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In 1919 T.S. Eliot famously stated that ‘not only the best, but the most individual parts of [a poet’s] work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously’ (Eliot, 1975: 38). Eliot’s defence of literary value as necessarily tied to the literary text’s relation to other texts is part of a long critical line in Western thought. His innovative contribution, however, lay in his understanding of the two directions in which literary influence moves: it is not only that a work of art cannot be understood without its predecessors, but that the meaning of the works of the past is influenced and transformed in the light of their present heirs. Certainly, if there is a contemporary writer who has enriched and complicated our understanding of literary works from a wide range of literary traditions, it is J.M. Coetzee. A comprehensive appreciation of his literary production will very much depend upon familiarity with literary works such as Robinson Crusoe (1719), Devils (1871) or Don Quixote (1605, 1615). Vice versa, our reading of Defoe, Kafka, Dostoevsky, Beckett or Cervantes will not be the same after having read the South African Nobel Prize-winner’s works.

Coetzee has turned to Eliot in the attempt to define the ways in which he has been spoken to by European writers and artists. He did so in ‘What is a Classic?’, originally a 1991 lecture given in Graz, Austria that, according to Coetzee’s biographer John Kannemeyer, ‘was to prove one of the most important lectures of his career’ (Kannemeyer, 2012: 498). In this lecture, Coetzee analyses T.S. Eliot’s eponymous 1944 lecture, exploring the modernist poet’s motives for claiming a place within a great Western European tradition beginning with Virgil. According to Coetzee, there are two possible ways of approaching enterprises such as Eliot’s: ‘the transcendental-poetic and the socio-cultural’ (Coetzee, 2002: 9). In the first case, the approach to the classic is presented as an ‘impersonal aesthetic experience’; in the second, it is an experience marked by ‘material interest’ (11).

Coetzee then goes on to present himself as an example analogous to Eliot’s of the way ‘provincials’ or ‘colonials’ may situate themselves in relation to ‘the high culture of the metropolis’ (7). He analyses ‘the impact of the classic’ (10, italics in original), which he first experienced when he listened to Bach’s Well-Tempered Clavier in the South Africa of 1955, wondering whether this experience was a transcendental aesthetic one or whether it was determined by material interests:

[It] is there some non-vacuous sense in which I can say that the spirit of Bach was speaking to me across the ages, across the seas, putting before me certain ideals; or was what was really going on at that moment that I was symbolically electing high European culture, and command of
the codes of that culture, as a route that would take me out of my class position in white South African society and ultimately out of what I must have felt, in terms however obscure and mystified, as a historical dead end …? (Coetzee, 2002: 10–11)

Though Coetzee claims that this is not a question one could answer about oneself, his definition of the classic certainly emphasises the classic’s material construction and reception: survival is what defines a classic, and survival depends on the testing and critical interrogation by succeeding generations. At the same time, Coetzee does not entirely turn away from a definition of the classic in aesthetic terms, as he underlines its almost universal dimension: ‘Bach is some kind of touchstone because he has passed the scrutiny of hundreds of thousands of intelligences before me, by hundreds of thousands of fellow human beings’ (18–19). In this sense, as David Attwell argues, Coetzee offers a ‘somewhat conservative’ and ‘also contradictory’ resolution, ‘drawing together the transcendental and the historical’ (Attwell, 2006: 31).

But there is one material aspect that Coetzee is unequivocal about: the necessity of acknowledging one’s socio-historical position in the approach to the classic. Thus, he points out that what surprises him about Eliot’s lecture is that ‘nowhere does Eliot reflect on the fact of his own Americanness, or at least his American origins, and therefore on the somewhat odd angle at which he comes, honouring a European poet to a European audience’ (Coetzee, 2002: 2). To his own credit, Coetzee does not exhibit the same blindness, basing much of his discussion on his own ‘colonial’ and ‘provincial’ condition. According to Ankhi Mukherjee, however, Coetzee’s argument, like Eliot’s, operates in a contextual vacuum. Just as Eliot mentions his wartime circumstances only in a passing way, Coetzee’s lecture, delivered one year after the falling apart of the apartheid regime, does not engage in dialogue with the cultural and political debates going on in the South Africa of the 1990s: ‘Coetzee’s back garden, like Eliot’s war-ravaged London, is represented as timeless, spaceless, and universal’, which hints at Coetzee’s ‘increasing alienation from the South African public sphere’ (Mukherjee, 2014: 41).

