

# Disgraceful Metafiction: Intertextuality in the Postcolony

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## Summary

My aim in this paper is to examine J.M. Coetzee's use of intertextuality in *Disgrace* (2002a), partly because many commentators have said something about some of the intertexts utilised in the novel, but nobody has made an attempt at a thoroughgoing analysis, particularly in terms of what intertextuality, or indeed postmodernism, means in postcolonialism today. I want to make the claim against those who see *Disgrace* as primarily a realist text that merely provides an avenue into discussing sociological issues in "the new South Africa" and that to read it in this way is to do a disservice to the novel, to Coetzee's views on the value of literature and the imagination, and perhaps even to the relationship between literature and the nation. *Disgrace* is an ostensibly realist text that consists of a chain of provocations tempting the reader into realist interpretations, but a more careful reading of the novel shows how intertextual it is, and how subtle its analysis of cultural history is. This metafictional component then asks the question that Coetzee has been grappling with in his entire oeuvre, which is the question of the valency of complexity within sociohistorical contexts that tend to reduce complexity, sometimes to the extent of viewing it as an indulgence or even dangerous distraction within the new nation.

## Opsomming

My doel met hierdie artikel is om J.M. Coetzee se gebruik van intertekstualiteit in *Disgrace* te ondersoek. My rede hiervoor is deels dat, hoewel baie kommentators al melding gemaak het van sommige van die intertekste wat in die roman gebruik word, niemand nog 'n poging aangewend het om dit indringend te ondersoek nie – veral nie ten opsigte van die rol wat intertekstualiteit of trouens postmodernisme in postkolonialisme speel nie. Teenoor diegene wat *Disgrace* beskou as primêr 'n realistiese teks wat bloot 'n kanaal vir die bespreking van sosiologiese kwessies in "die nuwe Suid-Afrika" bied, wil ek die aanspraak maak dat so 'n beskouing die roman self, Coetzee se beskouing van die waarde van literatuur en die verbeelding, en moontlik selfs die verhouding tussen literatuur en die nasie, 'n onguns bewys. *Disgrace* is 'n oënskynlik realistiese teks wat bestaan uit 'n reeks provokasies wat die leser in die versoeking bring om dit op realistiese wyse te vertolk. 'n Deurtastender lees van die roman toon egter hoe intertekstueel dit is, en hoe subtiel Coetzee se ontleding van kultuurgeskiedenis is. Hierdie metafiksionele komponent ontlok dan die vraag waarmee Coetzee sy hele oeuvre deur worstel, naamlik dié aangaande die valensie van kompleksiteit in sosiohistoriese kontekste wat geneig is om kompleksiteit te verminder, soms dermate dat dit in die nuwe nasie as 'n verwenning of selfs 'n gevaarlike afleiding beskou word.

Disgrace – n – loss of favour or respect, downfall from position of honour, ignominy, shame, (is in disgrace); thing or person involving dishonour, cause of reproach.

Disgrace – v – Dismiss from favour, degrade from position of honour; bring shame or discredit on, be a disgrace to.

(OED)

My aim in this paper is to examine the relationship between nation and imagination via an analysis of the meaning of intertextuality in post-colonialism, or what the valency of postmodernism in postcolonial fiction is today. Perhaps the first thing to establish is the notion of intertextuality. Prior to Kristeva's theoretical intervention which established intertextuality as the notion of the radical interconnectedness of all texts, intertextuality tended to be understood via the ideas of imitation and allusion. Imitation implied the conscious use of prior texts or textuality, a learning from prior masters that was advocated by classical thinkers such as Aristotle, Cicero and Horace and prevailed into the eighteenth century (Cuddon 1998: 415), whilst allusion was a form of implicit reference. Kristeva's "Revolution in Poetic Language" took these ideas further by suggesting that literariness was actually an interwoven universe, and hence that dependence upon other texts was a profound interdependence. Indeed, postmodernism generally sees intertextuality as a form of equality or democracy within a field of intertextuality, unlike in modernism where there is a hierarchy of intertexts.

My question is what this intertextuality means in postcolonialism, particularly given that postcoloniality is occurring in the time of globalisation and increasing flows of information. My avenue into this examination is J.M. Coetzee's use of intertextuality in the novel *Disgrace*, partly because many commentators have said something about some of the intertexts utilised in the novel, but nobody has made an attempt at a thoroughgoing analysis. Moreover, in analysing the intertextuality in the novel, I want to make the claim against those who see *Disgrace* as primarily a realist text that merely provides an avenue into discussing sociological issues in South Africa today<sup>1</sup> that to read it in this way is to do a disservice to the novel and to reading generally, but also specifically to Coetzee's views on the value of

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1. A number of reviewers have been indisposed towards *Disgrace*, in some cases virulently so. See Blatchford 2003: 24; Christensen 1999: 59; Cornwall 1999: 248-258.

For more substantial reviews which have read *Disgrace* sociologically, or have considered sociological critiques at length, see for instance Farred 2002: 352-362; McDonald 2002: 321-330; Eagleton 2001: 189-203.

literature and literariness. *Disgrace* ostensibly consists of a chain of provocations that tempt the reader into realist sociohistorical and national interpretations, but a more careful reading of the novel shows how metafictional it is, and how subtle its analysis of cultural history is. This metafictional component then asks the question that Coetzee has been grappling with in his entire oeuvre, namely the question of complexity within sociohistorical circumstances and mindsets, particularly within South Africa, that tend to reduce complexity, sometimes to the extent of viewing it as an indulgence or extravagance.

