

-The Place from When I Read-

Intertextuality and the Postcolonial Present:
Reading *Elizabeth Costello* (and J. M. Coetzee)

Zachary A. Weir

M.A. Thesis

Marshall University
Department of English

Advisor: Dr. John K. Young

22 April 2004

-The Place from When I Read-

Intertextuality and the Postcolonial Present:
Reading *Elizabeth Costello* (and J. M. Coetzee)

Abstract:

This particular study does not set forth to recount, reconstruct, recontextualize or, ultimately, reinterpret J. M. Coetzee's contributions to postcolonial—or, specifically, South African—writing. Rather, this study will first qualify and then employ a nuanced form of intertextuality, most specifically indebted to the work of Julia Kristeva, as a paradigmatic model for reading Coetzee's work within established larger postcolonial, national, international and specifically literary contexts. *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), J. M. Coetzee's most recent work of fiction (perhaps "fiction"), provides an interesting and instructive textual location in which to observe the mechanics of intertextuality, as they function to develop not only an examination of postcoloniality, but also the politics and performative nature of the postcolonial present. Close study of this text from the wide sample of Coetzee's work will trace the intertextuality functioning in the creation of both postcolonial consciousness and subjectivity and, likewise, the position of the postcolonial author.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Not so much who, what, why or where—but, rather, <i>when</i>	
Chapter 1	21
The Didacticism of Disavowal	
Chapter 2	46
Ladies and Gentlemen: Present(ing) <i>Elizabeth Costello</i>	
Conclusion	69
Costello or Coetzee: Both/And	
Works Cited	76
Selected Bibliography	80

Introduction

Not so much who, what, why or where—but, rather, *when*

Like history, the novel is thus an exercise in making the past coherent. Like history, it explores the respective contributions of character and circumstance to forming the present. By doing so, the novel suggests how we may explore the power of the present to produce the future. That is why we have this thing, this institution, this medium called the novel.

-*J. M. Coetzee, Elizabeth Costello*

Having published eight novels, two volumes of stylized autobiography, three books of criticism and one hybrid work combining interviews and critical essays, J. M. Coetzee has written widely on a variety of literary, social and cultural topics. And, as evinced by his lengthy resume of awards and honors—including the Booker Prize (twice), the Commonwealth Writers Prize and, most recently the Nobel Prize for Literature—Coetzee has met with considerable popular and critical success. This particular study does not set forth to recount, reconstruct, recontextualize or, ultimately, reinterpret Coetzee’s contributions to postcolonial—or, specifically, South African—writing. Rather, this study will first qualify and then employ a nuanced form of intertextuality, most specifically indebted to the work of Julia Kristeva, as a paradigmatic model for reading Coetzee’s work within established larger postcolonial, national, international and specifically literary contexts. *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), J. M. Coetzee’s most recent work of fiction (perhaps “fiction”), provides an interesting and instructive textual location in which to observe the mechanics of intertextuality, as they function to develop not only an examination of postcoloniality, but also the politics and performative nature of the postcolonial present. Close study of this most contemporary text from the wide sample of Coetzee’s work will attempt to trace the intertextuality set to play in the creation of both postcolonial consciousness and subjectivity and, likewise, the precarious position inhabited by the postcolonial author. At a critical juncture where binary and dialectical relationships—as

fundamentally artificial constructs—between self and Other, author and reader, speaker and audience have come under heavy attack from theorists both inside and outside of the postcolonial debate, *Elizabeth Costello* provides Coetzee a fictional space both to respond to the highly charged politics of the present and to challenge any essentializing discourse attempting to pin down either the author or the work in a comfortable and unquestioned act of interpretation. As a point of analytical departure, *Elizabeth Costello* provides an interesting, not to mention convoluted, case through which to develop a postcolonial discussion of intertextuality with Coetzee’s writing.

Location: “Terms” of the Argument

Since Julia Kristeva’s coinage of the term in her essay, “The Bounded Text” (1960), the word *intertextualite* has entered into the lexicon of literary criticism—and, much like the theory it espouses would suggest—has emerged neither unscathed nor completely unaltered. From Kristeva’s reading of M. M. Bakhtin to Roland Barthes’s influential essay “From Work to Text,” the term intertextuality received much critical attention initially in the French journal *Tel Quel* during the 1960s, a journal in which certain poststructuralist critiques found their first programmatic expression; however, the term, as originally employed by Kristeva, has served different meanings and critical uses when idiomatically employed by other theorists and literary critics. For example, the use of “intertextuality” has proven essential to more structuralist approaches to textual theory, including the works of Gérard Genette and Michael Riffaterre, which rely on models that assume a basic literary competence in regards to readers of literature.¹

¹ Riffaterre and Genette differ slightly on their interpretation of how intertextuality functions within texts, though both argue for the merits of a structuralist critique. Genette’s work relies upon the actual presence of the inter-text, as a traceable or identifiable text appearing within the body of the text under analysis. Though Genette does not

Likewise, the American poststructuralist critic Harold Bloom subscribes to a method of critical reading much akin to the idea of intertextuality with the working theory of poetry and poetical composition put forth in his work, *The Anxiety of Influence*. Sharply divergent from Kristeva's initial use of the term, such critics have likewise adopted "intertextuality" to describe the relationship not only between texts, but also readers and texts. Though the term "intertextuality" may emerge in a variety of critical works and theories of literature, the working definition vacillates greatly between different critics and critical applications.²

For the purposes of this study, Kristeva's version of intertextuality proves the most instructive in revealing the intricacies of J. M. Coetzee's fiction and political stance as postcolonial author, as later demonstrated in the discussion of *Elizabeth Costello*. However, the nature of intertextuality and its potentiality for Kristeva deserves a somewhat thorough discussion before proceeding with any application of her theory, in order to set it apart from other theoretical methodologies sharing the same terminology. As Mary Orr notes: "Hence, because the more concerted theorization of intertextuality by a Barthes, Riffaterre or Genette brought the critical rigour her original work was deemed to lack, French critical guides eclipse Kristeva's version and concentrate on theirs" (23). However, as Orr intimates, such a collapsing of theoretical work under the blanket term of "intertextuality" seriously risks overshadowing the unique critical and political position offered by Kristeva's theorizing. Tracing Kristeva's critical position from her initial work on Bakhtin, the attempt in this study to situate Kristeva's work within the larger debate over intertextuality functions to further develop her critical position and

propose a solution to a "missing" inter-text, Riffaterre argues that such an inter-text can be "imagined" by the reader to fill in the necessary gaps, if the reader proves competent in her or his interpretive ability.