Coetzee’s ambivalent and irresolute formulation of his argument in ‘What is a Classic?’ and the contradictory readings this lecture may give rise to, are symptomatic of the complex and uncertain position he occupies in relation to different Western literary traditions and intellectual affiliations. The fairly straightforward image with which we opened this essay, and which presented Coetzee as easily and comfortably inserted within a literary line containing some of the great names of the Western canon, is in fact complicated by issues of positionality and agency, by a compromised dialogue between the aesthetic and the sociocultural, and by a struggle between competing material forces, contextual demands and discursive forces, issues of which Coetzee’s literary works exhibit a remarkable degree of self-awareness. If, as Derek Attridge has argued, Coetzee’s novels seek admittance to the canon, they do so by questioning the very process of canonicity itself (Attridge, 2004: 65–90). Coetzee’s *Foe*, for example, a rewriting of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, underlines the way ‘the text, like any text, is manufactured from the resources of a particular culture in order to gain acceptance within that culture’ (73, italics in original), thus calling attention to the canon’s cultural, historical and ideological contingency, and to the silences and exclusions on which every canon depends.

A constant in Coetzee’s oeuvre has been the way his texts have signalled their dialogue with other literary works through conspicuous and explicit intertextual markers. To mention just some of the most salient examples, there are allusions to Blake (Coetzee, 2004: 106) and
Emerson (79) in ‘The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee’, the second part of _Dusklands_ (1974), while in _In The Heart of the Country_ (1977) we can hear ‘many of the most prominent voices in the literature and philosophy of Western civilization’ (Penner, 1989: 69).1 _Waiting for the Barbarians_ (1980) takes its title from the Greek poet Cavafy’s eponymous poem and evokes Samuel Beckett’s _Waiting for Godot_. Furthermore, it contains a scene that constitutes a rewriting of ‘In the Penal Colony’ (1919) by Franz Kafka, a writer who reappears in _Life & Times of Michael K_ (1983) through Coetzee’s use of the letter ‘K’ to refer to his character, and in _Elizabeth Costello_ (2003), which establishes a dialogue with both ‘A Report to an Academy’ (1917) and ‘Before the Law’ (1915). Coetzee’s rewriting of Defoe in _Foe_ (1986) is a case in point and includes the eighteenth-century writer as one of its characters, just as _The Master of Petersburg_ (1994) features Fyodor Dostoevsky and rewrites the latter’s _Devils_. _Mrs Curren_ in _Age of Iron_ (1990) reads Tolstoy (Coetzee, 1998: 14), Shakespeare (40) and Virgil (192), and alludes to Hawthorne (114) and Zola (139). Similarly, in _Disgrace_ (1999), David Lurie quotes Shakespeare (Coetzee, 2000: 16) and Blake (69), and teaches Byron, defining himself as a ‘disgraced principle’ of Wordsworth (46). Elizabeth Costello, the Australian novelist of _The Lives of Animals_ (1999), _Elizabeth Costello_ (2003) and _Slow Man_ (2005), has written _The House on Eccles Street_, a rewriting of James Joyce’s _Ulysses_ from the perspective of Leopold Bloom’s wife, Molly. The title _Diary of a Bad Year_ (2007) alludes to Defoe’s _A Journal of the Plague Year_ (1722), and the collection of essays the writer JC is contributing to, _Strong Opinions_, takes its name from Nabokov’s well-known book. In his most recent novel, _The Childhood of Jesus_ (2013), Coetzee sticks to this fashion of explicit intertextuality, presenting _An Illustrated Children’s Don Quixote_ as the favourite book of David, the novel’s child protagonist. This explicit intertextual dialogue informing Coetzee’s literary production is in tune with the presentation of himself as a young man struggling to become a writer in _Youth_ (2002), a struggle in which the influence of and encounter with different writers – Pound, Eliot, Ford Madox Ford, Beckett – proves essential.

These are only some of the more obvious instances of intertextuality in Coetzee. They suggest that Coetzee has deliberately and continuously adopted intertextuality as aesthetic strategy, very often working as the very structural principle upon which his literary works are based. The extent and nature of Coetzee’s uses of intertextuality become clearer when we consider some criteria of intertextuality. Manfred Pfister has proposed that highly intertextual works do not merely use other texts but often refer to them, depend on intertextuality to communicate and generate meaning, exhibit awareness of this dependence, refer to other texts iteratively and structurally rather than in single instances, and draw on intertextuality in order to generate tension between the ideological and semantic profile of both texts (Pfister, 1985: 25–30). _Foe_ refers, already in its title, to the author of _Robinson Crusoe_, depends on the reader’s knowledge of _Crusoe_ to point to problems essential to its own semantic design, exhibits awareness of this dependence in its reflection on the ways in which power shapes the canon, refers to Defoe’s novel structurally rather than occasionally and puts intertextuality to the use of highlighting ideological tensions between itself and Defoe’s novel, especially as concerns Susan Barton’s exclusion from a male literary canon. _Foe_ is certainly an extreme case, but if the criteria mentioned above are any measure to go by, most of Coetzee’s novels are hardly less intertextual.

