

# Coetzee in/and Afrikaans

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## Summary

This article investigates Coetzee's complex attitudes towards the Afrikaans language, and, by extension, his views on language, translation, and the potential and performative subject positions, or "fictions of the" – enacted in and determined by a given language. It reflects on relevant passages from Coetzee's criticism (including "Achterberg's 'Ballade van de Gasfitter'", "Emerging from Censorship", "What is a Classic?", and "He and His Man") and fiction (including *In the Heart of the Country*, *Boyhood*, *Youth* and *Diary of a Bad Year*). Partly concerned with the (auto)biographical, this essay also explores the idea of embarrassment (rather than the more frequently discussed shame) as a key affect in Coetzee's oeuvre.

## Opsomming

Hierdie artikel ondersoek Coetzee se emosioneel gekompliseerde gesindheid teenoor die Afrikaanse taal. Dit raak ook aan die breër temas van vertaling en van die (performatiewe) identiteitsposisies – die "fiksies van die ek" – wat bepaal en gevorm word binne die strukture van 'n gegewe taal. Dit besin relevante passasies uit Coetzee se kritiese werk (onder andere "Achterberg's 'Ballade van de Gasfitter'"; "Emerging from Censorship", "What Is a Classic?" en "He and His Man") asook sy fiksie (onder andere *In the Heart of the Country*, *Boyhood*, *Youth* en *Diary of a Bad Year*). Vanuit 'n meer (auto)biografiese oogpunt, ondersoek hierdie artikel ook die moontlikheid dat verleentheid (eerder as skaamte, wat dikwels deur kritici bespeek word) die mees deurslaggewende emosie in Coetzee se oeuvre mag wees.

That is the active paradox I must resolve: at one and the same time it must be known and not known. I want you to know that I don't want to show my feelings: that is the message I address to the other. *Larvatus prodeo*: I advance pointing to my mask. I set a mask upon my passion, but with a discreet (and wily) finger I designate this mask.

Roland Barthes, "A Lover's Discourse"

Let us begin by reflecting on a few lines from near the beginning of Coetzee's Nobel Prize address, which is not a lecture so much as an allegory about the process of writing.\* Coetzee here adopts the persona of Robinson Crusoe, who, after returning from his remote island, lives in Bristol, and

receives detailed reports on things that are happening in England from a keen traveller and observer whom he thinks of as “his man”. The man is readily identified, not as Friday (though Friday is invoked in the epigraph to the address), but as Daniel Defoe by the fact that the reports are drawn almost verbatim from Defoe’s *A Tour thro’ the Whole Island of Great Britain* and *A Journal of the Plague Year*:

The fens are home to many other kinds of birds too, writes his man, duck and mallard, teal and widgeon, to capture which the men of the fens, the fen-men, raise tame ducks, which they call decoy ducks or duckoys. Fens are tracts of wetland. There are tracts of wetland all over Europe, all over the world, but they are not named *fens*, *fen* is an English word, it will not migrate.

These Lincolnshire duckoys, writes his man, are bred up in decoy ponds, and kept tame by being fed by hand. Then when the season comes they are sent abroad to Holland and Germany. In Holland and Germany they meet with others of their kind, and, seeing how miserably these Dutch and German ducks live, how their rivers freeze in winter and their lands are covered in snow, fail not to let them know, in a form of language which they make them understand, that in England from where they come the case is quite otherwise: English ducks have sea shores full of nourishing food, tides that flow freely up the creeks; they have lakes, springs, open ponds and sheltered ponds; also lands full of corn left behind by the gleaners; and no frost or snow, or very light.

By these representations, he writes, which are made all in duck language, they, the decoy ducks or duckoys, draw together vast numbers of fowl, and, so to say, kidnap them. They guide them back across the seas from Holland and Germany and settle them down in their decoy ponds on the fens of Lincolnshire, chattering and gabbling to them all the time in their own language, telling them these are the ponds they told them of, where they shall live safely and securely.

(Coetzee 2003: 1-2)

But the Lincolnshire ducks, as we learn in the next paragraph, mislead their foreign friends: for the decoy men and their dogs are lying in wait for them with nets and clubs.

The Nobel Prize address is a meditation on the relationship between author and character, whose usual hierarchy is brought into question (we are compelled to ask who writes whom, or writes in the service of whom); it asks whether fiction is an allegory of the real or the real an allegory of fiction; and in its final moments, to which I will return at the end of this article, it reflects on whether character and author can ever meet up, whether they can occupy the same chronotope, something that Mikhail Bakhtin considered about as feasible as lifting oneself up by one’s own hair (1982: 256).<sup>1</sup> But the address is also a meditation on translation: it hints in this

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1. The passage in question, which deals with the relationship between the chronotope *in* the work and the chronotope *of* the work, speaks directly to

opening passage at the impossibility of full translation, of the safe migration of concepts (or bodies) from one linguistic world to another. Translation is betrayal; if not always with such dire consequences as there are for the Dutch and German ducks.

If Coetzee's lecture struck many as a curious performance (where is the eminent Nobel Prize winner, after all, in all this stuff about Defoe and decoys?), it was certainly not out of line with his earlier meditations on translation. My comments above deliberately echo the language of his essay on Newton and, going further back in his career, that of his essay on the Dutch poet Gerrit Achterberg's "Ballade van de Gasfitter" (Coetzee 1992: 90, 192). The Achterberg essay, published in *PMLA* in 1977, was the very first piece of writing by Coetzee to be made available to a sizeable international audience. It was also, as it so happens, the first bit of Coetzee's writing I ever read. It was recommended to me – no doubt in the hope of making me a less naïve student of literature – by Johan Degenaar, the admirable Professor of Political Philosophy at the University of Stellenbosch, who strove for years to make the students at that elite Afrikaans institution more thoughtful, more inclined to question what he called the structural violence of apartheid. I admit that I found the essay with its curious oscillation between structuralist analysis and creative writing very strange back then – and I guess I still do. But the topic did not seem so strange. Though Achterberg was probably unknown to most readers of *PMLA*, he was often discussed among the more literary Stellenbosch students of those days – if, mostly, as the brilliant, crazy poet who murdered his landlady and then spent the rest of his life writing poems about murdering his landlady, of which "Ballade van de Gasfitter" was one.

