

INTRODUCTION

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[A]ll men are intellectuals, all men do not have the function of intellectuals in society.

—Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*

I

It would not be an overstatement to say that J. M. Coetzee is one of the most influential novelists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as evidenced by the burgeoning scholarship generated by his writing both in South Africa and internationally, as well as by his growing lay readership and the intense interest in his private persona (ironic, in part, because he resists this attention, for he is a writer who is known to be doggedly reserved). His work has been lavished with literary awards, including South Africa's prestigious CNA Prize. He was the first novelist to win the Booker Prize twice, and in 2003 he was made the Nobel Laureate in Literature.

By engaging self-consciously with the ethics of writing in his critical essays and all his works of fiction, often through the portrayal of the conscience-stricken white writer, Coetzee has chosen to enter the long-running and expansive debate about the ethics of intellectualism and the authority of the writer. By so doing, he deliberately places himself in the public domain, if one understands writing as necessarily a public activity. This concern for intellectualism reaches its apogee in Coetzee's uncanny performance of his fictional alter ego Elizabeth Costello in a series of lectures he gave in the United States on ethical issues such as animal rights and the nature of evil (published subsequently in *The Lives of Animals* [1999] and then *Elizabeth Costello* [2003]), which have left critics bewildered in their attempts to untangle Coetzee's and Costello's points of view. Each of Coetzee's novels portrays a (troubled) writer-figure or intellectual, albeit, in a number of the texts, only on the most minimal, symbolic level.¹ Similarly, Coetzee's nonfiction is marked by its concern for intellectual practice.² In *Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship* (1996), for instance, in the chapter titled "Taking Offense," he outlines a model of the ideal intellectual, with whom he finds himself identifying:

Complacent and yet not complacent, intellectuals[,] pointing to the Apollonian "Know yourself," criticize and encourage criticism of the foundations of their own belief systems. Such is their confidence that they may even welcome attacks on themselves, smiling when they are caricatured and insulted, responding with the keenest appreciation to the most probing, most perceptive thrusts. They particularly welcome accounts of their enterprise that attempt to relativize it, read it within a cultural and historical framework. They welcome such accounts and at once set about framing them in turn within the project of rationality, that is, set about recuperating them. (4)

The intellectual, as Coetzee suggests, in supporting his or her own position with reasoned and rationed argument, is ready to accept the reasoned and rationed criticism of fellow intellectuals (and others), indeed, sees this as his or her social function: to criticize and be criticized while, importantly, imparting expertise or knowledge with the purpose of effecting change. In light of the above comments, it surely must be deemed ironic that it was

criticism of Coetzee's novel *Disgrace* (1999), which depicts black-on-white rape at a time when rape is endemic in South Africa, that may have precipitated his departure from Cape Town to Adelaide, Australia, in 2002, where he now lives.

The “purpose of effecting change” is the concern of the essays contained in the present volume, since the ethical responsibilities of the writer are what preoccupies Coetzee in all of his novels. By taking stock of the contribution made by Coetzee to literature and to postcolonial and sociocultural theory, this is the first collection of essays on the author to address a specific theme, the ethics of intellectual practice, in recognition of Coetzee's continued concern for the debates around writing and intellectual history. Until recently, such concerns were generated in the oeuvre from postcolonial or South African paradigms. Moving in general chronologically through the novels, the essays variously take account of the impact Coetzee has had on South African literature and postcolonial and cultural studies, as well as his sustained interest in European modernism and philosophical thinking.

II

Coetzee's sociocultural heritage, his positioning on the peripheries of the Afrikaner community and, despite his sympathies with the Left, his profound suspicion of political rhetoric per se, have led to his sense of marginalization within South Africa and have, in turn, informed his ethics of intellectualism.³ Born in 1940 in Cape Town, English was the language he spoke at home—signifying his linguistic dislocation from Afrikaner society—and he spent part of his childhood in Worcester, South Africa (1948–51). The family returned to Cape Town when Coetzee was in his teens, where as a Protestant he attended a Catholic high school—again compounding his sense of alienation from the community in which he found himself.⁴

Peculiar for what might loosely be termed a “progressive” South African novelist and intellectual writing during, and post-, apartheid, and jarring with his carefully staged public intellectualism, is Coetzee's well-known aversion to political discourse at a time when key political organizations like the ANC were advocating the use of politically committed literature

as a “weapon of the struggle.”⁵ In Coetzee’s reading of Nadine Gordimer’s intellectual work in *The Essential Gesture* (the title alludes to engaged writing), he aligns himself with Gordimer’s suspicion of an “orthodoxy of opposition.”⁶ Gordimer is of course a very different kind of intellectual and novelist from Coetzee: always more outspoken in her political commentary and engaged in her art, she has explicitly aligned herself with the Left and with the ANC, though her position on the use of violence in South Africa’s resistance movement has shifted during the course of her career.