In his recent study on the genealogy of Coetzee’s fictional works, Attwell has asserted that ‘contrary to the widely held assumption that Coetzee’s novels are spun from quotations drawn from literary theory, the allusions to other writers (some theorists, but more often
than not novelists, poets and philosophers) are brought in only once that the work has found its own legs’ (Attwell, 2015: xx). Attwell’s suggestion seems to be that intertextuality only comes into play in Coetzee’s novels at a late stage, as one of his main arguments is that ‘Coetzee’s departure in fiction are his origins. … [T]hey are, in actual fact, himself’ (25–26, italics in original). Focusing, however, on the final form in which Coetzee’s novels are presented to us, Attwell’s argument about the strongly autobiographical dimension informing them is not incompatible with our claim about intertextuality as a structural dimension of Coetzee’s texts. In fact, in Attwell’s tracing of the process of aesthetic detachment that characterises the composition of Coetzee’s novels, intertextuality emerges as one of the tools used by the writer to achieve that detachment. This is, for instance, the case in The Master of Petersburg, which Attwell presents as Coetzee’s attempt to write his grief over the death of his son Nicolas. Showing that in the early months of drafting, his fictional Dostoevsky was mourning not his stepson but a son from his first marriage – the exact tie between Coetzee and Nicolas – Attwell points to the impossibility of telling Coetzee’s and Dostoevsky’s grief apart: ‘Coetzee is writing about the fictional Dostoevsky in himself’ (168). This act of imagining the grief of having lost his son as Dostoevsky’s (170) makes us see the different levels at which intertextuality works in Coetzee: together with its literary-aesthetic and politico-historical connotations, it may have a profoundly autobiographical and personal significance.

We hope to have made clear by now that in our description of Coetzee’s texts as intertextual, we are not operating with a notion of intertextuality that dissolves questions of agency, positionality, influence or power into a vision of literary relations as operating in an abstract textual continuum. In this sense, our use of the term ‘intertextuality’ differs from some of its poststructuralist uses. The emergence of this term in the 1960s, mainly associated with Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes, coincided with the transition from structuralism to poststructuralism. Inspired by Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism, Kristeva argued that ‘the notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity’ as ‘any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another’ (Kristeva, 1980: 66, italics in original). Kristeva replaces attention to the relation between human subjectivity and the production of language by a vision of texts as products of cultural and social textuality, and of the corresponding ideological structures and struggles. Similarly, Barthes’s ‘The Death of the Author’ (1967) defines the text as a ‘multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture’ (Barthes, 1977: 146). In his deployment of intertextual theory, Barthes aims at challenging the traditional power and authority of the figure of the ‘author’, celebrating, instead, the multiple meanings and textual relations that readers may find in any literary text (Allen, 2000: 2–3).

Coetzee is heir to Kristeva’s and Barthes’s legacy. As numerous critics have argued, and as his fiction and non-fiction show, Coetzee’s literary practice emerges – at least partly – out of a poststructuralist understanding of language and textuality, the result of his involvement in the major intellectual currents of the West from the 1960s to the present (Attwell, 1993: 4). It is with a view to this context that we have to read Coetzee’s statement that writing ‘is not free expression’ and that there is ‘a true sense in which writing is dialogic: a matter of awakening the countervoices in oneself and embarking upon speech with them’ (Coetzee, 1992: 65), a statement that comes close to Kristeva’s and Barthes’s notions of the inherently intertextual quality of texts. This is so because the voices conjured up in writing are not
limited to the voices of other authors but are voices from the whole cultural and linguistic texture in which the writer is immersed. We hear all these different voices in Coetzee’s texts, which shows that he ‘writes not only within Eliot’s sense of tradition as a body of texts, but also with a sense of language as tradition, language as a field in which one takes up a position using found instruments’ (Attwell, 2006: 31, italics in original).2

And yet Coetzee’s conscious deployment of intertextuality – i.e. intertextuality as textual strategy rather than ontological feature of any text – testifies to a preference for certain texts rather than others. Research on Coetzee has from its beginnings acknowledged that other writers of fiction and some theorists play a particularly important part in Coetzee’s works, and that this importance warrants studies that focus on narrowly defined intertextual relations. Part of why this issue is devoted to Coetzee’s relation to the non-English literary traditions is that, with few exceptions,3 writers from these traditions have as yet not received the attention they deserve with regard to their relevance to Coetzee. Apart from Kafka and Dostoevsky, critics have for the most part focused on influences in English. In addition, turning to Coetzee’s non-English influences is important as one reason that seems to draw Coetzee to these authors is their often marginal linguistic status, a point to which we will return in due course. Not only Coetzee’s novels testify to such an interest but also his non-fictional engagement in *White Writing* (1988), *Doubling the Point* (1992), *Giving Offense* (1996), *Stranger Shores* (2001) and *Inner Workings* (2007) with non-English European, Latin American and Afrikaans authors.