This kind of sensationalistic biographical interpretation is, of course, austere bracketed off in Coetzee's analysis. Indeed, the essay (subtitled "The Mysteries of I and You") raises many of the same questions Coetzee seems to ask more implicitly in "He and His Man". What is the relationship between the biographical author and character? "What distance is there between the poet and his gasfitter self? Is the distance constant? Does the poem present us with a single firm identity plus masks of that identity, or is the notion of identity it embodies more complex and fluid?" (Coetzee 1992: 69-70). The essay pursues these questions by examining how the words "I" and "you" signify in the field of language and in the field of the poem: how pronouns work as linguistic shifters and how these "abbreviative substi-

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the matter of the "I" and its fictional versions: a key concern of this paper. "If I am to relate or write about an event that had happened to me," says Bakhtin, "then I as the teller or writer of this event am already outside the time and space in which the event occurred .... The represented world, however real and truthful, can never be chronotopically identical with the real world it represents, where the author and the creator of the literary work is to be found" (1982: 256).

tutes” (Coetzee 1992: 71) in the referential system of the Dutch language (and in the non-referential system of the sonnet sequence) create fluid subject positions, or at least ones less fixed than those imposed by the crudely biographical reading of the poem that seemed to be in the air in Stellenbosch back in my day. Coetzee observes (and the style of gnomic assertion is characteristic of the essay): “All versions of the I are fictions of the *I*. The primal *I* is not recoverable” (1992: 75).<sup>2</sup> He concludes with a clear articulation of the entwined conceptual and formal projects of his hybrid essay: “all criticism is translation and all translation is criticism” (p. 90).

## 1

I begin in this way, not only to pay a small homage to Degenaar and to gesture at some of the continuities in Coetzee’s oeuvre, but to launch into some reflections on his “fictions of the *I*” and his ideas on translation – including the matter of self-translation, which is inevitably of interest to a migrant academic like myself. The germ of my article is a simple idea, namely, that one of the earliest of Coetzee’s doubles (earliest, that is, in terms of the biographical chronology) is the Afrikaans boy and thus the Afrikaans man that he never became, but who nevertheless once presented himself as a shadowy alternative, as a subject position consciously refused – one that had to be refused, in fact, since in this refusal lay the possibility of a career as cosmopolitan writer and intellectual. But not without pain, or loss, or abiding consequences. At stake in this article is, ultimately, my sense that the artist’s subjectivity (rather like the practice of translation) is for Coetzee a performative matter: an effect of choices or interpretations made at various moments in the course of living (or reading, or writing). It is also an effect of memory and recollection: of dealing with earlier and “quite primitive” parts of the self, which the writer must inhabit, temporarily and with care, learning over the years “to move in and out” of them “more or less freely” (Coetzee 1996: 38), much the same way that the translator must learn to “move back and forth between the circles of the two languages, trying to bring with him, at each move, the memory or feel of the sense he wishes to translate” (Coetzee 1992: 182).

In formulating these preliminary generalisations, I draw on a passage from *Giving Offense*, where Coetzee provides an extraordinarily vivid account of the plural, improvisational *I* that is already present in the Achterberg essay. He here presents the self as a zoo “in which multiple beasts have residence, and over which the anxious overworked zookeeper of rationality exercises a

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2. It is a comment that we may connect with Coetzee’s later statement that “in a larger sense all writing is autobiography, everything that you write, including criticism and fiction, writes you as you write it” (1992: 17).

rather limited control”. “In this figural zoo”, he asserts, “some of the beasts have names, like figure-of-the-father and figure-of-the mother; others are memories or fragments of memories in transmuted form, with strong elements of feeling attached to them; a whole subcolony are semitamed but still treacherous earlier versions of the self, each with an inner zoo of its own over which it has less than complete control” (Coetzee 1996: 37).

The creative process, then, is a matter of “managing these inner selves, making them work for one”; it is, Coetzee declares, “a complex matter of pleasing and satisfying and challenging and extorting and wooing and feeding and sometimes even of putting to death” (1996: 38). The hypothetical Afrikaans self, I would suggest, has certainly been in danger of this last fate; but it is not therefore of any less interest in an account of Coetzee’s work, especially in its more auto-/autrebiographical moments.<sup>3</sup>

Now, to properly address Coetzee and his relationship to Afrikaans is a broad undertaking, and this article is no more than a gesture in the direction of such an inquiry. To do full justice to this topic would require an investigation into several major works including “The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee” and *In the Heart of the Country* (especially in its Ravan Press edition, where extensive passages of dialogue appear in Afrikaans), as well as the memoirs *Boyhood* and *Youth*. It would involve careful consideration of Coetzee’s translations from the Afrikaans (notably Wilma Stockenström’s *Kremetartekspedisie*) and probably also those from the Dutch (Marcellus Emants’s *A Posthumous Confession* and the poems collected in *Landscape with Rowers*). It would demand an assessment of Coetzee’s substantial body of criticism of Afrikaans writers, from van den Heever and Mikro to Breytenbach and Brink. It might include, if one wanted to be a stickler, a consideration of some of the small errors that occasionally occur in Coetzee’s Afrikaans, in his usage of possessive pronouns and the double negative, omitted articles, and the like – this despite his quite remarkable feeling for the rhythms of Afrikaans dialogue, the complexities of its syntax, and the nuances of those tricky participles like “maar”, “sommer”, and the notoriously untranslatable “mos”.<sup>4</sup> The task would also entail, especially for

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3. I am indebted to Lars Engle’s fine essay on *Youth* for drawing my attention to this intriguing passage (Engle 2008). Coetzee’s distinction between autobiography and *autrebiography* (the form of self-writing that deals with the stranger and more primitive aspects of the zoo) is in *Doubling the Point* (1992: 394).

