

# New Research on J.M. Coetzee

## Introduction

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In 1989 the *Journal of Literary Studies/Tydskrif vir Literatuurwetenskap* published a special edition on the novel *Foe*, at that point the most recently published of Coetzee's novels. That edition was based on a conference with the same title held at the University of South Africa, Pretoria, from 10 to 11 March of the same year, organised by Marianne de Jong and the Department of Theory of Literature at Unisa. Due to the positive response to this edition, the *Journal* decided to launch a further special edition on the writing of J.M. Coetzee.

Looking at the contents of the first edition one becomes aware of expansions and variations, both in Coetzee's writing and in its reception. Indicative of this is the title of this present edition. It does not claim to be representative of a body of research, for example a South African one, as the edition of 1989 to a certain extent could. It is not based on a specific conference since today conferences dedicated to Coetzee's work or to selected novels by him take place all over the English-speaking world and beyond, and local scholars interested in Coetzee's work present papers overseas almost more often than they do in South Africa. The measure of anonymity and generality of the title of this special edition could further be explained by the rapid expansion of research directions on the work of J.M. Coetzee.

The reading and interpretation of novels such as Coetzee's can never be regarded as complete, and hence as forming a body, an encapsulating whole of reception and interpretation. The purpose of "New Research on J.M. Coetzee" is to display new interarticulations of literature and non-literary paradigms, new loci of interest *post* the political readings of Coetzee, and new problematisations of the ethics of his writing.

The introduction takes the form of notes and commentaries on each of the included articles.

In "Coetzee's Queer Body" Elleke Boehmer expands and refines an argument offered in the special edition, *Interventions on Coetzee's "Disgrace"*, where she argued that Lucy, in comparison to her father, David Lurie, "has been the passive recipient of a form of violent desire .... In her case, the victim of historical violence – and, as a woman, a historical victim – is forced to take upon herself (even if she denies doing so) the

consequences of that violence” (Boehmer 2002: 349). As in “Coetzee’s Queer Body”, this article connects the representation of women to an ethical drive. Narratively speaking, Lucy’s silence enables the novel to textualise the possibility, for Lurie, of the coming into being of a new-found “sympathy”. It also novelistically facilitates the articulation of “the far more painful process of enduring rather than transcending the degraded present” since the possibility of “adequately saying sorry” is excluded by the novel. (p. 343) If any grace is to be had from this endurance, then it accrues to the man and at the price of a textual typecasting of woman as passive and silent.

Coetzee’s “queerness” in the article in this edition refers to the inability to cope with the physicality or bodiliness of women. This is, according to Boehmer, deducible from the way the narrative voice in selected novels describes encounters with “the seepages and effluvia of a woman” (Boehmer 2005: 228) In such situations, Boehmer concludes, the typical reaction of John in *Youth* is “overwhelming feelings of guilt, squeamishness, inadequacy” (p. 228). Counterpointing this there is abundant textual evidence of a certain queer fascination with the male body. The first erotic impulses of which the John of *Boyhood* reports are of such bodies and the interconnectedness of “beauty and desire” (p. 223). “When human bodily perfection is granted female identity, it is the nonhuman identity of Greek goddesses carved in stone” (p. 223), Boehmer argues. Although Boehmer proposes that homoerotic desire is evident, and even suggests that this may be a response to Albie Sachs’s call for a literature beyond the political struggle against apartheid and its concerns, the point of the article is not in the first place to force novels such as *Boyhood*, *Youth* and *Elizabeth Costello* out of the closet, but rather to analyse the “queer aesthetic” they display (p. 226). Boehmer presents a synopsis of what a “queer reading” of literature could be. Considering the treatment of erotic desire in Coetzee’s latest novel, *Slow Man*, the following remark about queer reading might prove very useful: “A queer reading is not concerned about eviscerating the erotic secret. It is committed rather to collaborating *with* wayward movements of half-expressed desire; desire which cannot be acknowledged in so many words, or resolved into single object-choices” (p. 227). Should one read *Slow Man* as a painful exposé of self-doubting masculinity, then the fascination of its protagonist with the son of his object of desire could take us back to Boehmer’s exposition of queer reading in this article.