² For an overview of intertextuality and its history within the critical idiom, see Graham Allen's *Intertextuality* (2000). Also, for a thorough discussion of the politically charged debates over the effectiveness of intertextuality as a tool for critical discussions of literature, see Mary Orr's *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts* (2003). Both texts detail the historical and contextual uses of intertextuality as a critical tool; however, Orr's book assumes a readership more conversant in the lexicon of literary criticism and surveys a much larger breadth of critics and critical methodologies.

its applications for studying literature, specifically the works of J. M. Coetzee in a postcolonial context.

Owing largely to her influential work translating and introducing the work of M. M. Bakhtin to the French intellectual scene of the 1960s, Kristeva's theory of intertextuality derives much from the Russian critic's theories of dialogism and heteroglossia as they function within the space of the novel. In his essay "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin describes the textual mechanisms functioning within the novel, which separate the novel from other genres, creating a textual space within which an author can develop an open-ended discourse:

The prose artist elevates the social heteroglossia surrounding objects into an image that has finished contours, an image completely shot through with dialogical overtones; he creates artistically calculated nuances on all the fundamental voices and tones of this heteroglossia. (278-79)

With the incorporation of heteroglossia within the space of the novel, Bakhtin argues that such multi-voiced discourse develops a type of linguistic and epistemological space that most accurately captures the nature of "living discourse," a type of discourse that sets the novel apart from its epic precursor.³ Although, for Bakhtin "every literary work faces outward away from itself, toward the listener-reader, and to a certain extent thus anticipates possible reactions to itself" ("Forms of Time" 257), he nonetheless provides for a certain indeterminacy in the reception and interpretation of a given work by an essentially polyglot readership; and, for Kristeva, this indeterminacy opens up a space in which the novel can function as a viable vessel for critique and the representation of social reality.

³ For a thorough discussion of Bakhtin's distinction between the novel and other genres of fiction, see his essay "Epic and the Novel," collected within *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*.

In an interview Kristeva clearly spells out her indebtedness to Bakhtin's theories of the novel and discourse, though she insists upon a fundamental difference in her approach to a theory of intertextuality. In response to the question of Bakhtin's influence upon her work, Kristeva states:

I see the following differences. In the first place, there is the recognition that a textual segment, sentence, utterance, or paragraph is not simply the intersection of two voices in direct or indirect discourse [i.e. dialogism *en sensu stricto*]; rather, the segment is the result of the intersection of a number of voices, of a number of textual interventions, which are combined in the semantic field... So there is the idea of this plurality of phonic, syntactic and semantic participation. (*Interviews* 189)

Though Kristeva insists upon a more pluralistic understanding of the disparate voices and discourses incorporated within the space of the novel, the influence of Bakhtin permeates her critique, providing a theoretical basis from which to expand. Mary Orr notes the following in her discussion of Bakhtin's influence upon Kristeva's use of intertextuality: "It is from such [Bakhtinian] 'double-voiced' critical dialogue that Kristeva's essay takes its cue so that her own translingual project can be integrated within the French intellectual climate of left-wing *Tel Quel*" (27). Indeed, though Kristeva's use of intertextuality expands upon the terms set forth by Bakhtin and his theories of heteroglossia and dialogism, the use of intertextuality, for Kristeva, sets forth a relatively unambiguous critical position from which she can observe and detail the mechanisms by which novels, prose and poetry do not emerge devoid of context and historical association and associative meaning.

Kristeva first sets forth the terms of the debate over intertextuality within the essays collected in her 1960 work, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*.

Though not translated into English until the 1980s, Kristeva's work first rigorously employed the term "intertextuality" to denote a fundamental aspect of any understanding of the manner in which poetic discourse achieves significance, signification and/or *signifiance*. In her essay, "The Bounded Text," Kristeva explains how intertextuality affects the production of meaning in any textual encounter:

The text is therefore a productivity, and this means: first, that its relationship to the language in which it is situated is redistributive (destructive – constructive), and hence can be better approached through logical categories rather than linguistic ones; and second, that it is a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another. (*Desire in Language* 36)

The model of the text as "productivity" remains central to Kristeva's critical work and intertextuality provides her the space and critical tools necessary to explore the nature and directionality of such productivity. In arguing that such productivity "can be better approached through logical categories rather than linguistic ones," Kristeva wishes to debunk formalist interpretations, which attempt to argue that what a text *says* results directly from a particular programmatic arrangement of individual linguistic components. Within the same essay, Kristeva develops her concept of the ideologeme, which she defines as:

the intersection of a given textual arrangement [...] with the utterances [...] that it either assimilates into its own space or which it refers in the space of exterior texts. The ideologeme is that intertextual function read as "materialized" at the different structural levels of each text[...]giving it its historical and social coordinates. (36)

Understanding the ideologeme along the lines of intertextuality and the relationship between texts, Kristeva's model of textuality allows for a multidirectional space for discourse and meaning formation, which does not make overt claims for definitive meaning. The ideologeme, a textual fragment symptomatically expressive of the social/ideological context of its formulation, retains an essential, though not necessarily unproblematic, relation to the larger social and cultural context. Likewise, and essential to the larger claims of this study, intertextuality, for Kristeva, affords the text the ability to remain connected—even if arbitrarily—to the larger historical and social contexts in which it comes into production and/or interacts with its readership. Though contextual connections must retain a certain level of arbitrariness, this does not necessarily preclude the formation of meaningful relationships between texts and the circumstances of their production.

Combining psychoanalytic theory and textual scholarship, Kristeva's version of intertextuality orients and describes the split position from which the subject speaks. As Graham Allen notes: "Kristeva's work places a psychological dimension onto Bakhtin's analysis of double-voiced discourse, dialogism, heteroglossia and [hybridity]" (52). Focusing on language through the process of semianalysis, Kristeva expands upon the Bakhtinian concept of dialogism, as she explores the manner by which the subject of speaking and writing remains simultaneously constructed by previous discourses. Such an exploration opens a potential space in the present for enunciation and the resulting passage from sign system to sign system. Outlining the import of intertextuality within the contexts of the formation and the mechanisms of subjectivity and subject drive, Kristeva notes:

What we discover, then, within this texture, is the function of the subject caught between instinctual drives and social practice within a language that is today divided into often

incommunicable, multiple systems: a Tower of Babel that literature specifically breaks open, refashions, and inscribes in a new series of perceptual contradictions. (97)

In this manner, the speaking, writing and reading subject constructs conceptions of identity from what has come before, as per the nature of language, where “subjects cipher the normative language of everyday communication by means of extralinguistic, biological, and socially unforeseeable, changing codes” (100). Run-through with infinite possibility and recombinatory power, intersubjectivity—just like literature in general—remains a fundamentally intertextual experience for Kristeva’s purposes.