4. At risk of sounding pedantic and picky, I’ll provide some evidence for this claim. In his detailed analysis of what he sees as Pauline Smith’s faux-naïf “transfer” of Afrikaans speech patterns and ways of thinking into non-standard, quasi-Biblical English, Coetzee’s grasp of Afrikaans syntax is amply demonstrated. Yet, his reconstructions of the “original” Afrikaans sentences that her marked English might be “translating”, contain at least

an Afrikaans reader like myself, making sense of the respect and attention with which he treats Afrikaans literature (he once listed *Bart Nel* and *Laat vrugte* among the more viable candidates for the title of “Great South African Novel”) along with the strong revulsion he seems to feel in *Boyhood* for the crude, shoeless Afrikaans boys and his stereotypical notions of Afrikaans women – the same old stereotypes we find in English writers, from Olive Schreiner to Anne McClintock.<sup>5</sup> (Though I know it is to be taken ironically, I nevertheless find myself balking at a sentence like “What English man would want to marry an Afrikaans woman and have an Afrikaans family when Afrikaans women are either huge and fat, with puffed-out breasts and bullfrog necks, or bony and misshapen?” (Coetzee 1998: 126).) A full account of Coetzee and Afrikaans would also involve, as I have already hinted, a detailed consideration of his meditations on the practice of translation (in the course of which some of his fundamental insights about language itself arise): meditations which occur not only in the criticism, but are part and parcel of the fiction. I need only remind readers of the famous passage in *Waiting for the Barbarians* where the magistrate pretends to read the wooden slips he has excavated for his torturers, but in fact invents a defiant story about the barbarities they are committing, ending with the words: “Thank you. I have finished translating” (Coetzee 1982b: 123).

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one clear grammatical error. In the following sentence: “*Slegs wanneer word die vallei bereik het dat Klaartje met jong Herman du Toit getrou het was sy verontrus*”, “wanneer” – the iterative – should be “toe”. Another error occurs in the Afrikaans dialogue of *Age of Iron*: “*Sit haar neer, dalk kom haar iets oor*” (Coetzee 1990: 155). The correct pronoun in the second clause is “sy” not “haar”.

5. The cruel, fat, vulgar Tant’ Sannie in Schreiner’s *Story of an African Farm* is necessarily difficult for an Afrikaans feminist reader like myself to stomach. So too, somehow, are the passages on “The Invention of the Volksmoeder” (in a section rather irritatingly subtitled “Mum’s the Word”) in McClintock’s often-cited article on women and nationalism in South Africa. It is not that she gets the facts wrong, exactly, or that she forgets to say (dutifully, one feels) that the image of the *volksmoeder* is constructed and, to a degree, contested. But her sense of things somehow remains stuck in the 1930s, at the spectacular moment of the symbolic restaging of the Great Trek with women in sunbonnets and girl-babies named “Eeufesia”. The fact that the *vrou en moeder* identity was profoundly embarrassing and oppressive to many of those on whom it was imposed seems to lie beyond the affective intuition of this discussion, with its tone of somewhat exoticised disdain (McClintock 1991: 108-110).

## 2

Without being reductively biographical – although I do take courage from Coetzee’s statement that “all writing is autobiography” (1992: 391) – I would like to suggest that one of the factors that contributed to Coetzee’s interest in translation is his rather complicated and fraught linguistic background. A Google search executed some months back, when I first started thinking about this essay, informed me that “J.M. Coetzee was born to an Afrikaans father and an English mother”. The situation was not quite this simple and in the course of his career Coetzee has often found it necessary to clarify the matter. The following is one of his explanations:

I am one of many people in this country who have become detached from their ethnic roots where those roots were in Dutch South Africa or Indonesia or Britain or Greece or wherever, and have joined a pool of no recognizable ethnos whose language of exchange is English. These people are not, strictly speaking English South Africans, since a large proportion of them – myself included – are not of British ancestry. They are merely South Africans (itself a mere name of convenience) whose native tongue, the tongue they have been born to, is English. And as the pool has no discernible ethnos, so one day I hope it will have no predominant colour, as more people of color drift into it. A pool, I would hope, then, in which differences wash away.

(Coetzee 1992: 342)

This account is quite sensible and reasonable; but it does seem to me to somewhat misrepresent – or, if you will, mistranslate – the way in which these matters are staged in Coetzee’s imaginative writing.<sup>6</sup>

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6. This passage is embedded in a discussion about why Coetzee, despite his name, cannot, in his view, be considered an Afrikaner (not least because he would not be recognised as such by other Afrikaners). The matter is revisited as follows in *Boyhood*:

Because they speak English at home, because he always comes first in English at school, he thinks of himself as English. Though his surname is Afrikaans, though his father is more Afrikaans than English, though he himself speaks Afrikaans without any English accent, he could not pass for a moment as an Afrikaner. The range of Afrikaans he commends is thin and bodiless; there is a whole dense world of slang and allusion commanded by real Afrikaans boys – of which obscenity is only a part – to which he has no access.

(Coetzee 1998: 125)

My purpose in this essay is, in part, to ask why Coetzee avoided such access and had no interest in passing, even though this may have forestalled the loss he reticently articulates in the final interview of *Doubling the Point*: “For a variety of reasons, he ceases visiting the family farm, the place on earth he

The first aspect of the mistranslation (I know the term is itself something of a misnomer, but I don't want to go so far as to say that Coetzee's account is disingenuous or wrong) seems to me to lie in the representation of English as Coetzee's "native tongue" or, more problematically, "the tongue he has been born to". I am not, of course, trying to contest the fact that Coetzee spoke English at home; but I do want to insist that to describe his relationship to the language in this way, to present it as given and obvious, remote from any sort of elective affiliation, does not quite ring true to the experiences represented, for example, in *Boyhood*. There is more at stake – more feelings, more deliberate choices – in the process of becoming a de-ethnicised speaker of a convenient lingua franca.

The historian Charles van Onselen, in his autobiographically inflected review of Coetzee's memoir in the *London Review of Books*, also senses that this description of the English-speaking South African is rather too bland and detached, to the point where it hides from view certain significant historical and political decisions at stake. These decisions were not without their price, van Onselen points out, for his own father and for Coetzee's: men who lost their jobs in the wake of Dr D.F. Malan's election victory in 1948. Van Onselen observes that "becoming detached from one's ethnic roots involves processes every bit as complex and worthy of investigation as those that inform the making of real or imagined ethnic identities and their insinuation into nationalist ideologies" (1998: 18). I agree. And so, it seems to me, does the text of *Boyhood* – and perhaps in even more ludicrous ways that of *Youth*. In these works identity is presented as the effect of a deliberate affiliation rather than simple filiation – and not only on the part of Coetzee's parents (or grandparents, for that matter), but on his own part as well.

