continues the questions of history and storytelling we find in ‘The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee’, *Foe*, with its English and Caribbean geographies, is more widely about British imperialism. As I will argue, the intertextuality of *Foe* is a response to a canon of colonial texts,⁷⁸ not least Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and Defoe’s *Robinson*

⁷⁷ Dominic Head, *J. M. Coetzee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 104.

⁷⁸ See also Helen Tiffin, ‘Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse’, *Kunapipi* 9, 3 (1987), 22–23, as cited in Kossew, *Pen and Power*, 14. Kossew writes that by ‘describing Coetzee’s texts as “counter-discourses”, [Tiffin] demonstrates that he is not “simply ‘writing back’ to an English canonical text, but to the whole of the discursive field within which such a text operated and continues to operate in post-colonial worlds” (23); and: “it has become the project of post-colonial literatures to investigate the European textual capture and containment of colonial and post-colonial space and to intervene in that originary and continuing containment” (22). Tiffin correctly emphasizes the continuing nature of colonial appropriation in South Africa and refers to the white settler narratives which continue to propagate colonial myths’.

Crusoe, but also a range of other colonial writings, including castaway and captivity narratives, travellers' tales, and the journals of Columbus.

Disgrace

Like *Age of Iron*, Coetzee's latest novel *Disgrace* is a contemporary novel, dealing on one level with post-apartheid redistribution and retribution. As with *The Master of Petersburg* — a rewriting of Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* which features Dostoevsky as its protagonist — there is also a literary angle, but it is much less pronounced. Instead of rewriting *Don Juan*, *Disgrace*'s main character David Lurie plays at Lord Byron, the great seducer himself. But this is an intriguing new fictional excursion, which shares a theme with his most recent 'non-fiction'.

'What Is Realism?', which gave us the epigraph to this chapter, prefigures Coetzee's two other lecture-fictions, the Tanner Lectures of 1997–98 at Princeton University, subsequently published, with critical commentary by an interdisciplinary group of leading thinkers, in *The Lives of Animals* (1999),⁷⁹ with slight biographical alterations to his character Elizabeth Costello, and a new emphasis on animal rights and vegetarianism.⁸⁰ There is a small thread of continuity between these essays and *Disgrace*, particularly as the plot of the novel progresses from Cape Town to a farm in the Eastern Cape.

Twice-divorced at 52, David Lurie's love life is now reduced to weekly meetings with a prostitute for whom he has developed a certain fondness. Working in a demoted capacity as an adjunct lecturer in communications at the Cape Technical University, he is allowed to offer one course in his

⁷⁹ J. M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). Despite Coetzee's fictional device, *The Lives of Animals* is listed as 'non-fiction' on the dustjacket of *Disgrace* (1999) by his British publishers Secker & Warburg.

⁸⁰ Coetzee had previously written on vegetarianism in 'Meat Country'. In this piece he offers a short exploration of the history of food practices and a humorous account of his personal experience, as a vegetarian, in the cattle country of Texas. See J. M. Coetzee, 'Meat Country', *Granta* ['Food: The Vital Stuff'], 52 (Winter 1995), 43–52.

specialisation: he teaches the Romantic poets, but incites no passion from his students, until he has a brief liaison with one of them, the reluctant Melanie Isaacs. Her boyfriend and father find out and an official complaint is made to the university authorities; contact with her is cut off. Lurie refuses absolutely to make a spectacle of himself in the form of a public apology, and so is forced to resign.

After this débâcle, Lurie leaves Cape Town to retreat to the countryside, where his lesbian daughter Lucy has a smallholding in the Eastern Cape, near the town of Salem on the Grahamstown-Kenton road. For work, he has his project, an opera he calls *Byron in Italy*, but for now he occupies himself more practically, helping Lucy around the farm and with her dog kennels. At her urging he also agrees to volunteer at the local animal welfare clinic in Grahamstown. His main job is to help put down the dogs whose grace period is over.