The essays in this volume will show that there is a tension in Coetzee’s writing—both his fiction and essays—between the private and public spheres, a tension that is fervently contested amongst his readers and critics. Known to be a fiercely private individual who spurns media attention, Coetzee rarely gives interviews, and those he does give are characterized by his evasiveness and circumspection. Take, for instance, the interview that opens this volume, or consider the notorious correspondence between Philip R. Wood and Coetzee, published in a special issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly* (1994), in which Coetzee’s taciturn responses make the lengthy questions of his interviewer look vaguely ridiculous.⁷

Indeed, Coetzee is criticized frequently for his elusiveness or silence on matters of politics and, similarly, for the opacity of his fiction. His memoirs, *Boyhood* (1997) and *Youth* (2002), are remarkable for their presentation of their protagonist “Coetzee” in the third person, a device that allows author to distance himself from character in his story and, in some senses, allows Coetzee to abnegate responsibility for his actions. (In fiction, of course, we are required not to equate the author with the characters he or she creates.) In *Youth*, for example, the Dostoevskian antihero “Coetzee” engages in a tawdry love affair, in part, he tells us candidly, to furnish his fiction more colorfully. While showing a deep lack of humanity for the woman “Coetzee” encounters, at the same time he (Coetzee/“Coetzee”?) identifies the silencing effects on the political climate in South Africa of what Gordimer calls “responsibility as orthodoxy”: “There is more to the sorry business, however, than just the shame of it. He has come to London *to do what is impossible in South Africa: to explore the depths*. Without descending into the depths one cannot be an artist” (131) (italics mine).⁸ In this respect, however, living out his ethics of intellectualism, Coetzee resembles many of the fictional charac-

ters he portrays, who maintain their silence as a means of symbolically eluding interpretation or being read, and thereby resisting domination. Both in life and in his fiction, for Coetzee silence represents the freedom and autonomy of the intellectual and points up his or her integrity as a purveyor of truths (in *Doubling the Point* he claims expansively that “[t]he only truth is silence” [286]). In other words, as the essays that follow will demonstrate, the apparently paradoxical nature of Coetzee’s work—his insistence on fleshing out debates about the role of the intellectual while at the same time refusing to make his politics explicitly or publicly known—constitutes his scrupulously orchestrated ethical position. In the opening chapters of this book, David Attwell argues that Coetzee successfully occupies this seemingly paradoxical position, while Peter McDonald suggests that, though Coetzee clearly objected to the censorship laws governing fiction during the apartheid era, his writing sometimes inadvertently reinforces the polarity between aesthetics and politics that he wanted to undo.⁹

At the same time, and somewhat problematically, Coetzee, as a reviewer in venues such as the *New York Review of Books*, is less than circumspect in his opinions and in making his dispositions and opinions known. Indeed, one could map his stances on matters political and ethical from these reviews. Here, for example, we see a characteristic disdain for the public role expected of writers by society:

The Nobel Prize for literature, awarded for 1949, presented in 1950, made Faulkner famous, even in America. Tourists came from far and wide to gawk at his house in Oxford, to his vast irritation. Reluctantly he emerged from the shadows and began to behave like a public figure. From the State Department came invitations to go abroad as a cultural ambassador, which he dubiously accepted. Nervous before the microphone, even more nervous fielding “literary” questions, he prepared for sessions by drinking heavily. But once he had developed a patter to cope with journalists, he grew more comfortable with the role. (“Making of William Faulkner”)

That he makes controversial public interventions on the one hand yet shirks publicity on the other—moreover, that he seemingly holds his critics in contempt—begs the question: is Coetzee guilty of wanting to have his cake and eat it?

III

To what extent, we might ask, can a highly private writer like Coetzee be said to be an intellectual? Antonio Gramsci's distinction between the traditional and the organic intellectual is called to mind: while the traditional intellectual is free-floating and, perhaps, construed as remote and confined to the ivory tower, the organic intellectual responds to specific conditions in a role akin to political activism. In chapter 1 Attwell identifies the typical association made between the traditional intellectual and the private sphere, and the organic and the political. He goes on to examine the tension between the positions of public and private that Coetzee would seem to occupy, and asks whether there is a conflict of interests here. Attwell proposes that if the public sphere can only admit the political intellectual and therefore only the political should seek entry, "then Coetzee is surely at liberty to suggest that if the conventions of the public sphere are to be treated as sacrosanct, then it should not make demands on those writers who might expose their arbitrariness."