*Boyhood* is very specific about the linguistic heritage, abilities, and political leanings of the boy's parents. The father is from an Afrikaans family, whose ancestral land is a farm in the Prince Albert district in the Karoo. They could, in fact, have been perfectly "normal" Afrikaners (in fact, the boy wonders why his father makes such an effort in Worcester not to slide back into that identity); but he nevertheless chooses to speak English, though he does so with a slight Afrikaans accent. And there are other signs that he is not quite at home in the language: he consults the *Pocket Oxford Dictionary* to do the crossword puzzle, and uses certain English idioms with self-conscious deliberateness, as though he is committing them to memory. The source of this studious Englishness is not, in the first instance, Zachariah Coetzee's recent war experience, or so the memoir suggests, but the contradictory identity deliberately adopted by his much-admired father: a man remembered by his sons as "a ware ou jintlman and a ware ou jingo"; "a farmer and a gentleman" or, better yet, "'n Boer en 'n

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has defined, imagined, constructed, as his place of origin" (Coetzee 1992: 393-94).

gentleman” (one must, as it were, translate the line back into the conversational original to get the full effect of the straddling of cultures at stake here), a man who wore riding boots when everyone else on the farm wore “vellies” (Coetzee 1998: 128, 127). This mixed identity (Mike Marais calls it the “bloedsap” identity) is why conversation on the Coetzee farm is not in *suiwer* Afrikaans, but “a happy slapdash mixture of English and Afrikaans”, a “funny, dancing language ... with particles that slip here and there in the sentence ... lighter, airier than the Afrikaans they study at school” (Coetzee 1998: 81).<sup>7</sup>

Coetzee’s mother is of German stock: her maiden name is Wehmeyer, but her mother was a du Biel from Pomerania. Though their political sympathies lie somewhat more with the German than the English side in World War II, they are English-speaking by choice, and thoroughly at home in the language: his mother’s English, the boy observes, “is faultless, particularly when she writes. She uses words in their right sense, her grammar is impeccable” (Coetzee 1998: 106). The memoir, of course, reveals the young Coetzee to be – scandalously – his mamma’s boy; so, perfect English, coming first in English, is something he insists on for himself.

Vera Coetzee’s perfect English allows for a revealing, if speculative comparison between J.M. Coetzee and Athol Fugard. The latter has often credited his particular form of linguistic creativity to the speech of his Afrikaans-born mother, Anna Magdalena Potgieter, from the farm Knoffelfontein, near Beaufort West. She too, spoke English at home, but badly: her “glorious solecisms”, as Fugard calls them, were the source of the demotic, locally inflected, and often deeply moving language of his major plays. Fugard’s dialogue, as he first realised in writing *Boesman and Lena*, is always already translated: though written in English, it harkens back, in its lexicon and syntax, to an unwritten Afrikaans original.<sup>8</sup> It is for this reason that Fugard was to describe himself in his memoir *Cousins* as “the mongrel

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7. When Michael Marais describes Coetzee’s father as a “bloedsap”, the “sap” refers to a member of Smuts’s South African Party, a person of Afrikaans ancestry who nevertheless aligned himself with England and her wars. It is a curious term: “bloed”, of course, means “blood”; so “bloedsap” conflates party affiliation with matters of heredity and filiation in an almost comically oxymoronic way.

8. If Coetzee’s work is, as he seems lately to suggest, always already translated, it is so in the more Benjaminian sense of “all languages [being] finally, foreign languages, alien to our animal being. But in a way that is, precisely, inarticulate, inarticulable” (Coetzee 2007: 197). It is interesting to read Coetzee’s 2005 comments on the language of *Waiting for the Barbarians* as “translated by an invisible hand from an unspecified foreign tongue into English” (Coetzee 2005: 143).

son of white South Africa's two dominant cultures ... Afrikaner and English-speaking" (1997: 9). For Coetzee, by contrast, such a mongrel identity never seems to have presented itself as a real possibility. Indeed, to judge by *Boyhood* and also by some of the earlier essays in linguistics, it would have struck him as neither practically viable, nor conceptually feasible. (I am thinking here, for example, of the essay on Newton where Coetzee seriously entertains the Whorfian conception of language as a closed system from which one can exit only by entering another closed system [1992: 183].) Despite the appealing counter-example of the Prins Albert Coetzees, linguistic worlds do not usually intersect or merge for Coetzee: one is compelled to inhabit one or the other.

The closing moments of *Youth* are striking in light of these considerations: here we see the protagonist, John, frustrated by the binary logic of the computer codes in which he works from day to day, pondering the possibility of alternative "and/or" systems of thinking (Coetzee 2002: 159-160). His delving into the obscure history of logic proves futile, like so much in the memoir; but the desire implicit in it underscores the significance (and the oppressiveness) of the rigorous either/or logic that confronts and hedges in the protagonist of *Boyhood*. The young John feels himself compelled to choose between one thing and another with almost comic regularity: "Who do you like, Smuts or Malan? Who do you like, Superman or Captain Marvel? Who do you like, the Russians or Americans?" (Coetzee 1998: 27). What is Freek, the worker on his uncle's farm: a man or a boy? (p. 86). This sense of a compulsory either/or is not diminished by the reader's realisation that the options presented to the boy are often false ones: the most comic choice the young Coetzee has to make is between being "Jewish" or "Christian" or "Roman Catholic" (Coetzee 1998: 18-19). Nor is the pressure to choose taken away by the perception that the distinctions between the alternatives are far from firm. The boy's conviction that the English are good and the Afrikaners are bad, that they are people filled with rage and violence, is undermined when their lodger, Trevelyan, takes it upon himself to beat Eddie, a coloured boy who briefly lives with the Coetzees in Rondebosch as a servant, for running away. Trevelyan, though indisputably English, seems to relish the whipping just as much as do the Afrikaans teachers in Worcester who maintain discipline with the *lat*.

Despite such inconsistencies, the experiential world of *Boyhood* remains one of starkly antithetical options, the most significant of which is, of course, the linguistic one: whether to "be" English or Afrikaans. At stake in this choice is an entire system of ordering the world and of relating to others: a system, in other words, that interpellates the subject in very particular ways. (As in Althusser (1971: 174-175), interpellation and subjectivisation here seem to require a degree of individual assent: a performative recognition, at least, of one's place in the system, even though the individual – "always already subject" – cannot invent or change the system as a whole.) The system implicit in and imposed by Afrikaans is to

be avoided, the young John obscurely intuits, in order not to become entangled in various embarrassments. There is, for example, the embarrassment of the relationships with servants: one doesn't go to their houses, because, the boy is told, it would be embarrassing; but, even more embarrassingly, servants come into white people's houses, where they scrub the floor and address one in the third person, as "die kleinbaas", as if one weren't present (Coetzee 1998: 86). There is the further embarrassment of one's relation to superiors and elders. The grammar of the second-person pronoun, the boy notes, requires his father to speak like a "whipped slave": "*Mammie moet 'n kombors oor Mammie se knië trek anders word Mammie koud.*" ["Mommy must draw a blanket over Mommy's knees otherwise Mommy will get cold."] (Coetzee 1998: 49). Then there is the embarrassment of the bodily frankness and brutality that Afrikaans seems to encrypt, in words like "poes", and "borsel" and "moer" and in things like beatings and bare feet (pp. 57, 69, 77). And there is, finally, the embarrassment of what passes for Afrikaans culture: the cumbersome expressions learned at school, "lumpish nonsensical idioms about wages and cattle and cattle-harness", that are "supposed to come from the *volksmond*, but seem to come only from the Great Trek" (p. 81), or the saccharine songs like "*Kom ons gaan blomme pluk in die vlei*", with its "children gamboling in the fields among the chirping birds and jolly insects", which the young John hates so much that he "wants to scream and shout and make farting noises during the singing" (p. 70).