The political-ethical concerns about the textualisation of the colonised, racialised or political other in Coetzee’s first novels up to and including *Age of Iron* have been expansively debated and analysed. In *Elizabeth Costello* Boehmer recognises a thrust to embody the other, something the earlier novels withdrew from – for ethical reasons (and not only political ones), one

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might propose. If the writer Coetzee now breaches the gap to otherness by writing the novelist as a woman, then he can only do so by “queering” himself, by “sliding into a kind of sexism and thus arguably becoming the more skittishly and provocatively homoerotic” (p. 231). Following Boehmer, Coetzee’s “queerness” can perhaps be understood as an incompletely reflected, sub(not un)conscious writing manoeuvre. To bridge the gap to woman as body and as centre of the experience of pain, especially in the physical sense, the writer has to adopt a queerish stand which denies female sexuality and its physicality. Thus, if embodiment is an ethical obligation for the writer, as one might conclude from *The Lives of Animals* and from *Elizabeth Costello*, then the writer can only achieve this by a device which distances him from the female body in its physicality, for example by aging her as he does with Costello.

Could one accuse him of dishonesty as a writer, something which Boehmer does not do and which is not the purpose of her article? The article unwittingly reintroduces the question about the agent of writing, asked elsewhere about the “John” of *Boyhood* (to mention but one example).<sup>1</sup> As Boehmer implies more than once, the queer body belongs to the writing, to an agent who, due to the way he writes or in order to facilitate ways of writing, queers “himself”, and this by no means involves the biographical J.M. Coetzee. Could one add that this “queerness” belongs to the process or the act of writing?

The article also reintroduces the textualisation of the body in Coetzee’s work and allows us to restate a question recently put: “Is the actual other of Coetzee’s writing perhaps the Body?”<sup>2</sup> If the ethical withdrawal from the representation of the body of the other, so eminent in *Foe* and *Age of Iron*, and problematised in *The Master of Petersburg*,<sup>3</sup> is now replaced or perhaps rearticulated in terms of the task of imagination and sympathy, as professed by Costello in *Lives of Animals*, then Costello could be a means by which the agent of *Slow Man* explores the efficacy of such an imaginative

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1. As Hughes (2005) analyses John’s relationship with mother, father and sibling in *Boyhood* in psychoanalytical and historical-political terms, seeing the former as metaphor for the latter, he draws certain conclusions about the writer Coetzee and thereby implicitly addresses the agent of the writing. The psychoanalytical impetus also implicitly addresses the body of this agent. Hughes quotes various examples from *Boyhood* which display the link between agency and bodily, sometimes naturalistic writing.
  2. Informal remark made by David Attwell at the *Africa in Literature* conference at the University of Cape Town, July 2005
  3. The protagonist ventures to embody his own deceased son.

embodiment, even though the Costello of *Slow Man* could be taken with a pinch of salt.

In “Materiality and the Madness of Reading” Louise Bethlehem argues that *Elizabeth Costello* bears traces of the “semiotic matrix of South African literary culture” in that there is a “persistent interrogation of the relations between representation and material embodiment” (Bethlehem 2005: 235). Referring to Attwell’s description of Coetzee’s novels more or less up to and including *Age of Iron* as “situational metafiction”, Bethlehem accentuates the fact that although *Elizabeth Costello* does not fit into this early summary of the so-called “South Africanness” of Coetzee’s fiction, she nevertheless describes this hybrid novel as “expatriate formalism” (p. 239). Bethlehem traces the strong textualisations of the physical or bodily in the chapter “At the Gate” and quotes Costello remarking, as she begins to check her new environment, “that at least she does not have to invent: this dumb, faithful body that has accompanied her every step of the way” (p. 241). We are invited to read the “literariness” of which “At the Gate” is itself, qua writing, an example, as opposed to or intruded by the physical body.