So there is a strong temptation to read *Disgrace* as a realist text – indeed it might be said that the novel invites this kind of reading, and I want to link this to the issue of Coetzee’s oeuvre and particularly his style. It seems that with *Disgrace* Coetzee is unfolding a natural progression that was evident from his first novel, but perhaps most apparent in *Age of Iron*, towards an evermore terse realist style. So the question arises of what has happened to the other, the sublime, the unconscious that was more characteristic of his earlier and more experimental works with their slightly more gnomic prose and moments of defamiliarisation. I am thinking of the hyperbolic and destabilising repetition and the exorbitant airships with which Magda is fascinated in *In The Heart of the Country*; the enigmatic person of Michael K and Friday in *The Life & Times of Michael K* and *Foe* respectively, the magistrate’s encounters with the “barbarians” in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the complex intertextuality and enigmatic metafictionality of *Foe* and *The Master of Petersburg*. On the surface of it, the terse minimalism of *Disgrace* seems to have little alterity or the sublime or exorbitant in it, and if we read the text as realist we are bound to conclude that it is depressing and pessimistic, as a number of readers have done. However, I want to suggest that we can find the sublime, albeit an ameliorated sublime that might not merit the appellation, in the novel within the narrative trajectory of the story itself, and further I want to suggest that Coetzee is moving towards embodying rupture in narrative, as opposed to in style (although there is clearly no neat dividing line between the two). So although the prose is terse and spare, the narrative is punctuated and shaped by a number of shocking, even sensational, events: prostitution, the initial unwelcome scandalous seduction, the “not quite rape”, the expulsion, violence in the countryside, the dying fall of the ending; and, more importantly, these events are given meaning by intertextual clues (I count over twenty intertexts in the novel, from Blake to Kafka), primarily Romantic – it is by following these clues that we can come closer to reading the text within its context, rather than reading the text as subordinate to its context.

Coetzee establishes this context within the first line of the novel. The first sentence, rapidly becoming infamous, if not already so, is “For a man of his

age, fifty-two, divorced, he has, to his mind, solved the problem of sex rather well” (Coetzee 2000a: 1). The perfective tense of the sentence suggests closure but is interrupted by the modifier “to his mind”, signalling that Lurie’s solution is not as final as he imagines it, and creating the sense of illusion and consequent doom that will dog our protagonist. Moreover, this sentence obviously asks the question: why is sex a problem? The answer to this question is two-pronged.

Firstly, sex is a problem for Lurie because of his subjectivity; he is something of a roué, a lothario, and this is not merely an idiosyncrasy, but is something that derives from his culture which is Western, Romantic, erotic. So the first major intertext within the novel is implicit within the first sentence and it is Western Romanticism. This Romanticism is embodied in a particular form by Lurie and this form is thoroughly critiqued in the novel. Lurie has made a study of Western Romanticism on which he has written three books: one on the “*genesis*” (my italics) of Mephistopheles (via Boito’s *Faust*), one on “vision as eros”, the third on “*Wordsworth and the Burden of the Past*” (p. 4). Notice that all of these tracts centre on the devil in the past in that they all deal with past Western Romantic masters. Satan has a number of faces, as we might expect. As Lucifer, he is a fallen favourite, fallenness being the narrative trajectory of the novel. He is also the snake, significantly called “serpent” (p. 16), David Lurie’s “totem”, an image of venomous seduction, danger, corruption and cunning, but also of change, growth and spirituality. Lurie describes his sexual “temperament” under this totem as “lengthy, absorbed, but rather abstract, rather dry, even at its hottest” (p. 3). Furthermore, Lurie’s ambition is to write an opulent Gluck-like opera, *Byron in Italy*, which again suggests Romantic eroticism via notorious seduction, for a chamber-opera triumph will return eros, and hence himself, to society. This operatic ambition will be severely attenuated in the narrative trajectory of the novel.

Lurie’s emphasis upon a Romantically devilish sensuality is arguably macho and idiosyncratic but as Michael Williams points out in relation to Byron’s poem “Lara”:

In the 1940s, the 1950s and the early 1960s, explorations of the satanic were central to the study of such texts as *Lara*. Needless to say, this is the period when David Lurie – and incidentally his creator J.M. Coetzee – would have been encountering Byron in their university studies for the first time.

(Williams 2004: 8)

Nevertheless, Lurie’s emphasis is developed beyond this when he teaches Byron’s “Lara” to his class (Coetzee 2000a: 32-33). Lurie’s reading of “Lara” interprets the protagonist as “Lucifer, the dark angel”, which resonates with both Lurie himself and with Melanie Isaacs’s “bravo”

boyfriend, who at that moment has muscled his way into Lurie's class. According to Lurie's interpretation, the identity and sexuality of Lucifer, Lara, Byron, himself, and presumably Melanie's boyfriend, is that of the alienated modern individual, rather like Hamlet, who "will be condemned to solitude" (p. 34), a chillingly prophetic image of Lurie's fate and a critique of Romantic identity: Lurie says of his Romantic "masters" that "[t]hey all died young. Or dried up. Or went mad and were locked away" (p. 15). Thus Romantic sexuality is not merely a metaphysical or humanist issue of evil, which is explored at some length in *Elizabeth Costello*, but is also an issue of modernity.

Hence it would be wrong to assume that Romanticism is written off by the text as an anachronistic cultural embarrassment that can only lead to isolation and eventual disgraceful exile. Romanticism's ability to critique early modernity is never questioned; Romanticism seems to be the primary intertext of the novel because it was and is opposed to "Newton's sleep of reason" with its emphasis upon spontaneous feeling and corporeal sympathy, particularly the love of nature. Moreover, we do not usually think of Romanticism as a culture that espouses the middle path, it appears too Dionysian for that, but that Romanticism can provide a link between spirit and body, between vision and manifestation, is apparent in Lurie's class on Wordsworth's "The Prelude" in which he makes it clear that balance is necessary:

[W]e cannot live our daily lives in a realm of pure ideas, cocooned from sense-experience. The question is not, How can we keep the imagination pure, protected from the onslaughts of reality? The question has to be, Can we find a way for the two to coexist?

(Coetzee 2000a: 22)

It is appropriate that Wordsworth should be the exemplar of balance rather than Byron, but perhaps if we are going to critique Lurie without lapsing into specious judgement, then it should be in terms of his own professed ideal of balance and coexistence. Lurie is unable to live up to an ideal of balance because he is so enraptured with his Romanticism, maybe because it allows him to escape from his context. Lurie himself points out how unromantic reality can be when he asks, "But now, do you truly wish to see the beloved in the cold clarity of the visual apparatus? It may be in your better interest to throw a veil over the gaze, so as to keep her alive in her archetypal, goddesslike form" (p. 22).