Another underlying aspect of Kristeva’s development of a theory of intertextuality includes its necessary embeddedness in and connection to the larger social and cultural context. And, for the purposes of reading J. M. Coetzee’s work within an intertextual framework, such an embedment and connection affords the space by which an author can forge a discourse out of disparate textual fragments, polymorphous cultural contexts and circling heteroglossia. To the Freudian/Lacanian analysis of metaphor and metonymy, Kristeva argues for a “third ‘process’—the passage from one sign system to another” (*Revolution* 59), which adds a decidedly psychoanalytic dimension to her poststructuralist critique. Such a process “invokes an altering of the thetic position—the destruction of the old position and the formation of a new one. The new signifying system may be produced with the same signifying material; in language, for example, the passage may be made from narrative to text” (59). This process of transposition, which for Kristeva occurs explicitly within an intertextual framework, takes place initially in the location of writing, the space where the writer puts down to paper words in a particular order, in the formation of the text. As such, the intertextual network within a novel represents the “redistribution of several different sign systems” (59), which then enter into their own

unforeseen and somewhat unpredictable interactions without losing their grounding within the textual network and, therefore, the connection to the larger social and cultural context. Precisely at this point, for Kristeva's reading, intertextuality allows writing and discourse to evolve and shift their positions in response to the interaction between texts and contexts, leaving a space in the enunciative, writing and, ultimately, reading *present* for the forging of subjectivity in literature.

However, Kristeva's use of intertextuality does not receive full explication if simply understood "in the banal sense of 'study of sources'" (*Revolution* 60), hence her terminological move to define transposition as the passage from one signifying system to another, which takes place in a more complicated and involved series of textual interactions. Transposition takes into account the intertextual situatedness of both the textual artifact, specifically, and the condition of intersubjectivity, in general. No passage from discourse to discourse or sign system to sign system occurs without experiencing resistance with what has come before and reshaping the objects of resistance encountered during the passing. Here, where discourses and sign systems intersect, interact and intersperse, Kristeva locates the present of the intertextual condition, the place from which literary analysis must take place. Much like Homi K. Bhabha's argument for the "location of culture," understanding the creation of meaning at the interstices of textual composition provides an in-between place for both author and reader to create and develop nuances of meaning, which remain malleable with regards to cultural contextualization, falling outside the confines of any essentializing discourse.

Temporality: How soon is now?

In the Winter 2004 volume of *Critical Inquiry*, members of the journal's editorial board address the current state of critical theory and what the future might hold for critical studies. Homi K. Bhabha recounts an exchange with a student quite willing to challenge the critical foundations of postcolonial studies:

And then, she strode away, she fixed me with a stare and threw me a rather ungainly sentence that, for a tense minute, I thought I had written myself: “[Global] power has evacuated the [binary] bastion [that you postmodernists and postcolonialists] are attacking...in the name of difference.” (“Statement” 343)

Such a critique of postcolonial criticism and theory, as the student questions the efficacy of insisting on positions of difference to establish identity and subjectivity, has challenged any reading of postcoloniality based upon fixed and ever-present binaries. The export of multinational political and economic discourses via the language of cultural production has unquestionably impacted the position of postcolonial critiques, as highlighted, albeit by different means, in Hardt and Negri's *Empire* and Jameson's *Postmodernism: Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. As Hardt and Negri specifically implicate the participatory nature of postcolonial criticism/cultural production in the solidification of Empire, they contend that such critical positions address and attempt to challenge the outdated—and effectively impotent—enemy of early stage imperialism and colonization; Jameson takes the critique one step further, as he argues that an essential feature of the multinational capitalist world includes the impossibility of establishing any significant critical distance by which to separate cultural discourses from their all-inclusive postmodernist context.⁴ Yet, Bhabha argues that postcolonial

⁴ The discussions alluded to above can be found in Ch. 2, “Culture,” of Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism: Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* and “Symptoms of Passage” in Hardt and Negri's *Empire*.

studies may still hold an important place in contemporary critical discourse. Bhabha returns to the initial issue raised by the student, in order to highlight his argument that postcolonial studies can offer an *intertextual* approach, which remains effective in criticizing emergent discourses of globalization:

The discourses of cultural globalization have become a major intertextual and interdisciplinary highway between the humanities and the social sciences; and the traffic of ideas and methods that passes between them shapes much of your thinking in the arts and humanities. (345)

Bhabha finds critical theory, and postcolonial criticism specifically, especially adept at tracing the intricacies of such an “intertextual and interdisciplinary highway,” as he argues for the relevance of such a critical position.

As fully articulated in his work *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha’s conception of the postcolonial critical position depends upon the temporal situation of such a critique. According to Bhabha, the “terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively” (2). As per the nature of performance, the space of interaction between cultures, and thus the position of the postcolonial critic, depends upon the temporality of the present.

Bhabha details the engagement of the postcolonial critic, as he notes: “the critic must attempt to fully realize, and take responsibility for, the unspoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present” (12). The space of the historical present, for Bhabha, not only facilitates the interstitial location of engagement between disparate cultures and/or cultural discourses, but also represents a politically charged situation, whereby “the representation of the political, on the construction of discourse, is the radical contribution of the translation of theory” (27). Here, at this stage of translation—Bhabha’s “location of culture”—discourses interact with and combat

one another over the formation of meaning in the critical present. In a theoretical move resembling Kristeva's use of the "third process," Bhabha argues that the hybridity of cultural discourse gains fullest expression in what he terms the "third space," which, importantly, must "have a colonial or postcolonial provenance" (38).