It is this body and its representation which displays how text becomes event, Bethlehem argues, drawing on Attridge’s proposal that literature’s formality requires that it should be read as singular event (Attridge 2004). The event of the text implicitly refers to the act-event of writing, according to Attridge as quoted by Bethlehem, and this explains why the text as event is also a “singular putting into play of ... the set of codes and conventions that make up the institution of literature and the wider cultural formation of which it is part” (Attridge as quoted by Bethlehem 2005: 243; Attridge 2004: 105-106). Accordingly, the project of Bethlehem’s article is to look for “residual evidence of a deferred historicity” in *Elizabeth Costello* (Bethlehem 2005: 244). South Africa and, in particular, post-apartheid South Africa seeps into *Costello*, Bethlehem argues, in the “generalised nostalgia for the irrefutability of the body” as this is evident in the discourse of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (p. 246). To prove this Bethlehem also calls on Judith Butler’s argument that we think of the material body as a sheer exterior to discourse. If embodiment is a task for writing, as one can also deduce from Bethlehem, then her critical analysis of the TRC’s dependence on the materiality or corporeality of the body seems important. As the Commission uses the body as a means to claim “immediacy of reference”, the need for embodiment emerges, since the body in its materiality is an instance of “recall” – it is not at hand or present to the Commission in its physical corporeality (p. 247). The Commission, as those who followed its hearings know, had to draw on the testimony of scars and mutilations, on verbal recall and oral narrative.

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Bethlehem's critique of Costello's professed faith in the body in "At the Gate" reminds of the withdrawal from the direct representation of the body of the other which marked the ethics of writing in Coetzee's earlier novels. The other, or the body of the other, is often configured as mere textual given and the only materiality writing can present is "the materiality of the letter" (Bethlehem 2005: 248), a paradox which *Age of Iron* exploits or, to use Attridge's term, performs. Coetzee, as Bethlehem notes, knows that the body cannot be used by writing to produce "an excess of truth", since it is always coupled "to its history, to its contingent narrativisations" (p. 249). In her reading "At the Gate" implicitly stages the claim Costello makes on the body as infused, not with corporeality but with "literariness". It is in the nostalgia for the body as present and reliable referent that *Elizabeth Costello* displays a "post-apartheid modality" (p. 244).

If embodiment is indeed an ethical task, to what extent is it condemned from the start to be an instance of the "Nachträglichkeit" of the body, as Bethlehem states, using a Nietzschean term which can be understood as a presumed cause known (as cause) only in its effects? Does this confirm that the "body" is the immutable other of Coetzee's writing? In the last section of *Foe*, bodiliness infuses the writing to the extent that it diffuses it, so that the writing seems to perform the impossibility of writing the body.<sup>4</sup>

Another question arising here is how this affects the body of the writing agent, that body which Boehmer addresses. Theoretically speaking, and expanding on Attridge's proposal, one might ask to what extent that act-event which readers, exposing themselves to the event of reading, have to presume, includes the agent and her or his body.

The third article in this edition provides the reader with a welcome intertextual and "palimpsestuous" (Nethersole 2005) reading of the "Postscript" in *Elizabeth Costello* in which this letter written by a (fictional) Elizabeth Chandos is co-read with Hugo von Hofmannsthal's "Chandos Letter" of 1902, the fictional letter of *Elizabeth Costello* being dated 1603 and addressed to Francis Bacon. Reingard Nethersole's interlacing reading is both precise and rich in its interpretation and it should be in order to highlight only one or two points in the context of this Introduction. Firstly, Nethersole links the formal presentation of *Elizabeth Costello* as "hybrid text" (Nethersole, p. 255) to the "ambivalence" to which Costello herself refers, or to a "zone of the in-between" existing of gaps between double meanings which are not solved. Nethersole relays these gaps to a "basically unbridgeable one" (p. 256), namely the gap between semiotically produced, non-referential significance and discursive, referential meaning (p. 256). Chandos's letter supplements the letter Hugo von Hofmannsthal's

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4. This argument is presented in de Jong (2004).

conception, Philip, writes but in a manner which makes the letter a performance of the “irreparable otherness that defines the relationship between language and experience” (p. 257). This failure of language is captured in Von Hofmannsthal’s original fiction which, to quote Nethersole’s summary, depicts “a man who has given up writing because he has found that language fails before the revelations he experiences in his daily life” (p. 259). Hofmannsthal’s letter, Nethersole explains, has become synonymous with the crisis of language which marks modernism.