Lurie is so possessed by archetypal images, so enculturated, that he falls into the trap of keeping his vision "turned toward the great archetypes of the imagination we carry within us" (p. 23): in the "not quite rape" scene when he forces himself upon Melanie Isaacs he sees her as "from the quiver of

Aphrodite, goddess of the foaming waves, no doubt about that” (p. 25); Lurie thinks “*I was a servant of Eros ... It was a god who acted through me*” (p. 89). Lurie is unable to live up to his own Wordsworthian ideal of a balance between archetype and reality, between vision and objects, because he is rapt in his own ecstasy with Romantic archetype and vision. This is graphically illustrated by his need to take Melanie, to make her conform to his transcendental rapture by ignoring the fact that “[s]he opens the door wearing a crumpled T-shirt, cycling shorts, slippers in the shape of comic-book gophers which he finds silly, tasteless” (p. 24). Moreover, his rapture with transcendent mythical imagery prevents him from seeing that his drives are partly motivated by the mundane dynamics of aging; he cannot see the links between rapist and father. So Romanticism has been part of Lurie’s problem because it both fills up the void in his soul with art, but also creates that void since no physical manifestation or person can fulfil such a lofty artistic ideal. Romanticism all too often risks loss of balance; its emphasis upon rapture, ecstasy, the sublime opens it up to indulgence, egotism, loss of control and indiscipline. Yet what other discourse opposes an instrumental rationality so rigorously or foregrounds what Lurie calls “the rights of desire ... the god who makes even the small bird quiver” (p. 89)?

So I hope it is clear that the first aspect of Lurie’s dilemma is his rather predatory sexual identity which is at least partially a result of a particular Western Romantic enculturation. Perhaps the text is suggesting that the problem of sexuality is not only physical but is also due to the repression or sublimation of erotic energy that modernity and a certain type and interpretation of Western culture involve? However, David Lurie’s problem with sex is not merely his own subjectivity and his enculturation, but the clash between this and the particular postcolonial context within which he exists, and this forms the second horn of his dilemma. In other words, it is not Romanticism per se that is the problem, but a decontextualised and elitist Romanticism. Lurie, despite being an expert in Romanticism, appears blind to the fact that both Romanticism and “the new South Africa” are post-revolutionary historical moments and therefore might be usefully compared; Lurie’s Romanticism is decontextualised to the extent that it is ahistorical and lacking in agency. Further, Coetzee suggests that this problem is exacerbated by colonisation and especially by globalisation which institutes an “emasculatation” (p. 4). So the question is not merely why sex is a problem, but also how David Lurie could possibly make his sexuality, intellect and vision coincide with the new global capitalist dispensation.<sup>2</sup> That he can only

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2. There is a substantial literature on how certain management ideologies have come to be globally pervasive in global capitalism. Volcker points out how pervasive management styles and ideas have become: “[T]he economic logic of living in a world of global capital markets is to have much more integration ....

achieve some such coincidence via the reduced role of celibate care-giver to dying and dead dogs speaks volumes not only about him, but also about the context in which he finds himself.

Notice that the one course in Romantic literature that Lurie is allowed per annum as a sop to “morale” echoes the ninety minutes of sex he allows himself per week. So there is a link between Lurie’s compartmentalised solution to the “problem of sex” and the “great rationalisation” (p. 3) that characterises “the new South Africa” and the new global capitalist dispensation. Passion and commitment are giving way to organisation and efficiency in this new world order, accompanied by an increase in puritanical surveillance and moralistic denunciation; instrumental empiricism has been conflated with an easy judgemental ethics. The new globalised state is characterised by a narrow political correctness and a functionalist technicism that is most apparent in Lurie’s wonderfully graphic description of the form that he has to fill out for the disciplinary hearing resulting from his “abuse” of his student:

There is a form to fill in. The form is placed before them, and a pen. A hand takes up the pen, a hand he has kissed, a hand he knows intimately. First the name of the plaintiff: MELANIE ISAACS, in careful block letters. Down the column of boxes wavers the hand, searching for the one to tick. *There*, points the nicotine-stained finger of her father. The hand slows, settles, makes its X, its cross of righteousness: *J'accuse*. Then a space for the name of the accused. DAVID LURIE, writes the hand: PROFESSOR. Finally, at the foot of the page, the date and her signature: the arabesque of the *M*, the *l* with its bold upper loop, the downward gash of the *I*, the flourish of the final *s*.

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The obvious counterpoint is a growing lack of autonomy in economic management, easily perceived as an affront to sovereignty” (Volcker 2001: 82). The pervasive macroeconomic policy of market *laissez faire* is paralleled by “deregulation” of the workplace, which “amounts to a regime of indifference ... the employee labours in a vacuum ... [which] puts serious obstacles in the way of deriving an identity from work” (Sennett 2001: 187). Sennett goes on to argue that

[t]here is a regime of power operating on the principle of indifference to those in its grip, a regime seeking to evade, in the workplace, being held accountable for its acts. The essence of the politics of globalisation is finding ways to hold this regime of indifference to account. If we fail in this political effort, we will suffer a profound personal wound.

(Sennett 2001: 190)

It seems to me that Coetzee’s novel demonstrates this regime of indifference in the workplace that derives from globalisation and that his novel seeks to hold this regime to account in a highly political manner.

The deed is done. Two names on the page, his and hers, side by side. Two in a bed, lovers no longer but foes.

(Coetzee 2000a: 39-40)

The contrast between the instrumental vertical and horizontal lines of the form and the italicised arabesque “flourish” of the signature is stark, conveying the contrast between lovers in a bed together and the formalised conflict within which they are now caught. *Rapprochement* is virtually impossible within such a starkly polarised grid format which attempts to fit human beings into straight lines and boxes. Moreover, this new regime is not only schematic and instrumentalist, but it is also womanist,<sup>3</sup> so that Lurie wonders if he is viewed as “[a] shark among the helpless little fishes? Or does she have another vision: of a great thick-boned male bearing down upon a girl-child, a huge hand stifling her cries?” (p. 53). Such womanism is most graphically signalled in the poster of “Superman hanging his head as he is berated by Lois Lane” (p. 177) adorning the wall of the office of young Dr Otto who has replaced Lurie; this satirises not only the Romantic/-Nietzschean hero, but also what this superman has been reduced to. This political correctness is unconvincing to Lurie; as he disparagingly comments of his students: “Post-Christian, posthistorical, postliterate, they might as well have been hatched from eggs yesterday” (p. 32). Whilst it is easy enough to justify the historical reasons behind contemporary womanism and to dismiss Lurie’s condescending image of reptilian, even alien, birth, it is less easy to debunk his sense of the judgementalism of the new regime of globalising rationality which he describes as a politics of “blame” (p. 44): “The community of the righteous, holding their sessions in corners, over the telephone, behind closed doors. Gleeful whispers. *Schadenfreude*. First the sentence, then the trial” (p. 42); as his ex-wife thunders at him: “No sympathy, no mercy, not in this day and age” (p. 43). Despite Lurie’s melodramatic hyperbole in these passages, it is difficult to argue with his sense that “[t]hese are puritanical times. Private life is public business. Prurience is respectable, prurience and sentiment. They wanted a spectacle: breast-beating, remorse, tears if possible. A TV show, in fact” (p. 66).