It must be said that if one knows all the lyrics this song truly is quite embarrassing – especially for a preadolescent – in its nauseatingly coy romance: "*Steel jy 'n soentjie, ek sal nie skrik, / Want voëltjies sal ons nooit nie gaan verklik*" ["If you were to steal a kiss, I would not be alarmed, because little birdies will never betray us"]. (No decoy ducks in this sentimental, monolingualistic *vlei*.) The feelings of the young John, in other words, may be excessive, but they are not entirely eccentric. They resonate, it seems to me, with a characteristic structure of feeling in post-apartheid Afrikaans culture. Consider, for example, contemporary underground comics: texts that, as I have argued elsewhere, constitute a revealing archive of *petites histoires* of the apartheid era (Barnard 2004: 720). The work of the creators of *Bitterkomix* – Anton Kannemeyer, in particular – is rife with feelings of humiliation and embarrassment. Often, as in Kannemeyer's notorious strip, *Boetie*, which deals with an Afrikaans father's pederasty, these are feelings caused by the abuse and betrayal of a child by an adult: the guilt and shame (or, worse, the shamelessness) of one generation is displaced and transmuted into the pervasive embarrassment of the next. It makes perfect sense that these comics should also flirt with and even mimic pornography: a genre in which embarrassment is decisively excised.

To the example provided by the *Bitterkomix* artists I might add my own less sensational, but nevertheless intense, adolescent experiences. It strikes

me in retrospect that the chief reason why I decided to study English at university, rather than Afrikaans, lies in the uncomfortable interpellations that seemed to be rife in the study of Afrikaans literature. At my high school, the well-known Afrikaans Hoër Meisieskool in Pretoria, my headmistress would annually – almost ritually – read the poem, “By die vroue betoging”, by Jan F.E. Cilliers to our hushed assembly. It had the following resonant and hopelessly corny refrain, from which our school motto was taken: “*Ek sien haar wen/ Vir man en seun en broeder/ Want haar naam is vrou en moeder*” [“I see her win/ For husband, son, and brother/ For her name is wife and mother”]. How much, I have often asked myself, did the nauseating feeling of cultural and sexual embarrassment that issued from that awful, inevitable rhyme have to do with me making choices that eventually led me to my current professional position – not to mention my determined avoidance of motherhood? Not, I hasten to add, that studying English in South Africa’s Leavisite English departments ended up being entirely devoid of embarrassment. I now find it funny that I was, in my senior year at the University of Pretoria, the recipient of the most patronising prize I’ve ever heard of: the Phillip Millstein Award for the Afrikaans student who made the best progress in English. (We might remember here Coetzee’s reminiscence in *Boyhood* about how, in his school in Cape Town, boys with Afrikaans names inevitably got 6½ for English, while boys with English names got 7½ (1998: 139)).

I bring in these personal reminiscences not so much for the pleasure of jokingly exorcising an awkward girlhood, but to lead up to a pertinent critical observation. It seems to me that many commentators on *Boyhood*, including Derek Attridge, read the book in the light of Coetzee’s major essay on confession (Coetzee 1992: 251-294) and historicise the work in the context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and South Africa’s guilty past. They therefore have much to say about the dynamics of shame in the memoir. But viewed from my particular angle, the key affect in the work is not really shame but embarrassment – and the two should be distinguished. Derived from French and Italian roots, the word “embarrassment” is etymologically associated with obstacles, entanglements, debts, and, therefore, unwanted connections; these associations are rather different, I would argue, from the more morally intense associations and emotions that attach to the Germanic word “shame”: emotions which imply a sense of collective connection, however dishonourable.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, as Attridge

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9. It is worth recalling Coetzee’s reflections on “dishonour” (something closer to “shame”) throughout *Diary of a Bad Year*. If Americans should feel dishonoured by the actions of Cheney and Bush, or if men in general should feel dishonoured by a rape, it is because of a guilty identification with a particular collectivity; embarrassment may be more easily disavowed – indeed, I am suggesting that it is what provokes disavowal and disidentification.

points out, the sources of shame experienced by the young John in *Boyhood*, are often not really shameful. Except, I suppose, for the secret of his egomania and his stony heart, the boy's shame has to do with his parents' refusal to be "normal", with their indifference – "to their eternal credit", as an older J.M. Coetzee was to observe – to the fate of the Afrikaner (Coetzee 1992: 393). We respond to this emotion, Attridge rightly remarks, much as we do to the "shameful" attitudes of Huck Finn, "as a laudable sign of [the boy's] instinctive discomfort with the ingrained racism" of his society (2004: 150).

But embarrassment, rather than shame, is the affect that energises the young John's choice – his fervent and rather fearful desire – to be English, even if this identity compromises his belonging on (or to) his uncle's Karoo farm, or the loss of the alternative, more carefree self that seems available to him in some of the more utopian moments of the memoir: "When he speaks Afrikaans all the complications of life seem suddenly to fall away. Afrikaans is like a ghostly envelope that accompanies him everywhere, that he is free to slip into, becoming at once another person, simpler, gayer, lighter in his tread" (Coetzee 1998: 125).