In fact, Bhabha's insistence upon the present as the temporality of postcolonial critique retains many similarities with a Kristevan conception of intertextuality: both rely upon the interaction between not only text and context, but also the numerous ideologemes located within a particular sample of writing, which retain a grounding in both the social and cultural space and synchronic situatedness of the text. Bhabha writes:

The production of meaning requires that these two places [I and You] be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot 'in itself' be conscious. (36)

Far from a static situation, the nature of the performative present opens up unforeseen potentialities for the creation of meaning, as discourses interact; writers mix words; readers interpret meaning. As J. Hillis Miller notes: "A performative utterance...is a way of doing things with words. It does not name a state of affairs, but brings about the thing it names" (37). "Doing things with words," the performative present constitutes a viable space for critique, as any contest over meaning and/or signification remains far from decided at the point of utterance. As Miller rightly argues, "the imaginary realm opened by a literary word is not simply 'made available' to the reader, however. The performative dimension of the work's words demands a response from the reader" (38). Here, in the postcolonial present, texts and discourses intersect

and intersperse, freeing up any inherent ideological underpinnings and recombining in unpredictable and potentially politically liberating manners.

As a theory of textuality and subjectivity, Kristevan intertextuality addresses such liberatory concerns of the postcolonial critique and its continual attempt to level any essentializing discourse insisting upon the arbitrary boundaries between Self and Other. Bakhtinian dialogism, which greatly informs Kristeva's work and theorizing, discusses in detail the malleability of discourse within the novel, as it retains an important openness. In his essay "The Epic and the Novel," Bakhtin notes the interplay between levels of heteroglossia as manifested in differing genres:

[Genres] become more free and flexible, their language renews itself by incorporating extraliterary heteroglossia and the "novelistic" layers of literary language, they become dialogized, permeated with laughter, irony, humor, elements of self-parody and finally [...] the novel inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the openended present). (7)

Bakhtin's argument for the "semantic openness" of the dialogical present provides Kristeva with a basic theory of textuality, or how texts function in the production of meaning. Explicitly linked to specific textual encounters for Bakhtin, Kristeva inclusively incorporates portions of Bakhtin's work on genre into her own conception of how intertextuality functions to create meaning in all texts, not simply novelistic discourses. In concluding her assessment of Kristeva's contributions to theories of intertextuality, Mary Orr argues: "Intertextuality, then, shows a tenacity for the critical present, but also hints of a strong survival rate, proved through textual time, but in different guises" (59). Such "tenacity for the critical present" does not

preclude discussions of history and/or historical context, however. For Kristeva, and arguably for J. M. Coetzee as postcolonial author, intertextuality functions significantly within a particular text, as it allows for the interpretation of meaning (a meaning grounded in its historical context), the relationship between word and world.

Context: The Word in the Wor(l)d

For certain theorists and critics, including Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida, the openendedness of intertextuality simply highlights the radical uncertainty at the heart of any textual artifact; the indeterminate interplay between words and texts; the production of infinite meaning; the insurmountable distance between text and context.⁵ However, Kristeva's interpretation of intertextuality highlights her unwillingness to totally divorce text from context, as both interact in the production of meaning in the space of the critical present. In an interview, Kristeva clearly outlines her position with respect to Roland Barthes's radical critique, as Barthes would argue for a permanent and fundamentally insurmountable distance between text and sociohistorical context.⁶ Kristeva, while she demonstrates some agreement with Barthes's work, does wish to qualify such affinities between their respective critical positions:

I have already tried to answer this aporia posed by Barthes with the idea of intertextuality. Because I think, on the one hand, that we must maintain the autonomy of discourse with respect to the social level, because it is a level of autonomy that guarantees freedom...And, if one does not keep this autonomy of discourse, one falls

⁵ For a thorough discussion of such poststructuralist critiques see Roland Barthes's *The Pleasure of the Text* and Jacques Derrida's *Writing and Difference*.

⁶ Barthes directly challenges the idea of filiation with his essay "The Death of the Author." In this essay, Barthes makes his point explicit: "a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet this destination cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography, psychology" ("The Death of the Author" 148). Such a position, which seriously challenges the import of context within his theory of intertextuality, describes one such aporia, or gap in understanding, to which Kristeva directly responds in the above cited interview.

very quickly into a reductionism and a sociological conception where all aesthetic or personal performances are explained by the social milieu or a similar fate.

(Interviews 53)

Continuing her discussion, Kristeva further explicates her insistence on employing intertextuality as a model for understanding the situatedness of discourse, despite the fact that such situatedness does not retain any fundamental level of stability:

This said, there is an incontestable interaction between discourse and society, and I myself would consider that the fact of taking society as a generalized text permits us to see how, for example, a literary text does not live in an autistic fashion, closed on the interior of itself, but borrows always from the discourses of the press, from oral discourses, from political discourses, and from other texts that preceded it, that provide vehicles in turn for those cultural and political texts of history. (53)

In an undeniably political move, Kristeva argues for the use of intertextuality as not only a theory for understanding the constructedness of texts and discourse in general, but also as a method of recycling elements of social and cultural history through the transmission and incorporation of texts; yet, Barthes would wish to challenge the degree to which such constructedness exists in the first place.

Kristeva finds, in the place of the reader approaching a particular text, what she refers to as “‘a subject in process,’ which makes possible [her] attempt to articulate as precise a logic as possible between identity or unity, the challenge to this identity and even its reduction to zero” (*Interviews* 190). Here, through reader participation, the intertextual nature of discourse and texts influences subjectivity in the historical present, which inextricably binds the word to the larger context of the world of the reader. Literary criticism specifically—and, arguably, reading

in general—has undergone numerous revamps, reformulations and retranslations following the influx of Ferdinand de Saussure’s linguistic theories during the early part of the twentieth century. Though poststructuralist and deconstructionist critics have taken Saussure’s arbitrariness of the sign to develop a position insistent upon negating any meaningful relationship between the word and the world, certain aspects of Enlightenment thought have proven difficult to cast off. As Valentine Cunningham notes: “It is not so easy to rinse away logocentricity, the metaphysics of presence, the notion of a referential system: the history we all inhabit won’t allow us any real choice in the matter” (57). And, importantly for a postcolonial writer such as J. M. Coetzee, the mechanisms of Kristevan intertextuality provide a critical framework within which to explore Cunningham’s claim. Intertextuality, as it functions in the creation of meaning and subjectivity, encourages sociohistorical and political connections between reader and text in the space of the postcolonial, historical present.