This modernist scepticism about language is apparent in Coetzee’s novels from the outset. The information Nethersole provides and analyses, allows one to link the fictional Philip’s desire to be physically unified with the visionary figurations of his imagination to the problem of the writing of the body and its ethical outcome, namely the problem of embodiment, already discussed above. Nethersole touches on this dichotomy, for example by pointing out the irreducible, allogical, meaning performance in the play on “words” and “swords” in one of Elizabeth Chandos’s sentences. One is reminded of Curren’s complaints about the “either-or” logic of clear distinctions she is confronted with, and her play with terms such as “pomegranate” which displays the logic of the “and-or” or “nand-nor” (Coetzee 1990: 51; Nethersole 2005: 261). Elizabeth Chandos’s distress concerns exactly this loss of referential and denotational security which she experiences through her husband, as he suffers from his revelations and his desire to be unified with his imaginings by means of words. Nethersole expounds upon the way in which a “loss of self”, amounting to “madness”, is staged in E. Chandos’s writing, and in the manner in which it inscribes itself into Hofmannsthal’s “original” (pp. 264). The “madness of reading” which Bethlehem uses as a description of her method in the second article in this edition, could, due to the third article, be counterpoised by the “madness of writing” or by this living as/like/with words and the gap between words and referential “truth” which, following Nethersole’s interpretation of the “Postscript”, characterises writing in modernism.

Nethersole’s detailed analysis of the “Postscript” could prompt readers to consider the extent to which the “Postscript” is also a recapitulation, by the writer-agent Coetzee, of his own (previous) writing. So, for example, the closing words of E. Chandos’s letters, in which Elizabeth quotes the words Hofmannsthal’s figuration utters, remind one of Magda’s address to the aeroplanes towards the end of *In the Heart of the Country*: “Not Latin ... no Latin not English nor Spanish nor Italian will bear the word of my revelation” (quoted by Nethersole 2005: 264).<sup>5</sup>

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5. In *In the Heart of the Country* Magda says of the words she believes to hear that they belong to “a Spanish of pure meanings such as might be dreamed of

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The “palimpsestuous” relationship between the Hofmannsthal and Coetzee texts, Philip’s desire for a language “in which inanimate things speak to me and wherein I may one day have to justify myself before an unknown judge” (quoted by Nethersole 2005: 264) could also be brought to bear on the fact that this is a “Postscript” to *Elizabeth Costello* and that it follows on “At the Gate”. Philip’s desire might then perhaps be read as the desire of the writer per se, or of the writer-agent Coetzee interpreted via the figure of Costello. Philip’s desire that signs or “ciphers” (p. 265) might allow him “to enter into a new and hopeful relationship with the whole of existence” recalls *In the Heart of the Country* and Magda’s dilemma, but might also be traced back to *Foe*, or the desire for the sign to speak its truth in *Life & Times of Michael K*. Adding to Nethersole’s elaboration of “hypertext”, “hypotext” and “palimpsest” we might conclude that the “Postscript” is also a palimpsest of sorts of Coetzee’s own previous writing, of own other texts, a possibility strengthened by the variety of appearances which Costello as figuration has made before and after the publication of *Elizabeth Costello*.<sup>6</sup> Nethersole also relates the “Postscript” to the Nobel address “He and His Man” (p. 265) and her interpretation of this might prove important for the reading of *Slow Man*. If, following Nethersole, the author-character relationship could be read palimpsestuously, that is, if author and character featuring as Costello and Rayment in *Slow Man* are palimpsests of one another, then the ideal of a revelatory literary language must not only be given up, but the complete ambivalence of these and other typical binaries of literature and reality must be accepted and their consequences articulated and recognised. Nethersole, refuting the possible typification of *Elizabeth Costello* as postmodern, addresses one of these consequences as she foresees them, namely the historicist implications, and refers in this regard to the undermining of traditional patrimony, and of the humanist view of the self as subject both of language and of experience, by *écriture féminine* in this regard. The rapturous unity of self and other beings of existence belongs to a literary and philosophical past.