It is no wonder then that the happiest scene in the novel – one that we might describe, after Erving Goffman, as an instance of the "euphoric interplay" that arises when the usual operations of embarrassment are suspended – is one where the young Coetzee, in the company of his intelligent cousin Agnes, suddenly feels as though he is outside the linguistic either/or of English and Afrikaans: "They began to talk. She had pigtailed and a lisp, which he liked. He lost his reserve. As he spoke he forgot what language he was speaking: thoughts simply turned to words within him, transparent words" (Coetzee 1998: 94).<sup>10</sup> It is a moment of unproblematic, culturally unfettered expression of a sort that Coetzee, the academic writer, would never associate with any given language.<sup>11</sup>

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10. See Schudson (1984: 641 and throughout). It is important, however, to distinguish the function of embarrassment as it operates in Coetzee's writing (and life?) from the way in which it is understood to operate by Goffman. Goffman is, as Michael Schudson puts it, a "theorist of civility" (1984: 647); embarrassment, in Goffman's view, is what shapes the subject to fit into a given society in a peaceable and dignified manner. Embarrassment does not drive the young Coetzee towards social conformity: after all, the embarrassing things that cause him to cringe and recoil are perfectly acceptable in the social world of Worcester and the Karoo.

11. A case in point: Newton, or so Coetzee argues (1992: 181-84), needed a transparent language to express his theory of gravity, but unfortunately had to make do with the rhetoric of Latin, which entrapped him in the metaphors of agency. However, Coetzee does on occasion suggest that such fetters can be shed by musical expression of the highest quality: "Bach

Is English, then, a “native tongue”, a language Coetzee was born to? The matter, I have tried to suggest, is more complicated and more relevant to the idea of “fictions of the *I*” or “Coetzee and his doubles” than one might at first think. The intuitions I have been entertaining find some kind of confirmation in Coetzee’s recent meditations in *Diary of a Bad Year* on his relationship with the English language. Here he (or his focal character, Señor C) reflects – as Coetzee has reflected in interviews in *Doubling the Point*, in his Nobel Prize speech, and in his fiction – on the lack of full intentionality or self-presence in the act of writing: on the fact that one cannot say whether one writes to say what one means, or whether one discovers what one meant to say in the process of writing. He introduces these observations as follows:

Does each of us have a mother tongue? Do I have a mother tongue? Until recently I accepted without question that, since English is the language I command best, English must count as my mother tongue. But perhaps it is not so. Perhaps – is this possible? – I have no mother tongue.

For at times, as I listen to the words of English that emerge from my mouth, I have a disquieting sense that the one I hear is not the one I call myself. Rather, it is as though some other person (but who?) were being imitated, followed, even mimicked. *Larvatus prodeo* .... Who is it who judges what sounds or does not sound right? Is it necessarily I (“I”)?

Would the whole experience be any different, any less complicated, any better if I were more deeply sunk, by birth and upbringing, in the language I write – in other words, if I had a truer, less questionable mother tongue than English in which to work?

(Coetzee 2007: 195-196)<sup>12</sup>

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thinks in music,” he declares. “Music thinks itself in Bach” (Coetzee 2001: 9).

12. The phrase “*larvatus prodeo*” is immensely suggestive in thinking about Coetzee’s writerly practice. It alludes to the pledge made by René Descartes in his youth:

*Ut comoedi, moniti ne in fronte appareat pudor, persona indunt, sic ego hoc mundi theatrum conscensurus, in quo hactenus spectator exstiti, larvatus prodeo.*

(Descartes 1964: 213)

[Actors, taught not to let any embarrassment show on their faces, put on a mask. I will do the same. So far, I have been a spectator in this theater which is the world, but I am now about to mount the stage, and I come forward, masked.

(Descartes 1985: 2)]

The curious word “*larvatus*” carries different connotations from the more standard adjective “*personatus*” – connotations of unfinishedness, immaturity. While the primary connotations of the phrase do bring up the

It is revealing, I would suggest, that the very next entry in the series of “gentler opinions” in which these reflections appear – a warm, laudatory, almost envious one – is entitled “On Antjie Krog”: a poet who, for all her anguish about the historical guilt that clings to Afrikaans, surely never had any doubt that it is – like it or not – her mother tongue. While Coetzee is quite clear that, for all his competence in the language, he cannot be considered Afrikaans (not least because he would not be recognised as such by other Afrikaners (1998: 341-42)), he nevertheless seems to become increasingly doubtful about his being English. Assuming that Señor C’s opinions correspond with Coetzee’s, his “Englishness” – even just his use of the English language – comes to feel more and more like a matter of contrivance. It is a mask, *persona*, or *larva* to hide an embarrassing passion – not, in principle, so unlike his boyhood decision to “be” a “Roman Catholic.”

### 3

I would now like to return to Coetzee’s bland statement about his linguistic background that I cited earlier, to identify a second respect in which it seems to me to mistranslate or deny a particular aspect of his fiction. Coetzee comments, readers will recall, on the way in which English-speaking South Africans will eventually be of “no discernable ethnos”, that they will belong to “a pool in which differences wash away”. We see here a sensible spirit of cosmopolitanism and anti-nationalism: the only attitude, really, that one can sanely hold on these matters in the world of rational argument. To rage against the loss of a language that entraps one in an objectionable ethnos is surely mad. But in fiction, as Coetzee observed to David Attwell, one “can *stage* [one’s] passion”, one can be mad (Coetzee 1992: 61).

The crucial mad text here is, of course, *In the Heart of the Country*: a work that the linguist Susan Fitzmaurice has rightly described as “auto-

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idea of performance (which, according to certain theorists – for example, Gayatri Spivak – is inseparable from the translation or staging of a text), its secondary connotations bring to mind those older, more primitive versions of selves that are accessed during the creative process: the grub-selves that are recalled, for instance, in the *autrebiographical* world of *Boyhood*, with its pervasive sense of only partially understood options and embarrassments. Norman O. Brown’s meditations on the phrase are also suggestive. The word “*larvatus*”, he notes, can refer to madness or demoniacal possession (Brown 1966: 96-97): it thus evokes yet another even more discomfiting kind of creative othering – of the sort we encounter, say, at the end of *The Master of Petersburg*, where Dostoevsky is, at it were, possessed by the evil that is Stavrogin (Coetzee 1994: 96-97).