As opposed to a radical poststructuralist version of intertextuality, Kristeva’s version takes into account the power of words to interact and affect change in the real world. Discussing the interconnectedness between word and world, William H. Gass addresses the pitfalls of naïve reading: “We needn’t narrow our reading eye to such a slit, or look so literally upon the text; nevertheless, it is our world, as we most broadly perceive it, which the novel intersects, interpenetrates, and transforms” (109). In her conception of intertextuality, Kristeva, though wary like Gass of drawing unshakably concrete and unchanging connections between the space of the text and the world, nonetheless leaves room for the possibility for the word and world to interact within a particular text or, specifically, the space opened within postcolonial literature. Such a theory of intertextuality provides a meaningful location whereby the social and cultural

historical past can interact with the historical present. Discussing the interaction of word and world, Bakhtin notes:

The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. (276)

Bakhtin's metaphor of "dialogic *threads*, woven by socio-ideological consciousness" further elucidates the intermeshed and fabric-like conception of intertextuality espoused by Kristeva. The text, composed of "threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness," comes into being in the historical present, a space which offers a location from which to compose viable critique and form socially relevant meaning.

The historical present, the time of performative poetics and writing, enables the postcolonial critique to recognize and argue for the subversive and empowering aspects of literature, as it pertains to the formation of subjectivity and identity in the real world of the modern nation-state. Such a space, one probed and mapped out by Kristevan intertextuality, appears to positively respond to the potentially liberating interpretation of cultural construction championed by Bhabha, as he argues:

The secular language of interpretation needs to go beyond the horizontal [linear, causal] critical gaze if we are to give 'the nonsequential energy of lived historical memory and subjectivity' its appropriate narrative authority. We need another time of writing that will be able to inscribe the ambivalent and chiasmatic intersections of time and place that constitute the problematic "modern" experience of the Western nation. (*Location of Culture* 141)

In attempting to forge a critical perspective that debunks the myths of essentializing discourses, viable postcolonial critiques must remain wary of falling into the binary traps against which they strive to negate and break open to the potentials of plurality. In a tacit acknowledgement of the Foucauldian conception of discourse as power, the postcolonial perspective, as formulated by Bhabha and, as I will argue, manifested in the fiction of J. M. Coetzee, attempts to free discourse from binary entrapments and fixed traditions, while preventing a complete dissolution between word and world. By demanding an interpretation of the text never completely divorced from, yet never beholden to context, such a theory of intertextuality within postcolonial discourse proves both instructive for readers, writers and critics of postcolonial literature and, likewise, potentially liberating.

Application: Intertextuality in Coetzee-cum-Costello

Taken as a point of entry into the politics of larger questions of postcolonial identity, subjectivity and representation, an examination of the intertextual narrative strategies employed by Coetzee in his fictional works reveals much of the theoretical underpinning behind the construction of his fictional characters and narrators. In evading the more obvious declarations of social/racial/gender inequality, Coetzee develops narratives inundated with superficial and traceable intertextual moments and references which both draw attention to the necessarily fragmented consciousness that he attempts to represent within a particular work of fiction and challenge the reader to assess the import and interpretive merit of reading meaning into such metafictional moments. Such intense psychological character and plot development affords Coetzee the space to venture larger theoretical positions concerning the place of the female and the Other within the context of postcolonial fiction, when his texts fall under close critical scrutiny.

Reading Coetzee's work within an intertextual framework opens the postcolonial critical dialogue in the historical present, which as alluded to above, allows his fiction both a certain semantic openness and a fundamental connection to the larger sociohistorical context in which his readers approach the texts.

Of Coetzee's novels, *Foe* and *The Master of Petersburg* most obviously employ aspects of intertextuality (in the most basic sense, acknowledged and traceable textual precursors) in their construction, each taking both historical texts and historical authors as essential inter-text components, which heavily influence plot development. However, *Dusklands*, *In the Heart of the Country* and *Age of Iron* likewise contain numerous intertextual events and metafictional moments, each functioning to entertain reader-response and provide the textual space in which to examine the mechanisms of identity construction, relying upon undergirdings in both linguistic and psychoanalytic theory; however, no matter how overtly Coetzee flaunts the construction of his work, he nonetheless does not proffer a facile interpretation of its functionality. Almost an intertextuality born of combining various critical discourses, J. M. Coetzee's fictional output demonstrates not only a familiarity with the most esoteric linguistic and critical theory, but also a functional and working knowledge of how such discourses interplay with one another to forge a coherent whole. Though an intertextual analysis of Coetzee's entire works would represent a worthwhile critical endeavor, this particular study will remain limited to a close analysis of Coetzee's most recent work of fiction, *Elizabeth Costello*.

Elizabeth Costello, as a seemingly fictional text, definitely defies simple categorization, both with respect to his critically acclaimed earlier works and to the genre of fiction itself. The label of "fiction," clearly printed on the book's dust jacket, constantly draws his readers into conflict with a casual acceptance of genre distinction. Readers familiar with Coetzee's nonfiction

output likely will recognize the name of the work's protagonist. Coetzee published the text of his 1997-98 Tanner Lectures at Princeton University as *The Lives of Animals*, each given under the name of a fictional Australian author, Elizabeth Costello. In fact, of the eight "lessons" comprising the work, much of the speech content delivered by the fictional Costello has appeared as material in Coetzee's own lectures over the course of his career, including "What is Realism?" also delivered in 1997 at Bennington College and subsequently published under the same title. However, the manner in which the work recycles and recontextualizes the material demands close reading, attention and, ultimately, a certain level of participation. Coetzee arranges an unsettling interplay between the Costello delivering the lectures within the text and the character developed outside of her public performances, which remains oddly parasitic with respect to the real world in a manner in which his earlier fictions have not. Here at this intersection between word and world, not only with respect to *Elizabeth Costello* as printed text, but also Elizabeth Costello as fictional alter-ego for J. M. Coetzee, the postcolonial present encourages readers to participate in the formation of meaning, a participation much akin to an intertextual reading as prescribed by Kristeva: reading which acknowledges its limitations, but still insists upon a connection between intertextuality and subjectivity; text and context; past and present.

Chapter 1 The Didacticism of Disavowal

From my years spent as a teacher I know one has to repeat everything twice over to ensure at least the possibility of creating some order out of what appears to be chaos.