This leads me to the primary point that I want to advance, which is that given a present which is governed by an instrumental and reductionist version of rationality, Coetzee returns to an earlier phase of opposition to that rationality in order to examine the possibilities for opposition today. That earlier phase was Romanticism, which was arguably the earliest and most powerful rebellion against the newly emergent industrial phase of

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3. I use the term “womanist” as opposed to “feminist” here to signal Coetzee’s suggestion that “the new South Africa” has often tended to become somewhat politically correct and essentialist in its determination to oppose exploitation.



modernity. Moreover, European nationalism arose during the Romantic period, and it is highly appropriate that this cultural movement and period should be revisited when South Africa is undergoing nation-building, particularly as the rhetoric of such is “the rainbow nation”. Thus Coetzee’s metafictional intertextuality is highly politicised and relevant; any accusation of idiosyncrasy and tangentiality in the novel would seem to miss this point. Thus intertextuality for the postcolonial artist, or Coetzee at any rate, seems to involve a reframing in which both intertexts, text(s) and context, pressurise each other, not necessarily creating a hybrid amalgam but at least recontextualising and modifying. There is no fidelity to an original prior world or text, rather a deliberate contrapuntal recontextualisation and/or hybridisation forces the reader to reconsider both the intertext and the text in a comparative and political light, instantiating literary criticism within the fictional text. So intertextuality in postcolonialism would seem to consist simultaneously of both a contextually-specific and obliquely politically committed pastiche and parody.

From Lurie’s perspective at least, postcolonial modernity is characterised by the myth that the past was dark and unenlightened in order to give us the feeling that we are evolved and progressive now, a myth that Foucault pointed out in *The History of Sexuality*: “[T]here may be another reason that makes it so gratifying for us to define the relationship between sex and power in terms of repression: something that one might call the speaker’s benefit” (Foucault 1978: 6). Little does Lurie realise that the “new” South Africa has also revolutionised labour relations, but he will come to realise that “[i]t is a new world they live in, he and Lucy and Petrus. Petrus knows it, and he knows it, and Petrus knows that he knows it” (p. 116). Nor does he yet understand that there is no room for animals in this new “humanist” dispensation; his daughter Lucy tells him that “[o]n the list of the nation’s priorities, animals come nowhere” (p. 73). So Lurie might be a roué, but he is also an anachronistic and dehistoricised Lear figure, which is as much a judgement upon contemporary globalisation as upon Quixotic Romanticism.

So much for modernity in the city, but what happens when this complex intertextuality enters the heart of the country? Of course, Romanticism has always been associated with nature and the pastoral, and in particular with the sublime epiphany that nature potentially offers to the attuned sensibility. We should perhaps keep in mind that it was during the Romantic period that South Africa was colonised, and that a minor Scottish romantic poet Thomas Pringle, a year younger than Byron, would prove to be a major South African writer. These facts should alert us to Coetzee’s awareness that nature is a particularly mediated and constructed concept in South Africa, something he points out in settler art:

[I]t is not oversimplification to say that landscape and art and landscape writing from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth revolve around the question of finding a language to fit Africa, a language that will be authentically African .... The quest for an authentic language is pursued within a framework in which language, consciousness and landscape are all related.

(Coetzee 1988: 7)

So the landscape around Grahamstown to which Lurie escapes after his disgrace in the city is pictured in Romantic terms:

The wind drops. There is a moment of utter stillness which he would wish prolonged for ever: the gentle sun, the stillness of mid-afternoon, bees busy in a field of flowers; and at the centre of the picture a young woman, *das ewig Weibliche*, lightly pregnant, in a straw sunhat. A scene ready-made for a Sargent or a Bonnard. City boys like him; but even city boys can recognize beauty when they see it, can have their breath taken away.

The truth is, he has never had much of an eye for rural life, despite all his reading in Wordsworth.

(Coetzee 2000a: 218)

The mention of Wordsworth conjures up the pastoral, and in particular via his Lucy poems which picture nature as a benevolent Gaia who gathers up her melancholy innocent maid to her breast, leaving her lover plangently bereft. This image of the nurturing innocent eternal feminine is echoed in “*Das Ewige-Weibliche/Zieht uns hinan*” (Goethe 1943: 211) from the chorus at the end of Goethe’s *Faust II* which adds the suggestion of the redemptive powers of the eternal feminine. Just so is Lucy’s innocence lost/raped in *Disgrace*, but her being “Rolled round in earth’s diurnal course,/With Rocks, and stones, and trees” (Wordsworth 1969: 49) does not involve her physical death, but the death of her, and her father’s, pride in the compromising accommodation with Petrus which is an inversion of apartheid power structures. The implication here I think is that despite Romanticism’s utility as an ongoing critique of modernity and modernisation, its axioms are far too luridly melodramatic to be appropriate metaphors for post-apartheid South Africa which requires an altogether more steely stoicism in order to survive its vicissitudes. Where redemption is available, it is neither in terms of the pastoral enclosure of women, confining them to masochistic chaste purity, nor in terms of cymbal-clash transcendentalism, but in terms of a grinding endurance.

This “grounding” of Romanticism, if I may call it that, is emphasised in the name of the village in the Eastern Cape near Grahamstown to which Lurie flees: Salem, the etymology of which is “shalom” and “salaam” meaning peace, and it is also a shortened form of Jerusalem and referred to

Methodist chapels. Salem was one of the first towns to be settled by the English who managed to avert a Xhosa battle there by negotiation; hence it suggests the triumph of liberal rationality, a suggestion that Coetzee is to overturn in the novel. Salem also conjures up the puritan frontier of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* with the disgracing of women and the witch trials of Cotton Mather. Just like seventeenth-century America, South Africa has been puritanical, though in a Calvinist sense, and the parallel is not direct but inverted by having a male in disgrace. Perhaps Coetzee is suggesting that scapegoating, far from being redundant, will operate whenever and wherever any regime of correctness is reigning. Having said this, it must be pointed out that Hester Prynne's shaming in *The Scarlet Letter* is perhaps more marked than Lurie's in *Disgrace* for, after all, Lurie may be exiled, assaulted and burnt, but he is not branded with a sigil and he is not literally raped, a cruelty reserved for his daughter. Salem also conjures up Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* and McCarthyist censorship in the nineteen fifties. Coetzee chose the name of Salem appositely, considering his essay on Noel Mostert's *Frontiers* which traces the violent history of racial conflict in the Eastern Cape (Coetzee 1988: 337).