biographical in impulse” (1999: 179).<sup>13</sup> Magda, the novel’s central consciousness and one of Coetzee’s most compelling textual doubles or “fictions of the *I*”, is the figure of the colonial intellectual, who can enter the domain of ideas and philosophical speculation only in English. Yet the very intellectual ferocity of her monologues is an expression of an unreasonable sense of loss that arises from her self-imposed and necessary exclusion from Afrikaans – which is so beautifully described in the text as “a language of nuances, of supple word-order and delicate participles, opaque to the outsider, dense to its children with moments of solidarity, moments of distance” (Coetzee 1982a: 30). To be sure, Magda cannot compose what she calls her “terrible sonnets” in Afrikaans; indeed, the phrase “terrible sonnets”, with its Hopkinsian allusion, makes this very point, since it requires what Coetzee elsewhere calls “the echo chamber of the English prose tradition” for its full implications to emerge (1988: 126). But her more “primitive” self – to use the terminology suggested by the passage from *Giving Offense* – is clearly not English. Magda, in fact, confesses as much: “I grew up with the servants’ children. I spoke like one of them before I learned to speak like this” (Coetzee 1982a: 6-7). Some of the most poetic passages in the novel, though rendered in English in both versions of the text, are therefore, in a sense, already translated, imperfectly redolent of a linguistic and social world the speaker has been forced to abandon. I am thinking here, for instance, of the stories Magda regrets not being able to tell the servant girl Klein-Anna: “how grandfather ran away from the bees and lost his hat and never found it again, why the moon waxes and wanes, how the hare tricked the jackal” – stories that in English “have no past or future”, though in Afrikaans (or in the Khoi languages), they might seem “really to have happened” (Coetzee 1982a: 114). The “closing plangencies” of the novel, similarly, should more properly resonate in the “echo chamber” of Afrikaans than in that of English literature, evoking as they do those nostalgic pastoral poems Magda chose not to write: poems about “Verlore Vlakke, about the melancholy of the sunset over the koppies, the sheep beginning to huddle against the first evening chill, the faraway boom of the windmill, the first chirrup of the first cricket, the last twitterings of the birds

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13. Ian Glenn’s still indispensable essay on the novel makes this point well: in a section entitled “Magda, c’est moi”, he discusses the narrator as an apt “I-figure” or mask for Coetzee as colonial writer: “Magda as writer meditates on the limitations of writing as a way of articulating a poetics for Coetzee himself, the fellow writer writing Magda writing Magda” (Glenn 1996: 127). Glenn also cites an early biographical comment, in which Coetzee describes his own Karoo background in terms that correspond closely to the novel: he was born”, or so he told Dick Penner, “in the twilight of a centuries-old feudal order in which the rights and duties of masters and servants seemed to be matters of unspoken convention, and in which a mixture of personal intimacy and social distance – a mixture characteristic of societies with a slaveholding past – pervaded all dealings” (p. 127).

in the thorn-trees, the stones of the farmhouse wall still holding the sun's warmth, the kitchen lamp glowing steady" (Coetzee 1982a: 138). Even more significantly, Magda's decision to commit patricide – hypothetical, textual patricide, of course – when her father takes Klein-Anna to bed, can be read as a desperate defence of certain Afrikaans linguistic proprieties to which she remains attached. It constitutes a failed attempt to repair the linguistic breaches in the pronominal codes of the language (expressive not just of gender and number, but also of distance and familiarity) that occur when the white patriarch exchanges forbidden words of intimacy with the servant: "ons" "ons twee", "kom jy saam met my", and so forth (Coetzee 1978: 35).

*In the Heart of the Country*, then, dramatises the failure of full translation: a point that is most dramatically evident if we compare Magda's grotesque attempt at communicating her true thoughts to someone else, with the translated "mongrel" language of Fugard's characters: "Energy is eternal delight", she declares to Klein-Anna, momentarily vocalising Blake, as is possible only in English (Coetzee 1978: 101). But then she goes on:

I could have been another person, ek kon heeltemaal anders gewees het, I could have burned my way out of this prison, my tongue is forked with fire, verstaan jy, ek kan met 'n tong van vuur praat; but it has all been turned uselessly inward, nuttelos, what sounds to you like rage is only the crackling of the fire within, ek is nooit regtig kwaad met jou gewees nie, I have never learned the speech of men, ek wou slegs praat, ek het nooit geleer hoe 'n mens met 'n ander mens praat nie. It has always been that the word has come down to me and I have passed it on. I have never known words of true exchange, wisselbare woorde, Anna. Woorde wat ek aan jou kan gee kan jy nie teruggee nie. Hulle is woorde sonder waarde. Verstaan jy? No value.

(Coetzee 1978: 101)

To translate the passage into English alone (as Coetzee did for the international edition) is inevitably to smooth over the difficulties Magda faces in trying to move from the closed system of one language to another. The style of this extraordinary passage is clearly not a matter, as in Fugard, of using code switching for those socially realistic and characterological effects that Coetzee analyses with suspicion in his essay "Simple Language, Simple People" (especially in his commentary on Mikro's *Toiings* (Coetzee 1988: 126-134)). At stake, rather, is an experimental foregrounding of the constraints of language and language choice and a rupturing of the conventions of realism and novelistic dialogue.

There is much more to say on language and translation in *In the Heart of the Country*, especially with regard to the absurd, yet moving communications that Magda ends up spelling out in her stony Esperanto to the purported Spaniards who fly back and forth over the farm in their flying machines. The message "MA SEMPRE HA DESIDER LA MEDIA

ENTRE” (Coetzee 1982a: 133), in particular, seems to express the dream of an exit from closed systems: of that escape from the either/or, which is always present in Coetzee’s work as utopia, the unimaginable that we must nevertheless imagine. Let me simply note, in sum, that *In the Heart of the Country* stages the sharp pain of what I will oxymoronically term an elective expulsion from Afrikaans: the (sometimes) beloved language that cannot be inhabited, without belonging to a family – without the *embarrassment* of family, if you will – and without agreeing to occupy a subject position determined by a very specific grammar of relations, obligations, and constraints. And though *In the Heart of the Country* is Coetzee’s most madly contradictory text, it is also one whose contradictions are re-echoed in a more overtly autobiographical fashion in the two memoirs.

I mention both memoirs here, because *Youth*, too, registers the linguistic push and pull I have detected in *Boyhood* and *In the Heart of the Country*. The young John, desperate to shake his embarrassing colonial connections, thinks that to speak Afrikaans on the streets of London is like “speaking Nazi” (Coetzee 2002: 127). But when his cousin Ilse comes to visit he nevertheless experiences the profound pleasures of doing so: it is, he says, like “sliding into a warm bath” (Coetzee 2002: 127). His subsequent exclusion from these comforts – announced in the letter he receives from Ilse, addressing him as “Beste” rather than “Liewe” John and reproaching him for his callous sexual behaviour towards her friend – causes him intense distress. The expulsion is, of course, well deserved and perhaps even deliberately courted: John, one might say, acts in such a way as to convert cultural embarrassment into outright shame through his betrayal of both family attachments and basic decencies. And yet the pain remains. So much for his earlier claim of having “more or less” escaped South Africa and all its attendant handicaps: “an undistinguished, rural family, bad schooling, the Afrikaans language” (Coetzee 2002: 62).