-Cees Nooteboom, The Following Story

For readers unfamiliar with the fictional Elizabeth Costello's relationship to J. M. Coetzee, the "Acknowledgements" section printed on the final page of the work *Elizabeth Costello* provides some potentially unsettling insight (233). Of the eight lessons listed in the "Contents" page of the work, the reader finds that excerpts or entire portions of six of the work's sections have had prior publication in a number of formats ranging from articles in academic journals to actual book publications. The "Acknowledgements" page convincingly appears to conform to publishing industry standards and requirements, as the page enumerating the work's publication information notes: "page 233 constitutes an extension of this copyright page." Though the "Acknowledgements" might signal to the reader that Coetzee has effectively hoodwinked his audience, via a Borgesian move of postmodern high jinks, such a dismissal proves inadequate in effectively understanding the subtlety of Coetzee's textual and performative arrangement. And, obviously, those intimate with Coetzee's work and public career before opening *Elizabeth Costello* find themselves somewhat challenged as to how to take this work of "fiction," knowing of its parasitic provenance. Yet, in the performative and intertextual present, Coetzee does not try to remove the traces of arrangement and indicative markers of textual foregrounding: they—like Costello's speeches and Coetzee's textual ploys—exist firstly for the reader to *read* and, thus, interpret, allowing nuanced meanings to multiply and abound from a text that refuses to exist in a single locked form or permutation of words.

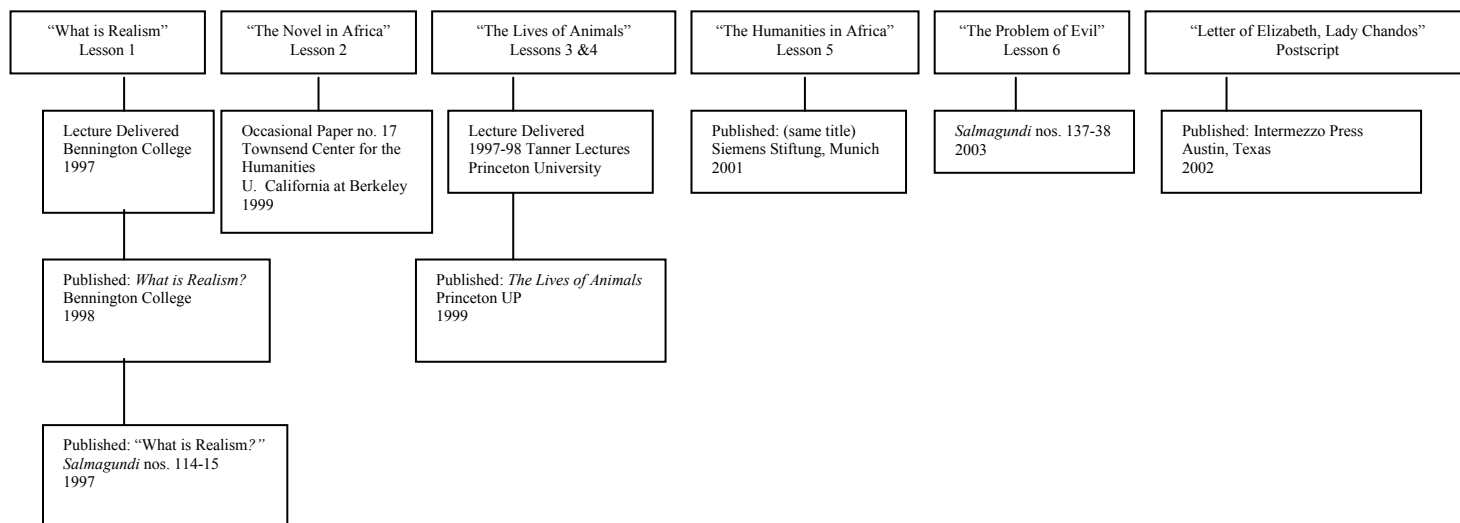
Coetzee's decision to divide *Elizabeth Costello* into separate "Lessons" reinforces critical interpretations of the author's approach to writing fiction, yet with a difference. As Bo Lundén

notes in the introduction to his study of didacticism in the works of J. M. Coetzee, A. S. Byatt and John Banville, entitled *(Re)educating the Reader*: “The (re)education of the reader thus comprises both educating and questioning education, that is, the aim of the novels is to make the reader realize what could be called their double-edged attempts to teach and unteach” (2).

Though Marjorie Garber reinforces such a position when she notes in her response—published within the Princeton University Press text—that Coetzee’s lectures (specifically *The Lives of Animals*, in this example) owe greatly to “another familiar genre...the philosophical dialogue” (*Lives of Animals* 79), Coetzee intentionally subverts a strict reading of the *content*, the actual *words*, of his lectures, as they remain inextricably bound to a context that does not so easily yield them up to strictly textual analysis. However, the comparisons between Costello and Coetzee abound as well, forcing even the most theoretically informed (or, perhaps uninformed would be more apt?) reader to question the distance between not only author and character, but also speech act and printed text; nonfiction and subsequent reclassification as fiction; text and inter-text.

In the reading and intertextual present, the reader must weigh somewhat countervailing discourses in discerning Coetzee’s move, as any interpretation must account for the levels of fictionality insisted upon by the nature of the printed work, *Elizabeth Costello*. An oversimplified schema of the bibliographical provenance of the work might appear as follows:

Elizabeth Costello (2003)
8 Lessons + Postscript



How does the reader reconcile the printed text, *Elizabeth Costello*, as the work's dissemination has followed such a convoluted and multi-leveled course on its way to a finished textual form? Though not necessarily essential to a reading of the text, portions of the bibliographic code, as sketched above, do in fact add certain nuances to analyzing and engaging *Elizabeth Costello* at both a textual and contextual level. As Jerome McGann argues in *The Textual Condition*: “Meaning is transmitted through bibliographical as well as linguistic codes” (57). As a textual artifact, *Elizabeth Costello* provides an interesting and potentially problematic case by which “meaning” as such remains tightly bound to the work's original contexts of production. Maureen Bell, discussing the importance of focusing critical attention upon bibliographic codes, notes:

Central to all of this is a developing and vital concern with the book as a material object. *Transformations of meaning* are effected by the very matter from which the book is constituted; differences in paper, format, typefaces, page layout, illustrations and bindings can make the same text mean differently. (3, Emphasis mine)

Though *Elizabeth Costello* contains a number of explicitly intertextual moments, whereby Costello or other characters engage and interact with social and cultural texts within the plot, the work's bibliographic code represents an intertextual montage for the reader to explore in its various permutations and contextual groundings, each of which have the power to affect different nuances and transformations of meaning.