The term "intellectual" was popularized by the Dreyfus affair in late-nineteenth-century France.¹⁰ The Jewish Captain Albert Dreyfus, accused of treason, expelled from the French army, and incarcerated in the notorious Devil's Island penal colony, was famously defended by Émile Zola in "J'accuse," his open letter to the French president.¹¹ Zola and a number of fellow writers, by speaking out publicly in support of Dreyfus against the anti-Semitic railings of the Right, standing for universal notions of truth and justice, undaunted by the opposition this would unleash, took upon themselves the duties of the public intellectual. Coetzee explicitly invokes the affair in *Age of Iron* through Mrs. Curren's condemnation of the apartheid state (127), and again in *Disgrace* when Professor David Lurie, after being disciplined by his university for an affair with a young student, implicitly aligns himself (with a pretense to martyrdom) with the persecuted Dreyfus (40). Initially an advocate of Dreyfus, Julien Benda reentered the fray in the 1920s with his well-known *La trahison des clercs* (1927), a polemic, informed by the affair, in which Benda argues that the intellectual must maintain independence from all organized social bodies, especially political ones, in order to speak the truth to power.

The literary critic and public intellectual Edward Said reinvigorated the debate in his 1993 Reith Lectures *Representations of the Intellectual* (the point at which Attwell opens his discussion of Coetzee by situating him within the question “What is the public intellectual?”). Said, while rightly identifying an underlying conservatism in Benda’s study, in part adopts his position: the intellectual should ideally remain amateur rather than expert since the expert is necessarily partial—itsself a kind of untruth since partiality and expertise require the manipulation of truths into particular agendas (7).¹² For Said, the role of the intellectual is public critic, which can only be achieved effectively through such distancing. He considers

whether there is or can be anything like an independent, autonomously functioning intellectual, one who is not beholden to, and therefore constrained, by [*sic*] his or her affiliations with universities that pay salaries, political parties that demand loyalty to a party line, think tanks that while they offer freedom to do research perhaps more subtly compromise judgement and restrain the critical voice. As [Régis] Debray suggests, once an intellectual’s circle is widened beyond a like group of intellectuals—in other words, when worry about pleasing an audience or an employer replaces dependence on other intellectuals for debate and judgement—something in the intellectual’s vocation is, if not abrogated, then certainly inhibited. (*Representations*, 51)

Attwell, in chapter 1, is particularly concerned with the notion of publicity: by entering the public domain, making public interventions, does an author have a responsibility to that public? For Attwell, Coetzee’s fiction portrays the very ethical writing and reading practices which the author himself resists, thereby making complex the tensions between his private and public personae.

In chapter 2 Peter McDonald turns to “The Novel Today” (1988), one of Coetzee’s major public interventions on the ethics of intellectual practice, in which Coetzee champions the novel as a rival rather than a supplement to the discourse of history. While McDonald recognizes that in this talk Coetzee is not advocating literature that is abstracted from the political, he suggests that Coetzee inadvertently reinforces the polarity of the discourses of politics and art, and thus to some degree plays into the hands

of the censors, to whom, he makes clear, he is opposed. Canonical works, McDonald argues, were viewed by the censors in apartheid South Africa as being of a higher order than political discourse—which would account for Coetzee's fiction evading the censor.

IV

The debate over the social role of the intellectual has a long history, from Aristotle and Socrates to Edward Said, Ngugi, Arundhati Roy, and Wole Soyinka. In South Africa, under the conditions of colonialism and then apartheid, it is particularly urgent. Writing and intellectualism in these contexts have been profoundly politicized; indeed, punitive and prohibitive measures were written into the apartheid constitution. The Afrikaner National Party, which displaced the Smuts regime in 1948, outlawed oppositional groups such as the ANC; banned, exiled, and murdered numbers of those opposed to the regime; instituted widespread and draconian censorship; and prohibited sexual relations across the "colour line." All these measures were overseen by a violently oppressive secret police who were implicated in a number of murders of prominent political activists, most notably Steve Biko in 1977.¹³