Yet in reading this conclusion of the “palimpsestuous” reading of the Postscript in *Elizabeth Costello* one wonders to what extent the ideal of such a rapturous unity does inform Coetzee’s writing, or did, as in the closing of *Foe*, the anguish and “madness” of Magda and even the failure of the

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by philosophers, and that what is communicated to me via the Spanish language ... is therefore pure meaning”. She forms the letters “CINDRLA ES MI” with stones (Coetzee 1999a:137).

6. In Coetzee 2000 (*The Lives of Animals*), 2004 (*As a Woman Grows Older*), 2005 (*Slow Man*).

medical officer's desire to interpret Michael K as sign. One might ask whether this "Postscript" is not to a degree Coetzee's Postscript to his own writing thus far, or, accepting the "porous" relationship between this Postscript and the rest of what is normally called an *œuvre*, one may wonder to what extent the "Postscript" restages or reperforms a dilemma, an anguish or a driving force in Coetzee's novels, "informing" us as readers that it might be restaged in various forms again, and warning us not to read this writing as *œuvre* or as linear elaboration, as "development" or even "growth". Coetzee as writer, having reached the status (in a double sense: stature and stasis) of celebrity, might experience this as a possible misconceptualisation of his labours, or of the "act-events" which accompany the "event" of reading.

In the opening lines of her article on the possibility of a relatedness between *Elizabeth Costello* and Hannah Arendt, specifically in the former's chapter with the title "The Problem of Evil", Pamela Ryan also draws upon the "ambivalence" in this writing by Coetzee: "*Elizabeth Costello* is a text in which meaning is obliquely present to the reader, a text encumbered, even constituted, by equivocations, evasions and inconsistencies" (Ryan 2005: 278). As her analysis demonstrates, Costello, at the end of the chapter, confronts the void of not knowing and not being able to think. For Ryan this provides a textually based reason to investigate the "absent presence" (p. 277) of Hannah Arendt in this chapter, and readers will be intrigued by the "equivocations" of Arendtian thought, writings and statements in "The Problem of Evil". The article thus returns to the problem of the ethical in Coetzee's work, a topic to which academic publications since the 1990s have given much consideration. Ryan's article does not aim to contribute to this debate but rather, almost as a side-effect, addresses it from a new Arendtian perspective, as yet unexplored in Coetzee reception. Costello is paralysed by thinking as such, in a way which is

the interruption of all other activities ... and it may also have a dazing after-effect, when you come out of it, feeling unsure of what seemed to you beyond doubt .... If what you were doing consisted in applying general rules of conduct to particular cases as they arise in ordinary life, you will find yourself paralysed because no such rules withstand the wind of thought.

(Arendt as quoted by Ryan 2005: 284)

After reading West's book Costello is sure of her conclusion that the writer should not enter the place of evil as West, in her opinion, did. But before and especially after the lecture her thinking is thrown in disarray.

It is significant that Costello is reacting to her own first reading of West's book, that she therefore responds like a reader or a writer who also is a reader, proves interesting. Costello is aroused by a book, by a writerly



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description, and thrown in inner turmoil by this event of reading. Does this demonstrate that readers can be victims of books in a manner analogous to those victims who are immediate witnesses of a performed evil, and whom Arendt describes as victims “smitten in their own flesh” and paralysed beyond thinking? As Ryan makes clear, Costello’s own imagination of that event is at least as terrifying as West’s appears to have been. One might add, as readers of Coetzee’s Costello, at least as banalising and arousing.