Through his works, Coetzee exhibits awareness of the fact that whenever he makes use of intertextuality, the contextual specificities out of which his texts emerge and to which his texts respond qualify and complicate his poststructuralist affinities. As we have seen in ‘What is a Classic?’, these specificities especially affect Coetzee’s concern with his speaking position as a writer affiliated with the Western intellectual and artistic tradition, an issue in which the literary-aesthetic is inextricably entangled with questions of historical violence and political complicity, given the intimate link between European culture, colonial domination and South African apartheid. Coetzee makes this link clear in his 2003 interview with Attwell when he presents himself as ‘a late representative of the vast movement of European expansion that took place from the sixteenth century to the mid-twentieth century of the Christian era’ and as ‘also a representative of the generation in South Africa for whom apartheid was created’, clarifying that this avowal of historical awareness comes motivated by his intellectual heritage: ‘I say that I represent this movement because my intellectual allegiances are clearly European, not African’ (Attwell, 2003).

One decade earlier, in his analysis of agency and canonicity in Coetzee, Attwell had pointed to this very same aspect of Coetzee’s literary production, arguing that Coetzee’s ‘relationship with the European canon entails an accusation of complicity in a history of domination. Coetzee’s response to this situation is to interrogate the specific form of marginality he represents’ (Attwell, 1993: 4), which brings us back to Attridge’s argument about Coetzee’s simultaneous insertion in and critique of the canon. Similarly, Dominic Head has pointed out that Coetzee’s recourse to a European cultural tradition, linked with the field of colonial domination, ‘is already an interrogation of historical forces’ (Head, 2009: 25).

According to Tim Mehigan, Coetzee’s Nobel lecture ‘He and His Man’ (2003), in which Coetzee once again presents himself as inheritor of a literary tradition inaugurated by Defoe, suggests that ‘the writer today cannot write – if s/he even could – outside a literary tradition and the assumptions about authorship that helped chisel that tradition into being’ (Mehigan, 2011:
Coetzee's texts always show the historical 'conditions that bear upon every speaking condition, every writerly utterance’ (4).

It is our contention, then, that any discussion of intertextuality in Coetzee needs to engage with questions of agency and positionality. If ‘influence’ shows a ‘central concern with the author’ and with ‘agency’ (Clayton and Rothstein, 1991: 3), whereas ‘intertextuality has to do with a much more impersonal field of crossing texts’ (4), influence must play a role in the discussion insofar as it acknowledges Coetzee’s intertextual choices as historico-politically anchored and biographically charged. Without endorsing a transcendental, ahistorical or hierarchical conception of canonicity or the literary tradition, Coetzee, in his relation to writers such as Defoe or Dostoevsky, whom he explicitly presents in his fictions as figures of authority to be both followed and challenged, is close to the poetic process described by Harold Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1977: 1973): the writer’s point of departure is the work of his precursor, whom he may correct, complete or swerve away from.

This brings us to the crucial question of who are Coetzee’s literary parents, a question which probably lacks a conclusive and definite answer, but which we may approach by first asking which literary heritage Coetzee has claimed for himself. As our discussion has shown, Coetzee has generally presented himself as tied to a European intellectual and literary tradition. His novels appear to position themselves within a literary culture that is predominantly European, and clearly ‘high’ (Attridge, 2004: 68). It is helpful to consider his critical piece ‘Homage’ (Coetzee, 1993) here, which he describes as ‘an acknowledgement … of literary paternity’ (5). Coetzee mentions Rilke, Faulkner, Musil, Eliot, Pound, Ford, Beckett, Nabokov, Patrick White and Zbigniew Herbert, a predominantly European list. He asks the reader to receive what he says ‘with due caution,’ however, given the vicissitudes involved in any autobiographical act and the complexities associated with the question of paternity, ‘we may want to disown our real parents and claim for ourself a much finer-sounding lineage’ (5). We should certainly not take Coetzee’s autobiographical exercise in ‘Homage’ as the last word on his literary paternity, but the piece is revealing in Coetzee’s choice to present himself as inheritor of an almost exclusively European literary tradition, which is exactly the same picture that he creates in *Youth*. This leads us to two further questions: which European tradition he affiliates himself with, and what role, if any, other literary traditions, such as the South African, play in his writing.