Black writing, in the politically inclusive sense,¹⁴ suffered particularly under colonialism and apartheid. As Coetzee has shown in *White Writing* (1988), oral narratives in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were suppressed or misrepresented by white colonials. Black writers, until recently, were largely denied access to higher education and were thus excluded from current literary debates, while their writing, which was often censored, has been dismissed by some recent critics as rudimentary in style and essentialist in content.¹⁵ These factors made the responsibility and accountability of the white intellectual and writer more pressing and complex: how were white intellectuals and authors to represent others' stories without exercising an ethically dubious authority over them? Writers like Coetzee, André Brink, Breyten Breytenbach, Athol Fugard, and Nadine Gordimer—all of whom are white—have been attentive to the privileges their racial identity necessarily accorded them,¹⁶ and their work has circled

around the experience and concerns of writing under an oppressive regime and of representing racial alterity.

The egregious oppression of South Africa's black peoples and the responsibilities felt by oppositional South African writers, black and white, were the driving force behind the movement for committed literature, a site of contest that in large part Coetzee has shirked. In order to achieve "relevance and commitment"—the criteria in Gordimer's model outlined in *The Essential Gesture*—resistance literature typically embraced a social realist mode, engaging in Gordimer's case with a sophisticated Lukacsian model. Other "committed" novelists have been more experimental. The creative writer and cultural critic Njabulo Ndebele, for instance, calls for a "rediscovery of the ordinary" in what constitutes for some commentators a hybrid, postmodern style: black South African writers, he insists, should appropriate the folk and pop art of the townships as a means of resisting the commonplace opposition of people and state, in other words, bypassing dominant grand narratives. In another vein, critics such as Neil Lazarus have recognised the ethical content—and thus the *usefulness*—of modernist writing. "Contemporary white South African literature," Lazarus argues, "must now be defined not only by its negativity, but also by its marginality and acute self-consciousness." Commenting on recent white South African writing, including Coetzee's modernist aesthetic, and dismissing the appropriateness of a postmodern critical model, he goes on:

And one is tempted to ask whether a literature displaying these characteristics, and written after—and frequently even in the idiom of—Kafka and Beckett and, for that matter, Kundera, could be anything other than modernist; especially when it is borne in mind that as a discourse it is so *ethically* saturated, so *humanistic* in its critique of the established order, so concerned to represent *reality*, and so *rationalistic* that it would be quite inappropriate to describe it as postmodernist. ("Modernism and Modernity," 148)

Attwell, in his monograph on Coetzee's early work up to *Age of Iron*, takes Lazarus to task over his rejection of postmodernist critiques of white South African writing, suggesting that, in Coetzee's case, the "problem . . . is to understand [Coetzee's] postmodernism in the light of his postcoloniality."¹⁷

Drawing upon the work of Linda Hutcheon on the “politics of postmodernism,”¹⁸ Attwell continues, “I share Lazarus’s appreciation of the ethical value of this writing, but what is puzzling is his insistence that it would be impossible for postmodernism *in any form* to achieve an ethical stance” (21).

In *Doubling the Point* Coetzee distances himself from the trend in writing he refers to as “radical metafiction,” which, he says, is in danger of “swallowing its own tail” (204, 86). This comment is curious given Coetzee’s own acutely metafictional style, exemplified in novels like *Foe*, *The Master of Petersburg*, and, most recently, *Elizabeth Costello*, yet its sentiment—its disavowal of navel gazing in art and criticism—is indicative of the ethical motivations evident throughout his oeuvre.

Because Coetzee returns repeatedly to the metafictional trope of the conscience-stricken author-figure or intellectual, and because his fiction is so theoretically informed, literary critics have often engaged in highly textual, often poststructuralist, readings of the work.¹⁹ It is noteworthy, therefore, that Derek Attridge, who is known for his engagement with deconstruction, especially of a Derridian mode, questions (in chapter 3 of this volume) the reliability of these highly textual readings of Coetzee. Addressing the very private activity of fiction reading (in contrast to Attwell and McDonald, whose concern is primarily with the public domain), his essay reveals his discomfort in particular with reading Coetzee allegorically—a mode that has become the signature of Coetzee criticism. Attridge suggests that reading in this way can often divert attention from what is significant about a literary work *as a literary work*: a literal reading is a reading that resists the various temptations to move away from the experience of the work to meanings of a fixed kind, whether historical, moral, or political. Coetzee’s work, Attridge suggests, is particularly valuable in considering this issue, since it states the process of allegorizing without becoming allegory—or if it is allegory, it is a type that has escaped the fixity characteristic of traditional uses of the mode. According to Attridge, the event of the reading—in which meanings are performed, or better, the process of meaning is performed, but not solidified—is more complex than any meanings that can be derived from it. Ultimately, the peculiar inventiveness and singularity of Coetzee’s fiction, for Attridge, lies in its resistance to such nonliterary uses and in its invitation to the reader to experience an alterity that cannot be domesticated. (It is this mode of reading that Dominic Head takes up in chapter 5.)