So, as far as Lurie goes, his "not quite rape" of the "black" girl in the city is neatly inverted in the rape of Lucy by the black men in the country, giving a diptych structure to the novel. This diptych is part of his "fall" and forces him to reflect upon his own complicity in the exploitation of women, the limits of his imagination, and the inappropriateness of European Romanticism:

He thinks of Byron. Among the legions of countesses and kitchen maids Byron pushed himself into there were no doubt those who called it rape. But none surely had cause to fear that the session would end with her throat being slit. From where he stands, from where Lucy stands, Byron looks very old fashioned.

(Coetzee 2000a: 160)

He may be making a disingenuous excuse for Romanticism here, but the comparison is what is important for the purposes of my paper, for Lurie's trajectory is from absorption in his own inner enculturated world towards an attenuation of that world via abrasion on the hard edges of the "new" South Africa. In other words, intertexts and their use are tested within and by context. In many ways, Romanticism is found wanting in the new South Africa, even whilst its guiding revolutionary impulse is ratified in this context.

One of the major problems with Romanticism is its pastoral enclosure of femininity, which is seen not only in Lurie's relationship to women but also in the rape of Lucy. Her name is an allusion to St Lucy the Sicilian virgin

martyr, patron saint of virgins, the blind and writers, who has a silencing throat wound described in the novel thus: “[O]ver the body of the woman silence is being drawn like a blanket. *Too ashamed*, they will say to each other, *too ashamed to tell*” (Coetzee 2000a: 110). It is difficult not to infer that patriarchy is a rape which silences. This linkage between patriarchy and silence was developed in Donne’s “A Nocturnal upon S. Lucies Day/Being the shortest day” in which the speaker is an original nothingness and darkness, apparently due to mourning (perhaps for Donne’s wife, daughter Lucy, or patroness Lucy, Countess of Bedford).<sup>4</sup> St Lucy’s Day falls on the thirteenth of December in the northern hemisphere, the winter solstice which emphasises a long dark night of the soul and, of course, December is astrologically the time of Capricorn, the goat, with all its connotations of earthy lust. Ironically, it is Lurie who is reduced to silence by Lucy’s experience. Her rape is all the harder for a father to bear because not only must it cause vicarious suffering via empathy, but it also emasculates him via his impotence and inability to imagine what was involved (pp. 97, 110, 158, 160), and this is compounded by Lucy’s refusal to “share” the experience in any way or to listen to any of his paternalistic advice. The reference to the rape of the Sabine women – a Roman myth, painted by Poussin and Picasso amongst others, in which the abducted Sabine women forced to marry Romans refuse to return to their Sabine men – emphasises Lurie’s emasculation. Lucy’s determination to get along with Petrus in the new South Africa, her determination not to leave the country, echoes this myth. I think that it is worth noticing that Lurie is always at something of a distance from the pastoral despite his intellectual and academic championing of it. This is embodied in his strained relationship with Lucy and in his conflict with Pollux and Petrus, both representatives of indigenous naturalism. Hence he describes his re-entry into Lucy’s world as an Orphean descent into the “Stygian soup of souls” of Canto VII of Dante’s *Inferno* (p. 209); as Graham Pechey points out, St Lucy is the patron saint of the mediatrix between Mary and Dante’s Beatrice in the *Commedia*.<sup>5</sup> This descent into the natural and the visceral, an encounter with threatening otherness, forces him to feel otherness rather than just intellectually appreciating it: he realises that Lucy is a different person to himself, not merely the offspring of his loins, when she confronts him thus:

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4. A.J. Smith’s commentary on the poem is particularly enlightening, pointing out that Donne could have been writing to Lucy, Countess of Bedford (Smith 1970: 390-393).
  5. Graham Pechey’s comments on Coetzee’s use of Dante are particularly illuminating.

David, I can't run my life according to whether or not you like what I do. Not any more. You behave as if everything I do is part of the story of your life. You are the main character, I am a minor character who doesn't make an appearance until halfway through. Well, contrary to what you think, people are not divided into major and minor. I am not minor. I have a life of my own, just as important to me as yours is to you, and in my life I am the one who makes the decisions.

(Coetzee 2000a: 198)

It is not only the alterity of Lucy that becomes clearer through confrontation, it is also the weight of history that becomes apparent. Lurie had imagined that his daughter was indeed his, the delusion that all parents have that they control their offspring, but he comes to realise that it is perhaps history that has had the greater part in Lucy's evolution: "Curious that he and her mother, city folk, intellectuals, should have produced this throwback, this sturdy young settler. But perhaps it was not they who produced her: perhaps history had the larger share" (p. 61). However, history is not some settled fact but is constantly changing and hence constantly open to the potential of reinterpretation and agency:

She talks easily about these matters. A frontier farmer of the new breed. In the old days, cattle and maize. Today, dogs and daffodils. The more things change the more they remain the same. History repeating itself, though in a more modest vein. Perhaps history has learned a lesson.

(Coetzee 2000a: 62)

The lines "History repeating itself, though in a more modest vein" and "has learned a lesson" could well be a summation of the novel as a whole which reinterprets history through culture. This not only shifts history, and perhaps politics, away from the epochal and towards the local, specific and embodied, but also hollows out a tiny space of agency within its broad canvas, for it is the cultural that allows for some intervention in history.

This cultural agency can hardly be viewed as political in the usual sense, but that does not mean that it does not exist. If agency is about change, then the question is, has David Lurie changed? Specifically, has his attitude towards sex changed? Is Lurie able to view himself ironically in relation to Melanie Isaacs now, as a historically situated subject? Coetzee does not provide us with a neat conclusion to these questions, not least because Lurie is his focaliser and hence it is difficult for the reader to fully trust his judgements. His attitude towards Bev Shaw, the manager of the animal clinic, is initially condescending *in extremis* and symptomatic not only of his sexism but of his "looksism" or extreme aestheticism (pp. 72, 79), but he does come to some awareness of her alterity via Flaubert:

His thoughts go to Emma Bovary strutting before the mirror after her first big afternoon. *I have a lover! I have a lover!* sings Emma to herself. Well, let poor Bev Shaw go home and do some singing too. And let him stop calling her poor Bev Shaw. If she is poor, he is bankrupt.