Coetzee explicitly addresses the latter question in ‘Homage’:

[D]o I acknowledge no South African paternity? The short answer is that in 1960 there was no South African writer, novelist or poet, to whom I as a young man could turn for a significant and vital lead in how to respond to, how to feel about, and therefore how to write about, my homeland. (Coetzee, 1993: 7)

Coetzee’s categorical rejection of any South African literary parents is startling because South African writers have always been present in his critical writings, even if occupying a more marginal position than their European and Western counterparts. Coetzee’s engagement with the *plaasroman* and the South African farm novel tradition in *White Writing*, or his essays on La Guma, Gordimer, Breytenbach and Fugard in *Doubling the Point*, constitute some of the most relevant examples. To this, we must add that if we turn to the fictional works he wrote before moving to Australia, some of them draw on recognisable South African literary modes or genres. Thus, ‘The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee’ may be seen as a parody of exploration narratives, a genre of European origin that acquired specific features in South Africa. *Waiting for the Barbarians* engages with prison and torture narratives, and *Age of Iron* with
the tradition of the liberal humanist novel. *In the Heart of the Country* and *Disgrace* are cases in point given their straightforward and self-conscious reworking of the codes and categories of the South African pastoral tradition. In this sense, they may be seen as instances of what Gerard Genette (1997) calls ‘second-degree’ narratives, and in particular of ‘hypertextuality’ and ‘architextuality. As regards the former, it involves ‘any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the hypertext) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the hypotext), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary’ (5). As Allen clarifies, ‘what Genette terms the hypotext is termed by most other critics the inter-text, that is a text which can be definitely located as a major source of signification for a text’ (Allen, 2000: 108). In this sense, Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) is the main hypotext for Coetzee’s *In the Heart of the Country*. If architextuality includes ‘the entire set of general or transcendent categories – types of discourse, modes of enunciation, literary genres – from which emerges each singular text’ (Genette, 1997: 1), the architextuality of Coetzee’s early fiction has a South African origin, while at the same time going beyond the boundaries of this context.

Jarad Zimbler has made a similar point in his recent analysis of style in Coetzee. Drawing on Bourdieu’s notion of the literary field and Adorno’s aesthetic theory, Zimbler emphasises ‘that the positions occupied by literary works are not simply chosen, but made’ (Zimbler, 2014: 12). He stresses the importance of understanding ‘literary works historically and relationally’ (13), and argues that ‘if Coetzee’s material necessarily incorporates the products of centuries of literary labour in several European languages, his field is South African’ (14, italics in original). According to Zimbler, in his early and middle fiction Coetzee is reacting to a far greater degree to South African novelists such as Gordimer, Brink and La Guma than has generally been acknowledged. Of course, not all uses of intertexts signify literary paternity or an acknowledgement thereof, but (elected) literary parents often become visible in intertextual references. Studies such as Zimbler’s alert us to the fact that we must indeed distinguish between Coetzee’s self-fashioned literary parents and the actual intertexts of his works. Thus, a figure like Schreiner is central to understanding novels like *In the Heart of the Country* or *Disgrace*, even if Coetzee never presents Schreiner as a literary ‘mother’.

It is worth mentioning at this point the strongly male character of the literary tradition Coetzee inserts himself in. When we look at the very wide range of critical pieces he has written, we come across only a few female names, such as Olive Schreiner, Sarah Gertrude Millin, Pauline Smith, Nadine Gordimer, Catherine MacKinnon, Yvonne Burgess, A.S. Byatt or Daphne Rooke, with only Schreiner playing an important yet largely unacknowledged role in his literary development or critical thought. Coetzee’s fiction rarely gestures towards female authors. This entails a significant (self-imposed?) limitation of Coetzee’s intertextual scope whose motivations and implications remain to be critically analysed. Let us just remark here that there seems to be a correspondence between Coetzee’s depiction of some of his female characters as inhabiting a dimension of alterity and silence he will not enter – the barbarian girl in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and Lucy in *Disgrace* are the most obvious examples – and his refusal or inability to engage with a female literary and intellectual tradition.

Coetzee’s explicit and prominent use of intertextuality has been interpreted as a sign of the postmodernist quality of his writing: ‘The way Coetzee explicitly and self-consciously positions himself in relation to the European literary tradition seems to place him in the camp of postmodernism. In his fiction he is constantly struggling with prior texts, calling their view of reality into question and sometimes actively rewriting them’ (Cantor, 1994: 84).
Most critics, however, see Coetzee as a late inheritor of modernism. As put by Attridge, Coetzee may be seen ‘as an instance of “late modernism,” or perhaps “neomodernism”’ (Attridge, 2004: 2). Or, following James and Seshagiri, we may label him as a ‘metamodernist’ writer: writers that ‘place a conception of modernism as revolution at the heart of their fictions, styling their twenty-first-century literary innovations as explicit engagements with the innovations of early-twentieth-century writing’ (James and Seshagiri, 2014: 87). In order to make his point about the modernist character of Coetzee’s fiction, Attridge points out that ‘Coetzee’s work follows on from Kafka and Beckett, and not Pynchon and Barth’ (Attridge, 2004: 2). It is precisely this incontestable role of Kafka and Beckett as two of the most important literary predecessors for Coetzee that is very much at the heart of the affiliation commonly claimed for Coetzee and modernism. In fact, it is probably on his relation to Kafka and Beckett that most studies of intertextuality in Coetzee have focused. Especially in the case of Beckett, on whom Coetzee wrote a doctoral dissertation submitted in 1969, his critical writing has no doubt contributed to reinforce the idea of an intimate bond between him and this modernist writer.