Michael Marais, in chapter 4, suggests that there is an ethical process ongoing in Coetzee's fiction that intentionally distances the texts from history, in what constitutes effectively a break from the public. Marais argues that any ethical claim about literary writing rests on a range of assumptions about the way in which texts relate to history. Referring to the novel *The Master of Petersburg* and through it the trope of death, Marais examines Coetzee's questioning of standard assumptions on the nature of this relation, and goes on to argue that Coetzee's fiction self-consciously prioritizes the literary text's relation to an otherness beyond history.

Literary critics have tried to anticipate the shifts in form and content of the literature of South Africa now that apartheid is over. To what extent do novelists engage with the ethical writing practices advocated by the movement for committed literature? Has the end of apartheid opened new paths in fiction and signaled more experimental forms in which to present them? Negotiating the realms of the private and public spheres, as we might say Coetzee does, Dominic Head considers such questions in his essay. He argues that complicity often links the writer, the text, and the world or political discourse. Comparing the works of the apartheid years up to *The Master of Petersburg* with the more recent ones, Head questions whether postapartheid such associations are made less compelling. Drawing on a notion similar to Attridge's reading event, Head suggests that Coetzee's fiction always incorporates a double bind: while the texts, particularly the earlier ones, encourage allegorical readings, at the same time the reductiveness of this practice might even, chillingly, strike a literal chord, but might also be self-defeating on the part of Coetzee. Understanding Coetzee as writing his own peculiar brand of "resistance" literature that is suspicious of all forms of orthodoxy, including that of resistance, Head then asks where Coetzee's writing might lead him, now that with *Disgrace*, according to Head, Coetzee is lessening the emphasis on allegorical writing and reading.

V

Throughout his career Coetzee has attracted, and perhaps even courted, controversy. *Disgrace* received damning criticism from sections of its South African (and world) readership for its stark portrayal of the rape of a white

woman at the hands of three black intruders. Choosing to address the subject of rape, particularly that of a white woman by black men, is deeply troubling for many readers and critics at this moment in South African history, when the incidence of rape, particularly of *black* women, is endemic and when a traumatized society is still coming to terms with its brutal past in a country where racist stereotypes of the black man as the natural rapist still prevail. In an ANC-commissioned report on racism in the media, the novel has been held up as illustrative of white racism in South Africa today. Rosemary Jolly makes reference to this report in her reading of *Disgrace*.²⁰

Highlighting Coetzee's ethically nuanced public/political domain, Sam Durrant, Elleke Boehmer, and Rosemary Jolly all argue that *Disgrace* makes an implicit critique of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Drawing parallels with *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Durrant argues that, in Professor David Lurie, *Disgrace* offers the story of a man who rejects the language of public confession and instead finds a way of "living it out from day to day, trying to accept disgrace as my state of being." "Living through" or "living out," Durrant suggests, would seem to involve an oblique recognition of one's ethical responsibility for the other: both Lurie and the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* must live through the consequences of their attempt to ignore or block out the suffering of the other. In forcing his protagonists to become more alive to the reality of other people's lives, in urging his readers to overcome a certain state of ignorance or even stupor, Coetzee presents fiction that is in accord with the basic ethics of humanism. Yet, Durrant proposes, Coetzee also departs from this model in his engagement with the lives of animals, with that which lies beyond the realm of the human.

Elleke Boehmer unravels the calibration of scapegoating in *Disgrace*. As epitomized by Lucy's refusal to speak of her experience of rape, the narrative offers graduated instances of traditionally subjected bodies carrying—literally bearing—the effects or manifestations of wrong which others have inflicted: the diseased goat, the killed dogs, the pregnant Lucy. Boehmer considers the implications for a gender politics of these different states of sorrow—in the sense both of bearing a burden of apology and of pitifulness. Drawing on both the post-Enlightenment discourses generated by the novel and the South African contexts from which it speaks, Boehmer tacitly

questions the efficacy of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission in bearing witness to the horrors of apartheid, and in laying its ghosts to rest in the (troubled) present.