(Coetzee 2000a: 150)

This is a reprisal of Lurie's self-regarding approval of his "snake-like" cool sexuality at the beginning of the novel:

He thinks of Emma Bovary, coming home sated, glazen-eyed, from an afternoon of reckless fucking. *So this is bliss!*, says Emma, marvelling at herself in the mirror. *So this is the bliss the poets speak of!* Well, if poor ghostly Emma were ever to find her way to Cape Town, he would bring her along one Thursday afternoon to show her what bliss can be: a moderate bliss. A moderated bliss.

(Coetzee 2000a: 6)

The irony here is that it is Lurie who is being taught moderation.

It seems that Lurie is now not only aware of his own disgraced situation, but is also groping towards some sort of awareness of otherness, particularly female otherness, and he describes his relationships as having "enriched" (p. 192) him. So Lurie, having seen that he is now in no country for old men, reaches a monklike kind of sexual purgatory in which he is no longer a Don Juan, has no lover, a place "not cold but not hot" (p. 195). This is ambiguated by his intercourse with a prostitute, which could be seen as a sign that he does not change, or as a valediction to his previous life. It seems that this intercourse is indeed a goodbye to his previous life, particularly if we consider this passage:

If the old men hog the young women, what will be the future of the species? That, at bottom, was the case for the prosecution. Half of literature is about it: young women struggling to escape from under the weight of old men, for the sake of the species.

He sighs. The young in one another's arms, heedless, engrossed in the sensual music. No country, this, for old men. He seems to be spending a lot of time sighing. Regret: a regrettable note on which to go out.

(Coetzee 2000a: 190)

This echo of Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" (Yeats 1982: 217) in the words "The young in one another's arms" emphasises the low point of Lurie's roué career. He has to face the fact that he is no longer able to appeal to women as he used to, that he is in decline, that his kingdom has come and gone, that mortality is stalking him. As Mark Sanders points out, this is also embodied

in language which is Romantic for Lurie – he is always being etymological (Coetzee 2000a: 102), and grammatical, often emphasising the perfective tense (pp. 21, 71).<sup>6</sup> The perfective suggests that Lurie is living the after-effects of an already-completed event, that his life is now merely a comet's tail after the comet has already burnt out. Again, as in Donne, the speaker is immune to the renewal of life, it is over for him. Yet he has to continue to live, to somehow find a role and subjectivity within much diminished circumstances. So the "perfection" that he finds in life is somewhat different from what he might have expected as Professor of English, yet the logic of his trajectory is "perfect" in the sense that it is an inversion of his previous path and connotes a secular metaphysics of inevitability.

If some of Lurie's rather sedimented attitudes to sex do not fully change, his attitude towards animals slowly does. He attempts to look after Lucy, and when it is clear that his attempts are far too clumsy and that he is alienating her instead of helping her, he transfers care to the doomed sheep and then to the dogs; importantly he does not understand these bonds, they are intuitive or precognitive for him:

A bond seems to have come into existence between himself and the two Persians, he does not know how. The bond is not one of affection. It is not even a bond with these two in particular, whom he could not pick out from a mob in a field. Nevertheless, suddenly and without reason, their lot has become important to him.

(Coetzee 2000a: 126)

This intuitive bond is important, for whilst the novel may be seen as ameliorating Romanticism into something unrecognisable, what we have here is the mode or action of Romanticism, which is the accessing of extrarational states of being as part of a wider connectivity. Of course this is Coetzee, so such access to the extrarational is not Romanticised; what we are presented with is a harsh vision of abjection and tiny gestures of compassion. Lurie's dog euthanasia is sacrificial and linked to Abraham and Isaac, echoed in Melanie Isaacs. So the point is that Romanticism within South Africa is redefined by Coetzee into an extremely humble yet proactive agency.

The savagery of this dog euthanasia is made clear in the use of the German word "*Lösung*" (pp. 142, 218) or solution, a word used by the Nazis to indicate the "final solution", and echoing Elizabeth Costello's controversial equation of battery farming with the Nazi death camps in *The Lives of Animals* and *Elizabeth Costello*. It is also Kafkan in the quotation of Joseph

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6. Sanders points out that the perfective tense is used extensively in *Disgrace*, suggesting a sombre sense of an unchangeable past.

K's stabbing in the final line of Kafka's *The Trial* (Kafka 1975): "Like a dog! He said, it was as if he meant the shame of it to outlive him" (p. 205), a phrase utilised by Lucy to describe her abject position in the new South Africa. Perhaps Kafka's stark modernism is just the antidote to Romanticism's excesses, and hence Coetzee's reference to it here. When Lurie decides to work in Bev Shaw's dog sanctuary he echoes Petrus in that he has now "become a dog man: a dog undertaker, a dog psycho pomp; a *harijan*" (p. 146), a reference to Gandhi's attempt to dignify the un-touchables with a new name.

So the novel critiques the excessive in suggesting that the first shall be last and vice versa, a suggestion visible in the metaphysical equation between the anagrams god and dog; Aphrodite and Eros have become Katy the three-legged male, nameless others. This is an attenuated middle-path, an anti-eschatological gradualism which would seem to be far from Romanticism. The novel itself suggests this through Lurie's desire to teach Emma Bovary "a moderate bliss. A moderated bliss" (p. 6), though it is Lurie who learns that "his hopes must be more temperate" (p. 214). A number of critics have noticed this amelioration: Elleke Boehmer says that the novel is about "enduring rather than transcending the degraded present ... reduced secular atonement" (Boehmer 2002: 343); Graham Pechey argues that Lurie's creativity at the end of the novel is "a small compensation in most ordinary contexts, huge in Coetzee's universe of parsimonious affirmation" (Pechey 2002: 382). Michiel Heyns points out that this narrative trajectory of attenuation follows the pattern of tragedy, the primary intertext of which is *Oedipus* (Heyns 2002): Lurie quotes the final chorus of the drama on page two of the novel, "call no man happy until he is dead". Heyns links this tragic inevitability to *King Lear* and to Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*.<sup>7</sup> It is also clear that this is something of a linguistic exercise, for Lurie now must embrace the imperfect partiality of life lived after the perfective tense.