The case of Kafka makes us see that in his dialogue with different literary traditions, Coetzee goes beyond the limits of the English language. As Attridge has argued in his introduction to *Inner Workings*, Coetzee shows ‘fascination with the European novelists of the first half of the twentieth century’ (Attridge, 2007: xiii), writers such as Italo Svevo, Robert Walser, Robert Musil, Walter Benjamin, Bruno Schulz, Joseph Roth and Sándor Márai. Kafka, who is an absence in *Inner Workings*, would also be part of the group (xi). As part of this interest in early twentieth-century continental Europe, we could also include Coetzee’s fascination with Dostoevsky, a writer who has also tended to receive attention from critics, even if there is still much more to be said about this intertextual relation, as Angelika Reichmann shows in this issue. Reichmann’s article, then, together with Kyle Wanberg’s and Stefano Rossoni’s – in their respective approaches to Dostoevsky, Kafka and Hofmannsthal, and Musil – respond to Coetzee’s links with early twentieth-century continental Europe. Rossoni’s and Wanberg’s articles on Musil and Hofmannsthal in particular fill in remarkable gaps, given the virtual absence of critical attention paid to these writers’ relation to Coetzee.

Yet Coetzee’s intertextual references also go beyond European boundaries. While the early fiction shows pronounced traces of American writers like Faulkner and Nabokov, it is especially in his ‘Australian’ work that intertextuality expands globally, with important references to writers such as Borges, as Fernando Galván points out in his contribution to this issue. Hence, a recent critical tendency has been to place Coetzee in some sort of international, transnational context, freed from local, regional or national particulars. That is Katherine Stanton’s point (2009) when she characterises Coetzee’s narrative as ‘cosmopolitan fiction’ together with Kazuo Ishiguro’s, Michael Ondaatje’s or Jamaica Kincaid’s. Rebecca Walkowitz reads Coetzee’s work as an instance of what she calls ‘comparison literature’: ‘transnational fiction’ (Walkowitz, 2009: 567) that is ‘born-translated’ (569) and thus suited to ‘an age of multilingual circulation’ (570). We would like to argue a different case. While Coetzee’s literary project is based on intertextuality that goes beyond national and linguistic barriers, he approaches those intertextual relations as linguistically and nationally anchored and uses them in order to articulate his relation to the different contexts from which his narratives arise. In this sense, we agree with the argument of Elleke Boehmer, Lynda Ng and Paul Sheehan’s article in this volume: that Coetzee is an exponent of world literature and a practitioner of transnational literary forms, while at the same time producing fiction that is
intimately tied to local and provincial contexts. This is why we suggest that, especially from the ‘Australian’ phase on and considering his literary career as a whole, Coetzee’s work can be called ‘cosmo-local’ as it simultaneously gestures towards global and local affiliations both in narrowly defined intertextual terms and through references to cultures around the globe in a way that stresses their national and local character.* Diary of a Bad Year*’s invocations of Kurosawa, Tolstoy, Borges and Bach, and its discussions of the function of the state or of global terrorism, for example, go hand in hand with references to South African, US and especially Australian political and social life that include such details as local habits of mind, customs, radio shows or manners of talking.

At the end of his introduction to *Inner Workings*, Attridge ventures to describe what it is that Coetzee has inherited from his European predecessors: ‘if there are gleams of transcendence in Coetzee’s novels, they are not only hints of a possible justice, but of justice animated, as well as tested, by a more obscure demand that the word “spiritual” can only gesture towards – a demand already adumbrated, from Dostoevsky on, by his formidable European predecessors’ (Attridge, 2007: xiv). Given the largely inscrutable and undecidable issue concerning him – the reasons that may have led Coetzee to follow, write against or react to some writers and not others – Attridge’s statement, focused on the ethical dimension, is understandably fairly tentative. Approaching the end of our own introduction, we would like to embrace that tentativeness in our venturing to point out a typology of authors Coetzee chooses either as literary parents or as providers of intertexts (as pointed out above, both things do not necessarily coincide). Though we are aware of the unavoidable limitations and incompleteness of such a task, we believe that it is possible to distinguish between different, though sometimes overlapping, kinds of relation between Coetzee and his literary parents and/or intertexts.