Concerned with Coetzee's critique of a proliferation of distinctively southern African hypermasculinities, reading it as a crucial, ethical contribution to an analysis of the epidemic of violence against women and children in the region, Rosemary Jolly focuses on *Disgrace* but refers to the masculinities depicted in Coetzee's texts of the apartheid and transition eras and argues that the issue of violence against women and children can only be understood in terms of hypermasculine formulations within the southern African context. She utilizes women's stories of egregious abuse told at the TRC hearings as empirical evidence of such a climate of violence. She argues that Coetzee, from *Dusklands* through to *Disgrace*, has consistently portrayed the role of discourses of racialized and engendered hegemony as key factors in a systemic, sexualized brutality that is seen by the perpetrators of this brutality to manifest their dominance. From an eco-feminist position, Jolly then attempts to show that Coetzee's fiction finds a way out of these damaging categories beyond the human, through animals.

VI

The ethical writer's and intellectual's task is, in part, to address the oppression of any marginalized group as well as to challenge its perpetrators, even if only through (the act of) writing. Writers *and* intellectuals like Chinua Achebe, Arundhati Roy, and Wole Soyinka, for instance, have questioned whether the secluded sphere of writing can be considered a sufficient form of contest. Roy has chosen ultimately to write a single novel only and thereafter to devote herself to her activism, whilst Achebe and Soyinka have both taken breaks from writing fiction in order to focus on their political work.

On the ethical question of being "merely a writer," Coetzee's fellow South African Nadine Gordimer contends that "art is on the side of the oppressed" since art by definition is "freedom of the spirit" and can therefore only represent (support) those seeking freedom. The act of writing, she quotes Roland Barthes, is ultimately his or her "essential gesture as a

social being,” and she adds that “creative self-absorption and conscionable awareness” are the “foetuses in a twinship of fecundity” (see *Essential Gesture*, 291, 286, 299–300). Michael Bell argues in chapter 9 that “[i]n Coetzee, the literary as such proves over and over again to be a radically discomfoting, albeit indispensable, category for a certain kind of truth telling.”

Bell, Lucy Graham, and Laura Wright all show, from different theoretical perspectives, that these boundaries between public and private are unsettled and clouded in Coetzee’s performance of his protagonist Elizabeth Costello (*The Lives of Animals* and *Elizabeth Costello*)—what Graham calls “textual transvestism.” According to Bell, *The Lives of Animals* expresses dramatically why Coetzee finds it difficult to believe, as Coetzee puts it elsewhere, in “believes in,” and it reveals the relationship between the ethical positioning of the speaker, Costello, her audience, and, indeed, herself. Bell reads Costello as a device put into play by the author to convey those feelings or sentiments that Coetzee himself finds difficult to express; that she allows him, as a deeply private and elusive figure, in some senses to hold his silence while testing the limits of acceptable discourse. Bell suggests that these “clues” embedded in *The Lives of Animals* radically rework our conception of normality by shifting the ground on which common assumptions are made, such as “Whom do we mean by ‘one of us’?” Bell’s essay at the same time offers new readings of Coetzee through the work of D. H. Lawrence.

Laura Wright, drawing on animal rights and feminist debates, finds that Costello is enacting a “rant”: a highly personal and at times angry philosophical exploration, which allows Coetzee to create a place of signification from which to voice an ethics that potentially undermines all binary modes of thought. Controversially, Wright enacts her own rant on the ethics of intellectualism, thereby reproducing the methodology of Coetzee in his performance of Costello.

Lucy Graham argues that critics who have acknowledged Coetzee’s “elusiveness” and the distance between Coetzee and Costello have often interpreted Coetzee’s scripting of Costello as mere evasiveness, a distancing device, and have expressed impatience with his apparent reluctance to take a stand himself. The “lessons” that make up the *Elizabeth Costello* collection, Graham argues, should be seen in the context of a tradition of female articulation in Coetzee’s oeuvre. Like Costello, Magda in Coetzee’s *In the*

Heart of the Country (1977), Susan Barton in *Foe* (1986), and Elizabeth Curren in *Age of Iron* (1990) are women who write and reflect on the processes of writing. Graham shows that the women in Coetzee's fiction play an important role in interrogating authorship and discourses of origin.