Ryan’s “intertextual” reading of this chapter’s equivocations is, by means of a critical discussion of the relationship between author and protagonist, extended to include the writer Coetzee. Once again based on a scrutiny of intertexts, in this case Coetzee’s *Giving Offense*, Ryan proposes that Costello might be a way in which the writer Coetzee thinks “in dark times”, that is, about the problem of evil. As the opening paragraphs warn us, this thinking does not aim at a conclusion, a truth or a closure. It is, according to Ryan, rather a thinking performed by means of a writing towards something which cannot be in advance stipulated or even known. Given that this Coetzee is also the writer of *Elizabeth Costello* and the specific chapter under discussion, hence also of Costello’s imaginings in their frightening graphic precision, one recalls the naturalism of Coetzee’s writing in scenes of *Dusklands*, *Waiting for the Barbarians* and even in *Age of Iron*. This would support Ryan’s suggestion that for the writer Coetzee Costello is a mode of thinking.

Ryan’s article is concluded with a quotation from Hofmannsthal’s Chandos text: “[N]o longer would anything let itself be encompassed by one idea” (p. 293). Interpreting a dark world is ambiguous, as Ryan concludes about both Elizabeth’s and “her creator” Coetzee’s attempts. The article allows us to take this further: whilst the “creator” critiques censorship, his “creation” initially practises it; whilst Coetzee himself has professed that the suffering of others is taboo for the writer,<sup>7</sup> Costello unwittingly transgresses on this score. If Costello co-textualises writing and the writer (if not necessarily the biographical person-as-writer J.M. Coetzee), then the thinking in this chapter provides a glimpse at the extent to which the writer her- or himself becomes ethically compromised by writing, or could become so. Perhaps the writer can only rigidly avoid this by repressing her or his own “brush with evil”, by denying it a literary life, but that would be at the cost of “thinking” it, and at the cost of a denial of a writing which would, however ambiguously, be an engagement with evil even as, or perhaps precisely because, writing by virtue of its very being cannot escape the encounter with evil.

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7. See for example Coetzee 1992: 361-368.

The past decade and longer has seen a wave of postcolonialist analyses and evaluations of Coetzee's work, no doubt because the novels themselves invited this interest from literary critics and theorists. The extent to which this is replaced by an interest in ethics rather than politics – an ethics including concerns of women's rights – is reflected in this edition. However, two of the articles published here explicitly deal with postcolonialism. The first of these – Grant Hamilton's *J.M. Coetzee's Dusklands: The Meaning of Suffering* – proposes that suffering in *Dusklands* constitutes a reappraisal of the subjective in the light of Western rationalist and objectifying world views. That Western thought of this kind was a condition of possibility for colonialism has become, rightly or not, a matter of critical and postcolonial self-evidence, but Hamilton's article contributes to this established self-critique of Western postcolonialism a radical perspective, drawn from Stoic and Deleuzian thought (amongst others). Drawing on the Stoic distinction between the corporeal and the incorporeal, which also allows Hamilton to include Deleuze in his elaboration, the self as set up in *Dusklands* is here seen as the domain of

the paradox of infinite identity, where the fixed designation of a proper name demanded by the scientific rationality that underwrote European colonial discourse is perpetually contested within an irremovable dialogue held between two divergent directions of sense: past and future; active and passive; cause and effect; too much and not enough.

(Hamilton 2005: 304)

To become a corporeal subject, the self requires definitions of space and time, and the split in the self is narratologically achieved, Hamilton seeks to show, by the split in the chronological order of the two "Reports" which make up *Dusklands*. Hamilton quotes passages from both reports to demonstrate that the language of a split self is most apparently "schizophrenic" when physical pain is experienced: "Each account of the pained body becomes a description of the interruption of the ideational through the assertion of the corporeally real" (Hamilton 2005: 306). For both Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee this experience facilitates a feeling of being alive, of self-assurance, since it operates through the body, but this sensation comes at the cost of a cutting off of the body from the self, of a split where the body becomes an Other or the site of the "Self-as-Other" (p. 306). It is this experience of the self which Hamilton calls the "self as event", following Deleuze in this, and from which the thesis is derived that the self is a "becoming" rather than a closed identity. The individual identity supported by Western thought is necessarily a passive one, and the self losing this identity the active, "becoming" one, albeit a becoming evident in a "schizophrenic condition of autoscopia" in the case of Dawn (p. 308).