Having said this, we should keep in mind that this secular metaphysics is hardly lacking in drama; indeed, as I suggested earlier, the narrative drama of shocking present-tense events is the means by which alterity or otherness is encountered and is Coetzee's method of defamiliarisation in this novel. In other words, Coetzee seems to be rejecting the classic Romantic tenet of Lurie's liberal humanism which is that it is imagination that enables the perception of otherness. This is a critique of Shelley's "The great secret of morals is love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not

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7. Heyns points out that "[t]he dogs are brought to the clinic because they are unwanted: *because we are too menny*" (p. 146) is a quote from *Jude the Obscure* highlighting the importance of the sympathetic imagination in Lurie's compassion for the abandoned dogs (Heyns 2002: 61).



our own” (Shelley, *A Defense of Poetry* 1891: 14).<sup>8</sup> Coetzee is suggesting, I think, that imaginative sympathy or empathy is not enough in itself, that otherness will often involve violent confrontation. The theorist who perhaps has most to say about this is Emmanuel Levinas, particularly in *Otherwise than Being*, where he describes the irreducibility of the alterity of another person that interrupts the self, a divine moment of face-to-face transcendence (Levinas 1999: 185). This might explain the pathos of the ending of the novel where the “face of God” that confronts Lurie is a “vast circulatory system to whose working pity and terror are irrelevant”; the karmic destiny of the Dionysian sensualist and egotist is to love dying dogs and become like Lucy “rolled round in earth’s diurnal course, with rocks and stones and trees”. So if Romanticism is the central intertext in the novel, it is an intertext that is stripped of Dionysianism and any rose-coloured gloss in order for it to be meaningful within South Africa’s context.

Hence Lurie is able to find some kind of grace through looking after dead dogs, through being concerned with the marginalised, which is why in his new opera it is Teresa, the jilted lover of Byron, who comes to be the main character (Coetzee 2002a: 182, 184). This movement of emphasis from the master to the marginal was anticipated in Henry James’s *The Aspern Papers* which similarly focused on a former lover of Byron, Claire Claremont, though it often conflated her character with Teresa. Moreover, the descent from Gluck as his initial operatic ambition to the plink plonk of the chamber banjo-opera echoes in sonic form his trajectory from the baroque filigree of excessive Romanticism to a stripped minimalism. Lurie claims that he loses Melanie Isaacs because he lacks the “lyrical” (p. 171), and his search for this lyrical takes him through the “masters” (Boito p. 4, “Beethoven and Janáček” p. 176, Scarlatti’s “cat music” p. 15); “So much for the poets, so much for the dead masters. Who have not, he must say, guided him well. *Aliter*, to whom he has not listened well” (p. 179). He rediscovers the lyrical, to the extent that he does, by learning from the masters, not by copying them, but rather by inserting their lessons into his context – hence the plink plonk Cape Coon banjo in the quasi-opera that “consumes” Lurie. Whilst he was intent on copying the masters, his opera was on “the monotonous track on which it has been running since the start. It has become the kind of work a sleepwalker might write” (p. 214); it was as though he were drowning out the voice of local nature with grandiose Eurocentric melodies. His intent has been ambitious and even egotistical, “it would have been nice to be returned triumphant to society as the author of an eccentric little chamber opera” (p. 214), so he cannot create authentically; “that is why he must listen to Teresa

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8. Elizabeth Costello mimes very similar ideas in *The Lives of Animals* (Coetzee 2000b: 48-49).

.... Teresa is past honour” (p. 209).

Now he has created a soundtrack with which “the dog is fascinated” (p. 215) and nearly howls in tune to. So creativity consists in learning from the masters but applying their lessons humbly and authentically within his own local context, an argument against the sterilising stasis of canonisation. Yet whilst literary forebears are questioned by contrasting them with the local, the local is challenged by these masters; creativity lies in the lyrical straining to escape from the local:

But he was wrong. It is not the erotic that is calling to him after all, nor the elegiac, but the comic. He is in the opera neither as Teresa nor as Byron nor even as some blending of the two: he is held in the music itself, in the flat, tinny slap of the banjo strings, the voice that strains to soar away from the ludicrous instrument but is continually reined back, like a fish on a line.

So this is art, he thinks, and this is how it does its work! How strange! How fascinating!

(Coetzee 2000a: 184-185)

Through just such a creative utilisation of intertextuality within the local does *Disgrace* attempt to resist or evade being “reined back”. Lurie is now something of a hierophant, a mediator between life and death, he conducts the reader to the isle of the dead past the dog Cerberus where they find their own role within history and are able to imagine a new role for themselves.

So I think that what we have in the novel is an affectionate deconstruction of Western culture, a deconstruction of the earlier Romantic effort to oppose the instrumental rationality of Modernity in the interests of an effort to resist similar instrumentalism in the latest instalment of globalising capitalism within the postcolony. This helps to explain the resonances that the novel has had for those outside of South Africa. What we seem to be looking at in *Disgrace* is a complexly metafictional novel that suggests that not only is creativity a partial and humbling process, but that creativity cannot occur within a vacuum and so requires the careful selection and use of past texts in order to inform and vivify the present. However, many of the intertexts available for use in the creative process are partially inappropriate to contemporary contexts, not least South African, to the extent that they are imperial, sensationalist, apocalyptic and/or eschatological, and will need to be carefully rewritten.

What is the value of this partial, temperate, moderate narrative that includes a plenitude of intertexts and is continually modifying its trajectory? What is the valency of a postmodern postcolonialism? Is Coetzee merely constructing the reader as a highly educated sniffer-out of intertextual sophistications, expecting that the reader be highly enculturated? Or is Coetzee, in constructing this narrative chain of provocations, inviting a

realist reading of *Disgrace*, and, if so, did he want to achieve the canonisation of the text as the authoritative commentary on South Africa that has in fact occurred, or was he merely attempting to prompt debate about the issues of gender, sexuality, violence, restitution, justice within the post-colony? My feeling is that we could certainly accuse him of these motives, but such a reading could learn much from the diminutions of mastery that Lurie's humbling trajectory embodies. Firstly, the moderate elements of the text are of value in an instrumentalist world/context for they tend to prevent extremism. Indeed, the instrumentalism of the reader is challenged in such a text. Coetzee has pointed out that empiricist mimesis is not only the cultural phenomenon accompanying Western imperialism, but is also inherently imperialist, as suggested by its links to desire.<sup>9</sup> Coetzee's fiction consists of the attempt to create a way to speak and write without the dynamic of rivalry