#### 4

Despite Coetzee’s ever more direct expression of his sense that English is not his mother tongue, it seems fair to say that the Afrikaans Coetzee, or, more accurately, the earlier self who once moved with the Afrikaans language around him “like a ghostly envelope that accompanies him everywhere” (Coetzee 1998: 125), has receded as a concrete potentiality – if it ever was that. This earlier hypothetical self has apparently been replaced by other “fictions of the *I*” (including that of a Russian and of an Australian novelist). By way of conclusion, I would like to draw attention to one of these later fictions that particularly intrigues me: the double that seems to be proposed in “What is a Classic?” (1991). This lecture brings to mind T.S. Eliot’s 1944 lecture of the same title in which he deploys not only Virgil, but Aeneas (that mythic figure of exile and then of home-founding) as

masks or personae, thus presenting himself not as American and a provincial, but as the magisterial voice of the metropolis itself. Eliot's determined transformation of himself into an English Roman, Coetzee notes, derived in part from "a certain embarrassment about American barbarousness" (2001: 3). It is hardly ingenious to suggest that Coetzee joins this line-up of impersonations: in fact, he confesses quite explicitly that he is "using Eliot the provincial as a pattern and figure of [him]self" (Coetzee 2001: 10). The essay interrogates a remembered youthful experience that is not included in the bleaker narratives of the published memoirs: a moment of transcendent delight on first hearing the music of Bach, which came floating over the fence into the backyard of his boring suburban Cape Town home one day in 1955. And it does not shirk confronting the possibility that a deliberate elective affiliation, of the sort that I have described in connection to *Boyhood*, may have determined what at the time seemed like a transcendent, disinterested, and impersonal aesthetic experience:

Was what was really going on at that moment that I was symbolically electing high European culture, and command of the codes of that culture, as a route that would take me out of my class position in white South African society and ultimately out of what I must have felt, in terms however obscure or mystified, as a historical dead end – a road that would culminate (again symbolically) with me on a platform in Europe addressing a cosmopolitan audience on Bach, T. S. Eliot, and the question of the classic?

(Coetzee 2001: 10-11)

In the retrospect of the internationally celebrated author and literary scholar, the one who can recognise himself in the figure of Eliot, that shadowy Afrikaans double – the self who speaks and is spoken by Afrikaans – disappears, just as the American Eliot disappears from the 1944 "What Is a Classic?" No matter that it once presented itself not only as an option, but as a considerable and ever-present threat (thence the strong affect of embarrassment), to his boyhood "I" – or "he". The fact that this earlier potential self seems by now so thoroughly superceded is surely one reason why Coetzee's childhood memoir remains *autrebiography* rather than autobiography (Coetzee 1992: 394).

And now that Coetzee has migrated from South African shores, his shadowy, hypothetical Afrikaans self will no doubt come to seem evermore like a discarded shell, rather than the once ever-present "ghostly envelope". But does this mean that it has been killed off, that it has ceased to have any effect on Coetzee's creative work? The best answer is that we cannot really know: the management of the inner menagerie is, after all, as Coetzee puts it in that striking passage from *Giving Offense*, "a very private activity, so private that it almost constitutes the very definition of privacy: how I am with myself" (1996: 38). However, a comparison between Coetzee's 1987

Jerusalem Prize acceptance speech and the Nobel Prize lecture seems nevertheless to offer some suggestions as to how we might think about this matter. In the Jerusalem Prize speech, Coetzee concluded by expressing a kind of envy of Milan Kundera, a previous recipient of the prize, who, in his acceptance speech paid tribute to Miguel Cervantes, “the first of all novelists, ... on whose giant shoulders we pigmy writers of a later age stand” (1992: 98). Coetzee laments that a South African writer, snarled in a world of “anger and violence” and “pathological attachments” – including, perhaps, his own primitive self’s attachment to the Afrikaans language and the family farm – cannot fully take up residence in a more cosmopolitan and just world where novelists “truly have an occupation” (p. 98). The pressures of the local and biographical, “the power of the world his body lives in”, with all its physical and moral crudity prevents a full, imaginative translation into the world of art (p. 99). Some twenty years later, by the time of the Nobel Prize speech, Coetzee seems to have freed himself from these local, national, and personal attachments, at least to the extent that “He and His Man” can be read as a tribute to Defoe, another of the genre’s originators. And yet, one cannot quite say that Coetzee presents himself, in the Nobel Prize speech as standing on the giant shoulders of Defoe. The biographical Coetzee, in fact, seems noticeably absent from the scenario he describes. Rather than serving simply as an honoured predecessor, as Cervantes does for Kundera, Defoe clearly serves here as mask for Coetzee: as yet another fiction of the *I*. More: the situation evoked in the lecture’s final, rather wistful lines would seem to allegorise an increasingly unbridgeable distance between fictional character and author, between self and mask: Crusoe and Defoe are sailing past each other “one on a ship going East, one on a ship going West, too busy working the riggings to even hail each other, though they might momentarily be close enough to do so” (Coetzee 2003: 6). It is not, I think, accidental that Coetzee chooses Defoe, the arch-ventriloquist who was so decisively masked and even eclipsed by his fictional creations as his own mask or persona in this lecture. Hiding behind this most elusive of ancestors, Coetzee presents us with a paradox. By so deliberately, so provocatively, and even so irritatingly (given the expectations of the event) keeping his biographical, authorial self from view, Coetzee is, precisely, drawing attention to that absence. The most impersonal author, as Coetzee himself observed in relation to Eliot, may ultimately be the most personal: he masks his passion, his excesses, and yet, to recall my epigraph from Roland Barthes, points with his “discreet (and wily) finger” to this mask (Barthes 2002: 43). “I want you to know that I don’t want to show my feelings”: this may be the burden of the Nobel Prize lecture. Thus, in his most illustrious international performance, Coetzee alerts us to the likelihood that the most profoundly hidden and embarrassing parts of the self will still be part of the creative process. They may again – who knows? – step forth to engage our critical attention more directly in years to come.

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