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Hamilton draws upon J.M. Coetzee's own valorisation of the suffering body which "takes authority in the production of its own undeniable power" (Coetzee as quoted by Hamilton 2005: 308; Coetzee 1992: 248), and shows how the subject-as-event, or as "becoming" obtains a position outside the reach of Christian dogmas of judgment and penalty – that penalty the believer must but cannot pay for the suffering of Christ. A close reading of this part of the text reveals, according to Hamilton, that "meaning becomes the artefact of a subjective experience that cannot be dominated by objective claims to truth since the value of such subjective experience resides beyond the judgment of another" (Hamilton 2005: 313).

Whilst addressing some of the typical interests of postcolonialist critique, Hamilton also moves beyond postcolonialist moralism since the subject as a becoming between self and (Self-as-)Other in an infinite process is, theoretically speaking, ethically neutral. However, the article raises the question whether *Dusklands* indeed sought to problematise the "self" of Western early- and late-colonialism-imperialism as "split" to such a degree. In the theoretical terms with which Hamilton operates "suffering" cannot be associated with grace or salvation and its bodily aspect is of a basic physicality. The complex theoretical network which Hamilton uses might also lead some readers to ask whether *Dusklands* is made into an exemplar of philosophical discourse on the self and hence made subject to an unacceptable theoretical appropriation. What is the status of such a philosophical-theoretical reading in comparison to the book as event, as Attridge proposed? Yet the article does provide an interpretation of the naturalistic writing in *Dusklands* which has baffled readers since the publication of *Dusklands* and it responds to the cultivation of madness in the first two novels, with *In the Heart of the Country* also calling upon a radical reading of the self in a rustic colonial culture. Some of the points elaborated in this article could be brought to bear on later incidents of suffering explored in the novels, for example the magistrate's incarceration in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Reading Coetzee in terms of Deleuze and Artaud would not be inconsistent with the ways of writing we are confronted with in many of his novels.

Asking what type of intertextuality is practised in novels dealing with the "postcolony", Gerald Gaylard concludes, affirming a statement by Michael Marais, whom he quotes in this regard, that a "peculiarly postcolonial version of intertextuality" is at stake in the Coetzee novels he refers to since it is an intertextuality or "postcolonial metafiction" which is historically and politically engaged. Gaylard concentrates on *Disgrace* and, whilst referring to a variety of other intertexts, highlights Romanticism:

In relation to South Africa and South African literature Coetzee's focus on

Romanticism in *Disgrace* is appropriate and canny given the political and pedagogical heritage of the country and Coetzee's ability to use a reformatted Romanticism to understand and redefine the present.

(Gaylard 2005: 334)

He demonstrates the extent to which this intertext is "subjected to ... a sustained critique" so that something "new" is arrived at, "something new that redefines its constituent parts in a proactive fashion" (p. 335). Some readers may not agree with Gaylard's formulations of this newness when, in places, it appears to answer to the question: What has Lurie learnt? What "lesson" can be deduced? Yet the definition of the kind of newness which intertextuality can produce is born out by the article and by its object, *Disgrace*. As Gaylard's references indicate, Romanticism as intertext in *Disgrace* has recently been the topic of serious research.<sup>8</sup> Gaylard interestingly points out that a certain globalist instrumentalism could be added to the intertextual scrambling in *Disgrace*, and refers to "an increase in puritanical surveillance and moralistic denunciation" evident in the text. (p. 335). Due to a critical approach to the question of intertextuality as metafiction, he establishes further normative terms for intertextuality, for example that a reading of the text within rather than subordinated to a context is preferable (p. 321). Gaylard's textual examples demonstrate, perhaps to an extent more than the author might have conceived of, the obsolescence of Romantic and individualistic self-concepts in the new dispensation *Disgrace* refers to. Gaylard questions "Romanticism's utility as an ongoing critique of modernity" since it is "far too melodramatic to be (an) appropriate metaphor ... for post-apartheid South Africa" (p. 314). This strikes one as a point that could be taken further. Does this intertext not, after all, serve the interest of parody in *Disgrace*? Do the sheep in Salem with which Lurie feels a certain identification, and the self-contained closed abode of women-to-women relationships really represent the Romanticist pastoral, or is the latter here parodied? When Lurie gives up his project of writing a minor piece for a chamber orchestra, he experiences the "comic" (Coetzee 1999b: 184 quoted by Gaylard 2005: 332). Would allowing for such an intertextual parody clarify Lucy's "silence" in *Disgrace*? Her silence affirms the obsolescence of Lurie's world. Her refusal to go to the police strikes one as one of the few assertive actions of the main figures in the text. Is she implicitly asserting a way of living which is not based on miscognition and illusion? A closer reading of the Salem, *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Crucible* intertexts which Gaylard includes in his discussion have us seeing that the scapegoat is Lucy, and, taking the article beyond its own