Though each of the individual texts melded into the larger work *Elizabeth Costello* first appeared in other print venues, three of the "lessons" have a performative component that deserves specific consideration within that specific context, as distinct from the print medium. In 1997, Coetzee addressed an audience at Bennington College, delivering a lecture entitled "What is Realism?"; through the remarks of a third person narrator, Coetzee first introduced the fictional Australian novelist, Elizabeth Costello. After developing Costello as a character mainly from the perspective of interactions with her son John (Coetzee's first name, oddly enough), the narrative proceeded to move from the third person mode into her first person lecture, taking as its title, ironically enough, "What is Realism?" Yet, though Bennington College had engaged the South African novelist J. M. Coetzee to deliver a lecture at the institution, Costello, a fictional alter-ego of sorts, took the stage, as the audience could not easily discern where the remarks of Coetzee ended and where Costello began. Though subsequently published by the Bennington College Bookstore, the lecture content first entered into a critical discourse in the present tense moment of performance. The printed text, though faithful to the words uttered by J. M. Coetzee on stage, could not completely recapture the initial context in which the author delivered the lecture, wherein he put forth the comments of Elizabeth Costello on the topic of literary realism, divorcing such remarks from any strict biographic correlative in the real world. However, any recognition of the bibliographic provenance of the lecture text, especially as it comprises a

portion of the work *Elizabeth Costello*, must take into account the impossibility of revisiting the original performative context, as the past-tense nature of the performance does not readily give itself up to the critical present in the same manner as the printed text.

When invited to deliver the 1997-98 Tanner Lectures at Princeton University, J. M. Coetzee accepted the honor, revisiting the fictional Australian novelist Elizabeth Costello, as he delivered two “fictional” lectures featuring Costello as the narrative and ethical force behind each. Within the narrative Costello likewise delivers two lectures: “The Philosophers and the Animals” and “The Poets and the Animals,” which share their titles with the two Tanner Lectures given by Coetzee. Though subsequently published as *The Lives of Animals* by Princeton University Press, in a manner similar to the “What is Realism?” lecture delivered at Bennington College, these lectures challenged the flexibility of the forum in which Coetzee first delivered their “fictional” content in the performative present. As Amy Gutmann notes in her introduction to *The Lives of Animals*: “the form of Coetzee’s lectures is far from the typical Tanner Lectures, which are generally philosophical essays. Coetzee’s lectures are fictional in form: two lectures within two lectures, which contain a critique of a more philosophical approach to the topic of animal rights” (3). Published with responses by literary critic Marjorie Garber, moral philosopher Peter Singer, primatologist Barbara Smuts and religion scholar Wendy Doniger, Coetzee’s lectures enjoyed a positive critical reception, though the responses symptomatically revealed the tension concerning the proper manner by which to place Coetzee’s remarks. In her response, Marjorie Garber writes:

These lectures and responses, in short—the lectures and responses that were initially presented to the audience in a Princeton University lecture hall—have already been anticipated, fictionalized, and appropriated. A lecture within a lecture; a response within

a response. What is the strategy of such an appropriation? Among other things, it is a strategy of *control*. (76)

Whose arguments does Coetzee put forth while delivering the lectures: his own? Elizabeth Costello's? The question does not have a clear-cut answer, as Coetzee demonstrates a pointed interest in the hermetic ambivalence of his remarks. However, Coetzee—as an author/speaker in the real world—did in fact *perform* the enunciative function when delivering the lectures, which tied the text to a context in which he figures directly and unavoidably.

Though Garber fairly raises the issue of *control* as it relates to Coetzee's decision to deliver fictional lectures and to assume the identity of a fictitious Australian novelist in doing so, such a performance allows the self-admittedly reclusive Coetzee the space by which to distance himself from his public role as author, a role that he views with the highest degree of skepticism. Susan VanZanten Gallagher acutely describes Coetzee's hesitant acceptance of the mantle of authorship: "Coetzee refuses an authoritarian determination of the role of the writer. In so refusing, Coetzee does not deny that a writer performs a function in society; rather, he denies that there is a particular function that all writers must fulfill" (16). Yet Coetzee does, in fact, agree to deliver the lectures at both Bennington College and Princeton; however, the content functions within such a public context to uncover and highlight Coetzee's difficulty in allowing such a connection between "author as producer of literary works" and "author as public figure" to go unquestioned and unproblematized. In an interview with David Attwell, collected within *Doubling the Point*, Coetzee unambiguously states his position toward biography and biographical correlations between author and work: "Biography is a kind of storytelling in which you select material from a lived past and fashion it into a narrative that leads into a living present in a more or less seamless way. The premise of biography is continuity between past and

present” (391). As a performative mechanism, the structure of the fictional lectures focalized by the fictitious Australian novelist Elizabeth Costello—as opposed to a more typical lecture delivered by J. M. Coetzee, the South African novelist in the real world—explicitly treats this tension at the heart of facile biographical association. Of course, one should rest assured that J. M. Coetzee received the award checks and speaker’s fees, not Elizabeth Costello; nonetheless the tension symptomatically revealed by Coetzee’s decision to deliver such unorthodox lectures generates some powerful questions and points of analysis in the relationships between writing and responsibility, questions definitely associated with the politics of writing from a postcolonial position.

The problematic nature of Coetzee’s chosen format of delivery revealed itself quite clearly in the criticism responding to the fictionalized lectures by Elizabeth Costello. In his review of *Elizabeth Costello* for the *New York Review of Books*, David Lodge summarizes the uncertain and problematic critical reception generated by Coetzee’s lectures. Lodge notes:

Not surprisingly most of the commentators felt somewhat stymied by Coetzee’s meta-lectures, by the veils of fiction behind which he had concealed his own position from scrutiny. There was a feeling [...] that he was putting forward an extreme, intolerant, and accusatory argument without taking full intellectual responsibility for it. (6)

Yet, as Lodge and other reviewers and commentators argue, as a metafictional device, the format of a lecture within a lecture discourages and perhaps even prevents the tendency to draw too close a correlation between the positions put forth by Costello and positions that Coetzee would necessarily endorse, both in degree and wholesale. Peter Singer, moral philosopher and animal rights activist, chooses to employ the dialogue format as well, when composing a response to Coetzee’s Tanner Lectures. In his somewhat oddly formulated critique, Singer responds to his

daughter's questions about Coetzee's lectures by stating: "It's a marvelous device, really. Costello can blithely criticize the use of reason, or the need to have any clear principles or proscriptions, without Coetzee really committing himself to these claims" (*Lives of Animals* 91). Such critiques, when considering the lectures in isolation from the larger bibliographic context, soundly question the power deferred, displaced and, ultimately, disavowed by such a fictional performance explicitly related to the politics of the real world.