As I believe the essays collected here will show, the Coetzee oeuvre is ever in a state of flux, and with the figure of Elizabeth Costello (who even makes an appearance in the most recent novel, *Slow Man* [2005]), readers and cultural commentators of Coetzee are left wondering where his writing will lead next. These essays go some way in answering such questions by identifying the shift from "Third World" locations and locutions to the more privately realized presentation, in *The Lives of Animals* and *Elizabeth Costello*, of the idiosyncratic and outspoken Costello figure. (Indeed, one might ask whether the end of apartheid has allowed such a shift, from public to private, to take place.) I believe, however, that the essays will leave the reader in no doubt that interest in Coetzee's writing and in what comes next will persist beyond his apparent withdrawal, both literally and literarily, from the so-called Third World.

Notes

1. *Dusklands* (1974) parallels and thereby correlates two very distinct narratives: the story of a colonial explorer Jacobus Coetzee who records unselfconsciously the violent history of his journey into Namaqualand, and that of Eugene Dawn, a twentieth-century propagandist writing in the service of the U.S. government in its war in Vietnam. Colonialism and U.S. imperialism are thereby identified as violently oppressive ideologies. In *In the Heart of the Country* (1978) the isolated and psychotic Afrikaner spinster Magda symbolically resists the (patriarchal) drive to be narrativized into a story, while at the end of *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) the Magistrate prepares to document the last days of the settler community. Like the colonizers in the poem by Constantine Cavafy to which Coetzee's title refers, this community is "waiting for the barbarians." (In Cavafy's text the barbarian is always an imagined other.) The elusive Michael K in *Life & Times of Michael K* (1983) takes symbolic authority over the twinned metaphors of writing the land and writing the body as a gesture of resistance to (textual) oppression. In *Foe* (1986) Susan Barton resists the patriarchal attempts of the author-figure Foe to misrepresent the story of her shipwreck on a Robinsonian island while simultaneously Barton inadvertently "colonizes" Friday's story. The protagonist Mrs. Curren in *Age of Iron* (1990) is writing a letter to her self-exiled daughter in America. Set during the

waning years of the apartheid regime, the novel pits ethics, or the private sphere, against politics, or the public sphere, when Mrs. Curren is confronted by what she perceives as the political dogma of both the state and the political activists she encounters. Dostoevsky in *The Master of Petersburg* (1994) struggles with the demons of a guilty conscience just as he struggles with the idea of his writing when he abuses his dead son's memory in pursuit of a good story. In *Disgrace* (1999), published shortly after the closing of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings, during which stories of egregious oppression were brought into the public realm, Professor David Lurie seeks personal reconciliation with himself and with the "new South Africa," while at the same time struggling to find inspiration for his opera. Here, Lurie's ethical consciousness operates interdependently with his artistry: as his private life falls into disarray, so he loses control of his muse. In *The Lives of Animals* (1999) and *Elizabeth Costello* (2003) Coetzee's alter ego Elizabeth Costello delivers her impassioned, heart-felt "lessons" on emotive issues such as animal rights and the nature of evil.

2. *White Writing* (1988), for example, is a sociohistorical study of early white South African literary and artistic genres in which "white," according to Coetzee, is politicized, meaning "no longer European, not yet African" (11). Such writing—*écriture blanche*, as Roland Barthes would have it—is characterized by its erasures and evasions about black people and their cultures. *Doubling the Point* (1992), a collection of interviews and essays on literature and culture edited by David Attwell, is premised upon a modernist notion of "doubling back" and autocritique where the modern writer is hyperaware of the limits of his or her own authority. In the central essay in the book, "Confession and Double Thoughts," Coetzee analyzes the confessional writing of Tolstoy, Rousseau, and Dostoevsky, identifying the problems that encumber confession: finding the truth about the self, which, in turn, is imbued with problems of deception and self-deception, and closure: how to end the unending cycle of truth-telling and self-abnegation into which the confessant might fall. Elsewhere, Coetzee links the bold assertion that "[a]ll autobiography is storytelling, all writing is autobiography" with the problem of "how to tell the truth in autobiography" (391–92). Writing becomes an act of self-disclosure that is plagued by the problems inherent in confession. *Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship* (1996), as Coetzee remarks in his introduction, addresses "the passion that plays itself out in acts of silencing and censoring" (vii), from the trial of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* to rooting "apartheid thinking" in "demon possession." Coetzee invokes the Romantics' preference for sentiment over reason: "passion" here is the operative term since political debates about censorship per se hold no interest for him, as he remarks elsewhere (*Doubling*, 299).

3. In *Doubling the Point* Coetzee tells David Attwell, "Sympathetic to the human concerns of the left, he is alienated, when the crunch comes, by its language—by all political language, in fact" (394).