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8. See Williams (2004) and Wright (2005).

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stated point, could make us as readers wonder to what extent Lucy could be interpreted as the counterpoint to Romanticism and related old-world cultural remnants without thereby becoming a representation of a new truth, order or insight.

Like some of the other articles in this edition, Agatha Krzychylkiewitz's contribution was read as a paper at the conference on Africa in Literature held at the University of Cape Town.<sup>9</sup> Both there and elsewhere this overview of the Russian response to Coetzee met with much interest. Krzychylkiewitz's article is spurred by "influences" or intertextualities in Coetzee's writing which suggest that there is a strong Russian presence in Coetzee's writing, a presence not restricted to *The Master of Petersburg*. The article gives some clues to this and in this way indicates a field of research into Coetzee's work which should be investigated more intensively. Ironically, from Krzychylkiewitz's overview of the Russian reception of Coetzee, it does not seem as if this work can be left to Russian scholars in Russia itself, at this stage. Examples of such work can be found in the journal *Slavic Almanac* which is edited by the author of this article.

This edition is aptly closed off with Carol Clarkson's review of Attridge's *J.M. Coetzee & the Ethics of Reading {Literature in the Event}* since various articles in this edition refer to these books. Clarkson questions the "ethics of (the) reading" of theoretical sources on the side of Attridge. To what extent can a literary text pose to the reader an "Other" in the sense deployed by Attridge, who calls upon a Derridean reading of the Other, but in a rather loose way? Clarkson's question revives a point at present suppressed in literary criticism and cultural studies, namely if a proposition is based on "theory", why not be stringently accurate, and if not based on it, why call upon it? However, Clarkson nevertheless evaluates Attridge's widely acclaimed and read book highly.

Clarkson's question, how something can be totally other (in a Levinasian sense) and still allow us to engage with it in acts of reading and interpretation, could be repeated here to arrive at a final comment. Various articles in this edition focus on intertextualities in Coetzee's work, and perhaps this might give a key to an answer to Clarkson's question. In many ways these articles engage with the very "Otherness" that intertextuality can produce in a literary text, and the articles in this sense represent events of the reading of Coetzee. From the opposite viewpoint, intertextuality is also an apt example of the way in which writing performs meaning, a term also used by Attridge in *The Singularity of Literature* (Attridge 2004) on which this final comment is based. What I would suggest is that intertextuality, due to its "Otherness", returns the reader to the very act-event which is largely

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9. These papers are the articles by Boehmer and Krzychylkiewitz.

eluded by Attridge's proposed event of reading. This act-event would be writing as act proper with, as action theory holds, the event that properly goes with an act. On such a basis it becomes possible to also return the writer to reading – not as biographical person but as agent of a specific text, or as agent of a specific act of writing. If Clarkson's question implies that an element of recognisability should be accounted for, then perhaps the reader's knowledge that the text is also an act might supply such an element, since we all know what actions are, and experienced readers know very much about acts of writing.<sup>10</sup>

Many articles in this edition enter into dialogue with other recent publications on Coetzee, both books and articles which appeared in other journals. To close this introduction the editors would like to thank all students, scholars and other readers whose contributions, whether published here or not, have assisted us in creating this forum.

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10. de Jong (2004) deals with an action description of writing and the consequences this has for the notion of literary agency in the novels of J.M. Coetzee. See also de Jong (2005).

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