To begin with, Coetzee seems to enter a dialogue with writers writing in a situation of historical upheaval, with a compromised relation to the historical and political times in which they found themselves living, having gone through exile or experiences of alienation. All the European writers from the early twentieth century that Coetzee engages with in *Inner Workings*, for example, ‘experienced as young or middle-aged men the upheavals of the First World War, many living through, or into, the Second World War as well; undergoing ‘the trials of exile, dispossession, and sometimes personal violence’ (Attridge, 2007: xi). As a white South African writer writing in apartheid South Africa and as a late inheritor of settler colonialism, Coetzee shares many of these writers’ sense of alienation from their place of birth, from its history and its politics. Furthermore, his partly Afrikaner background combined with his use of the English language provoked in him an early ‘sense of being alien’ (Coetzee, 1992: 393). Wanberg’s article in this issue, focusing on the ways in which Kafka’s *Vor dem Gesetz* and Hofmannsthal’s *Ein Brief* are used in *Elizabeth Costello*, is a study of this dimension of Coetzee’s intertextuality. Wanberg argues that references to Kafka and Hofmannsthal allow Coetzee to reflect on the struggles of a writer in the context of settler colonialism.

Addressing the German language’s association with imperialism, Wanberg also points to a second quality that makes writers like Kafka attractive to Coetzee. Coetzee often references authors entertaining a non-straightforward relation with the language in which they write; what we may call, following George Steiner (1975), writers linguistically ‘unhoused’. Coetzee has stated that his own relation to English is marked by an absence of feeling of belonging and cultural rootedness, by ‘a foreigner’s sense of distance’ (Coetzee, 1993: 7). In a letter to Paul Auster, he asserts ‘that many writers and intellectuals have a removed or interrogative
relation to the language they speak and write’ (Auster and Coetzee, 2013: 65). He goes on to say that this is his case, and it is also the case of many of the writers he has chosen as literary fathers. The question of language is undoubtedly an important root of Coetzee’s fascination with Beckett, for example. As Kellman has argued, ‘what Coetzee found in Beckett … was an author for whom nature and the world are problematic because language cannot be taken for granted’ (Kellman, 2000: 59). Similarly, what ‘engages’ Coetzee ‘in Kafka is an intensity, a pressure of writing that … pushes at the limits of language, and specifically of German’ (Coetzee, 1992: 198). Coetzee relates this ‘interrogative’ (Auster and Coetzee, 2013: 202) relation to the German language to Kafka’s ‘alienation,’ conceived as a speaking position that ‘the dominant culture cannot immediately assimilate,’ determined, in the case of Kafka, by his ‘writing in German, in Prague, with a Jewish background’ (Coetzee, 1992: 202). The parallel with Coetzee’s position as a white person in apartheid South Africa, half of Afrikaner stock, writing in English and with European intellectual affiliations, is clear enough. On the other hand, Coetzee’s dialogue with languages other than English testifies to his concern with ‘the necessary imperfection of translation’ (Coetzee, 2006: 216), a topic addressed up by Boehmer, Ng and Sheehan.

One of the most consistent concerns in Coetzee’s oeuvre is the revision of ideas of the human that stress language use, reason, self-consciousness, autonomy and God-likeness. This revision involves a poetic of testing that pits intertextually referenced ideas against each other in polyphonic narratives. As Coetzee states in his review of Musil’s The Confusions of Young Törless, he is particularly interested in writers who explore the tension between rationality and irrationality, the limits of reason, writers engaged with the failure of ‘the social and political doctrines inherited from the Enlightenment’ (Coetzee, 2007: 35). Rossoni addresses this dimension of Coetzee’s intertextuality in this volume by tracing the influence of Musil’s attempt to reconcile reason and emotion in The Man Without Qualities on the ways in which Coetzee’s protagonists in Waiting for the Barbarians and Disgrace eroticise the female sensibility. Kafka’s revisions of the human–animal divide, addressed by Wanberg, have been a seminal influence on Coetzee, as have Beckett’s. Dostoevsky has been important not only because of his explorations of the limits of confession but also because he strengthens the case of the irrational and the religious against modernity’s reliance on rationalisation. Reichmann’s contribution on Coetzee’s referencing of Dostoevsky’s trope of monstrosity addresses the issues of rationality, irrationality and the human, and points to yet another dimension of Coetzee’s intertextuality when she argues that the monstrous not only features as an idea in The Master of Petersburg but also shapes the form of Coetzee’s rewriting of Dostoevsky’s Devils.12