Coetzee weaves a seemingly disparate series of elements into a compelling story about disgrace, healing and redemption, but from the dustjacket blurb it is hard to believe that this is a Coetzee novel at all — the author of *In the Heart of the Country*, *Foe* and *The Master of Petersburg*, all highly allusive and fictionally inventive novels which have assured Coetzee a ready place on courses of postmodern and postcolonial literature, but which have not made him a ready winner for the Booker Prize. This, of course, is a question about the nature of awards. But what makes *Disgrace* a different case from his other more 'literary' novels? What does it have in common with his first Booker Prize-winner, *Life & Times of Michael K*, and even with his recent third-person memoir, *Boyhood* (1997)?

There is, first of all, the Cape setting; then there is its accessibility and discernible plot. In *Disgrace*: post-apartheid South Africa, a scandalous affair, a horrifying attack, a father and daughter story (a story about generations),

and the new racial politics. Lucy's former black employee Petrus is now her business partner, neighbour, fellow land owner.

On the surface, it seems a more likely description of a novel by either of Coetzee's compatriots, André Brink or the Nobel Prize-winning author, Nadine Gordimer, whose most recent work, *The House Gun* (1998), is a similar repositioning of current politics.⁸¹ But the animal clinic and Byron come into *Disgrace* too, giving the book a more complex twist. The disgraced academic disposes of the dogs' bodies carefully, in death giving them an unexpected dignity, while his undignified toy banjo score for an opera on Byron and his Italian lover, unsurprisingly, never quite gets off the ground. Nor does Coetzee's Byronic interlude; but the hesitations with this sub-plot are also the falterings and failings of Lurie's imagination.

The central event on which the novel would seem to pivot is the violent assault on them both at the homestead. Lucy refuses to talk about it or seek justice; Lurie is outraged but cannot convince her to take action. In her mind, this is the new reality; she is paying the price of history, she is now 'paying' to live on the land. Her smallholding becomes a test ground for new beginnings — this is neither the pastoral of the old days,⁸² nor even the antipastoral of *In the Heart of the Country*.

They ought to install bars, security gates, a perimeter fence, as Ettinger has done. They ought to turn the farmhouse into a fortress. Lucy ought to buy a

⁸¹ Brink, in the nineties, however, has been considerably more inventive, contributing to a South African style of magic realism. I have discussed Brink's and Gordimer's latest works in three reviews. See T. Kai Norris Easton, 'In the Desert of the Past: In South Africa André Brink's Disturbing Novel a Journalist Finds a Community that Time Forgot', review of *Devil's Valley*, by André Brink, *The Boston Sunday Globe*, 14 March 1999, F1, F4 [Books]; 'A South African Epic Through Women's Eyes', review of *Imaginings of Sand*, by André Brink, *The Boston Sunday Globe*, 17 November 1996, N17 [Books]; review of *The House Gun*, by Nadine Gordimer, *World Literature Today* 72, 4 (Autumn 1998), 887–88.

⁸² See also Mars-Jones, 'Lesbians are Like That', 13: 'In this narrative, country life is not therapy but ordeal, not a pastoral but a war of attrition'; and Ranti Williams, 'A Man's Salvation', review of *Disgrace*, by J. M. Coetzee, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 25 June 1999, 23: 'The landscape is no pastoral but a dark, active force of destruction and regeneration, capable of stripping its inhabitants of everything which is not most basic to them.'

pistol and a two-way radio, and take shooting lessons. But will she ever consent? She is here because she loves the land and the old, *ländliche* way of life. If that way of life is doomed, what is left for her to love? (113)

In *Disgrace*, what could be a clichéd attempt to represent the present times is instead a chilling and uncomfortable question about what level of reaccommodation is required for life in the ‘new’ South Africa. Coetzee is tackling some transgressive ground here: sex, race, rape. At a time of truth and reconciliation, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s account of the Commission’s hearings in his new book, *No Future without Forgiveness* (1999),⁸³ the Booker Prize-winner’s vision seems bleak enough. But Coetzee’s brilliance is his refusal to force a reconciliation between sides (father and daughter; black and white) or to make his novel a simple allegory. Like *The Master of Petersburg*, this novel puts the question of salvation at the heart of the book. As Lurie tells Mr Isaacs:

‘In my own terms, I am being punished for what happened between myself and your daughter. I am sunk into a state of disgrace from which it will not be easy to lift myself. It is not a punishment I have refused. I do not murmur against it. On the contrary, I am living it out from day to day, trying to accept disgrace as my state of being. Is it enough for God, do you think, that I live in disgrace without term?’ (172)

And as Lucy suggests, after telling her father of Petrus’s marriage proposal which is, in essence, a contract — his protection in return for her share of the land:

‘Yes, I agree, it is humiliating. But perhaps that is a good point to start from again. Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept. To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity.’
‘Like a dog.’

⁸³ Desmond Mpilo Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999).

'Yes, like a dog' (204).⁸⁴

After the 'great house' which dominates the landscape in *In the Heart of the Country*, Coetzee's representation of colonial Cape architecture becomes increasingly fragile. In *Age of Iron*, Mrs Curren's house is described as:

A house built solidly but without love, cold, inert now, ready to die. Whose walls the sun, even the African sun, has never succeeded in warming, as though the very bricks, made by the hands of convicts, radiate an intractable sullenness (13).

And in *Disgrace*, with an additional grant from the Land Affairs office, Petrus builds a functional new house which *overlooks* Lucy's relic of Afrikaner settlement. Lurie sees it on his return from home in Cape Town: 'Grey and featureless, it stands on an eminence east of the old farmhouse; in the mornings, he guesses, it must cast a long shadow' (197).⁸⁵

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The 1990s were a productive decade for Coetzee, both as a novelist and a critic.⁸⁶ In addition to *The Lives of Animals*, his book of essays on censorship,

⁸⁴See Lehmann-Haupt, 'Caught in Shifting Values': 'The only meaning David can find is in the act of helping a neighbor euthanize and incinerate the sick and superfluous dogs in the community, a bitter acknowledgment, perhaps, of what his life has been reduced to, and a tribute to the final line of Kafka's "Trial," which follows Joseph K.'s stabbing and reads: "'Like a dog!' he said; it was as if he meant the shame to outlive him.'"

⁸⁵See J. M. Coetzee, *Age of Iron* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1990); J. M. Coetzee, *Disgrace* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1999).

⁸⁶There are certainly other avenues one could pursue by incorporating the more recent work. For example, *The Master of Petersburg* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1994), would make an interesting companion to the chapter on *Foe* (London: Penguin Books, 1987 [1986]) as both novels metafictionally incorporate the life and works of a famous literary figure from the past. *Disgrace*, with its Byronic interludes, could also be included with these two novels, although with its sections on the daughter Lucy's farm it could be joined with the brilliant chapter on the family farm in *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1997), extending the negotiations of settlement that we see in *In the Heart of the Country* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1977) and *Life & Times of Michael K* (London: Penguin Books, 1985 [1983]). A chapter on versions of autobiography could be written on the memoir *Boyhood*, the essays and interviews in *Doubling the Point*, ed. David Attwell (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), and the documentary, 'John M.

Giving Offense, was published in 1996; and Coetzee has made three forays into another genre: his memoir, *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life* (1997), joins his intellectual autobiography, *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews* (1992), edited by David Attwell. Additionally, almost coinciding with the publication of *Boyhood* in the United States, Coetzee participated in a televised South African documentary of his writing life, 'John M. Coetzee: Passages'.⁸⁷

Coetzee: Passages', dir. Henion Han, prod. Cheryl Tuckett. Videocassette, 52 minutes (London: Dizzy Ink, 1999). Film © 1997, SABC3, South Africa and J. M. Coetzee.

⁸⁷This is a fascinating portrait of Coetzee which largely emphasises his fiction (the first seven novels). Extracts are read by Coetzee himself, and commentary is provided by several South African academics and writers. I have reviewed this documentary in a new online journal of postgraduate literary research. See Kai Easton, review of 'John M. Coetzee: Passages', *SOAS Literary Review* 1 (November 1999), www.soas.ac.uk/soaslit/issue1/easton.html.