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9. Coetzee derives his analysis from the Girardian schema of mimetic violence: "desire is mimetic – that is to say, it seeks models for itself" (Coetzee 1996: 92). Desire is insufficiency to itself, it is generated from a sense of lack or absence or incompleteness, and seeks to eradicate that sense or feeling with fullness, fulfilment, which are primarily derived from acknowledgement. In a very basic sense, I only know myself to be present within the context of others, and I particularly feel myself present, sense my own being, when acknowledged by others in some way. The means by which desire slakes itself is by copying fullness, by copying that mode of being which others recognise and acknowledge, which explains the self-reproduction of society, socialisation, and which is embodied in the commonplace phrase "monkey see, monkey do". This mimesis within desire, this desire to ape, takes on a more sinister cast when we consider the implications of copying what it is that others see, desire, copy, acknowledge, for as soon as the desirable is mediated by an other, then a relationship of rivalry is established, an Oedipal economy that cannot but lead to conflict and violence. As Coetzee notes, "desire does not involve only a desiring subject and a desired object: the object acquires its desirable value through the mediating glance of an Other whose desire serves as a model for the subject's imitation" (Coetzee 1996: 91). This economy of rivalry within desire can be linked back to the sociohistorical, in this case the rise of imperial modernity and capitalism, via another clichéd phrase: "the law of the jungle", a law which depends upon an economy of scarcity, lack, and hence conflict. Desire leads to mimesis, which in turn leads to a mounting cycle of rivalrous violence, which in turn spirals into the erasure of difference, for it is the loss of difference that causes rivalry; it is always the similar, the twinned, who fight hardest: "the appearance of doubles is a sign that the mimetic process has been carried to its ultimate reaches" (Coetzee 1996: 92). Hence the peculiarly piquant irony of realism in Africa: in its desire to escape the hegemonic and obliterating gaze of the West and to establish a presence of difference, it imitates that rivalry and erases its difference. We have here a strange and monstrous twinning whereby Austen, Dickens and Hardy are mirrored by Ngugi, Iyayi and Achebe.

and the mimetic violence of desire. Hence his fiction is of the West, but about Africa, preventing the establishment of a simplistic rivalry between the two and challenging the reader. Secondly, a highly intertextual text of this sort is all-embracing, non-exclusionary; if we do not grant a text its full scope, we are doing it a disservice. Thirdly, Coetzee has no truck with false consolations, does not waste time with rationalisations. That Lurie is not able to sustain his Romantic ideals, partly because various realities violently haul him out of them, suggests that solipsistic idealisms cannot last and are inappropriate. This is an argument against canonisation. It may also be an argument against putting one's faith in any single text, movement or ideal. Finally, Coetzee's intertextuality appears to be particularly historical and political, perhaps suggesting that postcolonial intertextuality is more *engagé* than its postmodern analogue, eschewing a self-reflexivity that becomes a *mise-en-abyme*. The question of what such a degree of metafictional intertextuality means in Africa is tackled by Coetzee in a chapter entitled "The Novel in Africa" in *Elizabeth Costello* where the eponymous white Australian writer is at odds with the African writer Emmanuel Egudu, partly because they were once in bed together. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this debate is not only sexual, not only about power, but is also a debate about the valency of writing, between an essential/visceral understanding of African writing as oral and traditional and Costello's Derridean understanding of writing as play, a play of difference. This debate is not solved by Coetzee, for Egudu's emphasis upon physical authenticity has a point, as does Costello's argument that this authenticity is often merely the repackaging of Africa as a consumable primal exotic for Western audiences today. It seems that neither a Western audience wanting exoticism nor an African audience wanting authenticity desires a highly intertextual or postmodern African fiction. Nevertheless, this is what audiences receive in *Disgrace*, though it is a peculiarly postcolonial version of intertextuality that is on offer, a version that Michael Marais describes as having "a well-defined metafictional dimension that articulates the text's intention to engage affectively with history" (Marais 2000: 177). Marais, and I support him in this, is suggesting that postcolonial metafiction tends to be more politically engaged than many Western postmodernisms, but it also allows for more distance between the author and society than most nationalisms or realisms allow for, arguably even reinforcing a modernist split between artist and audience. Nevertheless, there are historical/appropriateness limits to intertextuality; 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. Still, I do think that intertextuality often works in a chaotic way for writers; there are often

happenstance and syncretic connections between hugely disparate times/places/things/ideas; “If it works, make the links” is, I suspect, how most artists work in relation to intertextuality, and I think that critics have little right to be critical about this unless they have better (richer, more fruitful) connections to suggest. Intertextuality, Kristeva’s notion of textual interdependence, was an acknowledgment that texts do not merely allude to other texts but are profoundly dependent upon them; that the present or the self is a mosaic of the past and of others respectively. Kristeva advances the notion that intertextuality “involves an altering of the thetic *position* – the destruction of the old position and the formation of a new one” (Kristeva 1986: 111). However, the problem with this notion is that it does not aesthetically or otherwise differentiate between uses of intertextuality that are merely new, in the sense that every production is new, and those that appear to provide a strikingly new vantage; an originality that provides defamiliarising affect or a new mode of thought or analysis or seems to be seminal or sum up something of the *Zeitgeist*. In the less interesting forms of postmodernism, for instance, intertextuality results in pastiche or parody, without a new vantage point being attained. I think that Coetzee provides us with a powerful form of postmodern/postcolonial intertextuality within which carefully selected texts and contexts are subjected to such a sustained critique that they yield something new that redefines its constituent parts in a proactive fashion. Indeed, the postcolony can reinvigorate the world’s texts, but likewise those texts can also provide some harsh lessons for the postcolony to learn, particularly in relationship to intransigent instrumentalist ideologies. In conclusion, I would add that it is the realisation that kingdoms come and go that is the profoundest lesson at the heart of postcolonialism; Coetzee transmutes this realisation into a new art by utilising the art of lost empires in a new way. What is that way? That way is a new multiplicity – a plenitude of powerfully resonant intertexts are utilised towards the end of moving us away from singularity and towards multiplicity. Is intertextuality a metaphor for hybrid cosmopolitanism? If so, Coetzee shows how a careful use of intertextuality produces a hybridity that is free of the blandishments all too often adhering to cosmopolitanism. Coetzee’s intertextuality is a revisionist and discretionary one which is sanguine about the limitations of texts and of individual agency, but is nevertheless able to create. It seems, then, that the imagination and the nation are likely to be somewhat opposed, perhaps even in perpetuity.

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