It is no coincidence that authors whose ideas of the human, or revisions of ideas of the human, are taken up and tested by Coetzee, also tend to redefine the form of narrative and particularly of the novel. Bakhtin has argued that Dostoevsky’s innovative dialogism, for example, is interdependent with the author’s radical assumptions about human nature; and it seems that Dostoevsky has been such an important influence on Coetzee precisely because the Russian writer’s revision of the human and that of the novel form are related to each other. Bakhtin’s characterisation of Dostoevsky’s definition of the human through his characters describes well Coetzee’s works, where humanity is in a continuous process of being defined. Bakhtin writes that the most basic impulse in Dostoevsky’s characters is to rebel against being defined, as they ‘all acutely sense their own inner unfinalizability, their capacity to outgrow, as it were, from within and to render untrue any externalizing and finalizing
One of [Dostoevsky’s] basic ideas … is precisely the idea that man is not a final and defined quantity upon which firm calculations can be made’ (Bakhtin, 1984: 59, italics in original). The unfinalisability of the human in Dostoevsky as well as in Coetzee can be described as a dialogism in which subjects unceasingly define and redefine themselves and each other. Bakhtin mentions Plato’s philosophical dialogues as forerunners of the polyphonic novel, and, as Valeria Mosca shows in this volume, the notion that ideas are inseparable from the men and women who exchange, enact or performatively contradict them in evolving situations is not only one suggested by Dostoevsky but hitherto by Plato, who inspires Coetzee’s staging of dialogism in The Childhood of Jesus. Fernando Galván’s contribution to this volume also suggests that Coetzee is drawn to Cervantes and Borges – and particularly to Borges’s experiments with alter egos – because Cervantes as well as the Argentine writer conceive of narrative as a genuine mode of thinking. So do Plato and Dostoevsky, and so does Musil when he combines analytical writing and narrative in The Man Without Qualities. Attwell has argued that ‘the antecedents that Coetzee chooses from the history of the novel are those writers who have brought self-consciousness to the surface and writers in whose work one easily discerns a process of self-invention’ (Attwell, 2006: 31). We would like to add that the self-consciousness exhibited by the abovementioned writers consists particularly in highlighting through their characters the bodily and historical codetermination of thinking, and by extension of the human. This operation implies that narrative is not only a genuine but also a truthful mode of thinking insofar as narrative presents ideas, including the idea of the human and of the self, in an embodied and historically embedded form, the only form in which they exist. Writing back to other writers, Coetzee is thus also rethinking the novel, and with it the linguistic, historical and philosophical issues that have, since Cervantes, been thought through it.

Notes

1. See Penner (1989: 69) for a collection of the manifold literary and philosophical echoes that critics have identified in this novel.
2. Clarkson (2011), in her overview of Coetzee’s critical writing, makes a similar point as she argues that we should approach Coetzee not as a novelist, but as a writer.
3. The volume Travelling Texts: J.M. Coetzee and Other Writers (Kucała and Kusek, 2014), focused on Coetzee’s dialogue with central and Eastern European authors, is a significant exception.
4. In his recent reading of The Master of Petersburg, Attwell also draws a parallel between Coetzee’s composition of this novel and Bloom’s description of the poetic process: ‘Coetzee places his own anguish in the vessel of Dostoevsky’s writing, and quietly watches the master’s ship tack a different course’ (Attwell, 2015: 174–5).
5. In his 2003 interview with Attwell, he refers to ‘Homage’ as ‘a fairly hastily written piece’ that will not ‘bear close interrogation’.
6. Coetzee has recently confirmed this European heritage in the form of ‘La Biblioteca Personal de J.M. Coetzee’, a series of books chosen by Coetzee for their influence on him as a writer. The series was launched by the Argentine publisher El hilo de ariadna (http://www.elhilodeariadna.org/coleccion/detalle/9) and so far includes works by Defoe, Kleist, Hawthorne, Tolstoy, Flaubert, Ford Madox Ford, Robert Walser, Musil and an anthology of poems, all translated into Spanish. Date of Access, May 31st, 2016.
7. In Doubling the Point, Attwell also suggests the label of ‘late modernism’ (Attwell, 1992: 198).


11. Coetzee’s dialogue with and incorporation of the Afrikaans language into his narrative is a case in point, as argued by Barnard (2009) and López (2013a). Coetzee’s relation to the Afrikaner literary tradition has partly been analysed, especially Coetzee’s dialogue with the plaasroman tradition (see Wenzel, 2000; Barnard, 2003), but this remains a dimension of Coetzee’s intertextuality very much in need of further critical response.

12. In his exploration of the conflict between irrationality and rationality, fantasy and truth, imagination and reality, Coetzee also repeatedly appeals to Cervantes and his famous hero. This appeal is explicitly brought to the foreground in The Childhood of Jesus, and is also present in many other fictional and non-fictional texts. Critics, however, have not generally paid attention to Coetzee’s dialogue to the Spanish writer (the only exceptions are Hayes, 2010 and López, 2013b) – a gap partly closed by Galván’s article in this issue –, which is symptomatic of the critical neglect affecting Coetzee’s relation to non-English literary traditions.


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