4. At twenty-one Coetzee left South Africa for London, where he worked as a computer analyst for a number of years, at the same time taking a Masters in Literature by correspondence at the University of Cape Town. Awarded his degree in 1963, he wrote his dissertation on the novelist Ford Madox Ford, a writer in whom, as he comments

in *Youth*, he would come to lose interest. In the mid-1960s he moved to the United States and studied for a PhD in literary linguistics at the University of Texas, Austin, on the Irish novelist and playwright Samuel Beckett—an acknowledged influence, among many, on his own fiction. He embarked upon his career as a lecturer at the State University of New York, Buffalo (1968–71), where he also began work on his first novel, *Dusklands*, informed by his experiences in America. Coetzee then returned to South Africa to take up a teaching position at the University of Cape Town, where in 1984 he was made Professor of General Literature. In subsequent years he divided his time between the universities of Cape Town and Chicago, and in 2002 moved to Adelaide, Australia, to work as an honorary research fellow.

5. For a discussion of this issue see ANC activist Albie Sachs's well-documented speech, "Preparing Ourselves for Freedom," in which Sachs highlights the limitations of engaged art.

6. See Gordimer, *Essential Gesture*, 106.

7. See Wood, "Aporias."

8. See also Gordimer, *Essential Gesture*, 293.

9. In *Doubling the Point* Coetzee, in conversation with Attwell, comments, "I regard it as a badge of honour to have had a book banned in South Africa, and even more of an honor to have been acted against punitively, as Fugard and others were officially, and Brink and others unofficially. This honor I have never achieved nor, to be frank, merited. Besides coming too late in the era, my books have been too indirect in their approach, too rarefied, to be considered a threat to the order" (298). Peter D. McDonald makes reference to these remarks in "Not Undesirable."

10. See, for instance, Kramer, "Habermas, Foucault," 30.

11. The letter was published in the literary newspaper *L'Aurore* (The dawn), on January 13, 1898.

12. Jeremy Jennings and Tony Kemp-Welch make this point in "Century of the Intellectual," 10.

13. Biko was instrumental in forming the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa in the 1970s, inspired by the earlier movement in the United States. Apartheid legislation included Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, Act No. 55, 1949; Immorality Amendment Act, Act No. 21, 1950; amended 1957 (Act 23); Suppression of Communism Act, Act No. 44, 1950 ("communism" was defined in broad terms as radical politics); Bantu Building Workers Act, Act No. 27, 1951; Separate Representation of Voters Act, Act No. 46, 1951, amended 1956 (disfranchisement of "Coloureds" from common voters' roll); Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act, 1953; Bantu Education Act, Act No. 47, 1953; Natives (Prohibition of Interdicts) Act, Act No. 64, 1956 (prevented blacks from appealing to the courts against forced removals); Extension of University Education Act, Act No. 45, 1959 (ended black students attending white universities); Terrorism Act, 1967; Bantu Homelands Citizens Act, 1970 (removed black people's right to South African citizenship). See Boddy-Evans, "Apartheid Legislation."

14. Under apartheid law racial identity was categorized into the hierarchy of White, Coloured, Asian, and African.

15. For an early account of the emergence of black English, including a discussion of the (mis)representation of indigenous oral narratives, see Gray, *Southern African Literature*, chapter 7. In “Postmodernism and Black Writing in South Africa,” Lewis Nkosi refers to the “formal insufficiencies, . . . disappointing breadline asceticism and prim disapproval of irony, and its well-known predilection for what Lukacs called ‘petty realism, the trivially detailed painting of local colour,’ [in sum, the] naively uncouth disfigurements” typifying black South African writing (77). He speculates that black South African literature has tended to resist a postmodern mode, in part because of the isolation of black creative writers from South African universities, where current theories were being disseminated.

16. All except Coetzee have been censored, and Breytenbach spent some years in prison.

17. Attwell, *J. M. Coetzee*, 20.

18. See Hutcheon, *Politics of Postmodernism*.

19. See, for instance, Maes-Jelinek, “Ambivalent Clio.” Teresa Dovey makes extensive psychoanalytic readings of Coetzee using the theories of Lacan and Freud. See, for instance, *Novels* and “Waiting for the Barbarians.”

20. See Rosemary Jolly in this volume. In a special issue of *Interventions* David Attwell and Peter McDonald debate the discussion of the representation of race in *Disgrace* in the ANC report, giving markedly different accounts. See SAHRC, *Inquiry*; Attwell, “Race in *Disgrace*”; McDonald, “*Disgrace* Effects.”

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