Central to Costello/Coetzee's argumentation within both lectures—"The Philosophers and the Animals" and "The Poets and the Animals"—rests a critique of the resolutely human failure to relate with animals on an empathetic, and ultimately equal, ethical level. Radically divergent from arguments detailing religious and cultural justifications, Costello/Coetzee cites a communal failure of imagination as the main reason by which humans legitimize their illegitimate and unethical treatment of animals. Not only does such an essentialist position itself remain open to numerous interdisciplinary critiques—as the responses contained within *The Lives of Animals* aptly demonstrate—but likewise employs certain illogical moves, which demonstrate the mutability of logic, a position which the responses quickly point out. Of the more questionable examples Costello/Coetzee employs, she/he conflates the Nazis' methodological extermination of the Jews during the Holocaust with the manner by which the food industry systematically breeds animals for the explicit purpose of then killing them for potential human consumption, placing the two horrors—as argued—on par ethically. Elizabeth Costello unequivocally states:

Let me say it openly: we are surrounded by an enterprise of degradation, cruelty and killing which rivals anything that the Third Reich was capable of, indeed dwarfs it, in that

ours is an enterprise without end, self-regenerating, bringing rabbits, rats, poultry, livestock ceaselessly into the world for the purpose of killing them.

(Elizabeth Costello 65; Lives of Animals 21)

And, characteristic of the reflexivity punctuating all of Coetzee's writing, the structure of the lecture allows him to include well-formulated and serious critiques of Costello's argument through the fictional commentators and critiques embedded within the larger metafictional framework of the lecture Coetzee delivers to his audience at Princeton. Thus, critics such as Singer argue that Coetzee makes a rather pointed and ethically questionable argument for animal rights without having to bear the responsibility for his remarks, Elizabeth Costello as mouthpiece affording him the buffer of fictionality in order to circumvent and subvert any ready acceptance of an unproblematic link between content and context.

At the heart of such critiques rests the Freudian notion of disavowal or negation. In such a critical analysis of Coetzee's subject position with respect to the lectures delivered through the focalizing mechanism of the fictitious Costello, the disavowal of responsibility or culpability flaunts itself via the indisputable and insistent presence of J. M. Coetzee—both in body and embodied—behind the podium, marked not only by the context of the lecture setting, but also the physicality of the performative utterance. The link between body and the embodied utterance could not rest in closer proximity, as per the nature of the performative moment; yet, Coetzee accepts the performative role, only to then dismiss a simple relationship between body and embodiment. Not unlike D. A. Miller's conception of the open secret within the novel, which functions to "both keep [its] secret and give it away" (220), Coetzee's metafictional lectures assume the mantel of the lecture form, only to then problematize any discussion based upon a

seemingly direct relationship between content and context. For Freud, negation as a repressive, psychological mechanism functions as such:

[...] the content of a repressed image or idea can make its way into consciousness, on condition that it is negated. Negation is a way of taking cognizance of what is repressed; indeed it is already a lifting of the repression, though not, of course, an acceptance of what it repressed [...] With the help of the symbol of negation, thinking frees itself from the restrictions of repression and enriches itself with material that is indispensable for its proper functioning. (“Negation” 667-68)

In reading Coetzee’s lectures within such a framework, critics and commentators question the degree to which Coetzee claims ethical responsibility for his comments and positions. By assuming the persona/character of a fictitious Australian novelist within his lectures, does Coetzee in fact create an unproblematic distance between his words and the world, between the content and the context? As Freud argues, “The outcome of this is a kind of intellectual acceptance of the repressed, while at the same time what is essential to the repression persists” (667). In such an “intellectual acceptance,” symptomatically revealed through the remarks contained within Costello’s (but, necessarily, also Coetzee’s) lecture, does Coetzee as the authorial and intellectual force behind the ethical edifice in question commit an historical injustice, in fact belittling the Holocaust through the mechanism of simile? A difficult question, most definitely, but one that perhaps should take into consideration the publication of Coetzee’s lecture text, in both of its subsequent printed forms, which open his remarks to the play of intertextuality and interpretation in the historical present.

* * *

Upon publication as *The Lives of Animals* and later within the larger work *Elizabeth Costello*, Coetzee's metafictional lecture takes on different nuances of meaning as a result of the change in both context and narrative time. As per the nature of the performance of a specific and determinate speech act, the 1997-98 Tanner Lectures delivered at Princeton University, which Coetzee delivered to a specific, determinate and limited audience, remain locked in the historical past, limiting the degree to which the discourse contained therein can effectively engage future acts of interpretation in the ever-elusive historical present. If Coetzee had not supplemented this closed time with the countertime of the lectures in published form, then perhaps critical skepticism would appear justified in highlighting a certain intellectual irresponsibility within Coetzee's metafictional lectures. Yet, as the lectures appear in textual form, available in the reading present and not inextricably bound to the contextual modulation of Coetzee's voice at the time of past performance, their intertextual derivation makes possible the type of critical investigation conducted by this study in the historical present. The performance of reading, in the historical present, takes into account the intertextuality emerging from the recycling of the novel's content, as such a textual mechanism manifests itself in a number of contexts in which the original lecture, as a countervailing notion of performance can/could not. As Coetzee notes in an interview: "I am concerned to write the kind of novel—to work in the kind of novel form—in which one is not unduly handicapped (compared with the philosopher) when one plays (or works) with ideas" (*Doubling the Point* 246). Given the reception history of Elizabeth Costello's remarks, Coetzee rightly highlights how the context functions to direct the manner in which content remains bound not only to the linguistic, but also the bibliographic code. The words themselves, from Coetzee's initial delivery at Princeton to subsequent publication in both textual

formats, never change; yet, arguably, their *meaning* vacillates in accordance to the context in which they find an audience.

As a postcolonial South African author, Coetzee's apparent endorsement of a position which privileges the printed word, as opposed to its spoken correlate, would constitute a critical aberration. In "Realism," the initial "lesson" contained within the work *Elizabeth Costello*—a metafictional lecture first delivered by Coetzee at Bennington College—the unnamed narrator explicitly treats the ascendancy of the embodied voice as a residue of an ultimately realist mode of expression, unapologetically parodying a postcolonial critical position which privileges speech over writing:

So when it needs to debate ideas, as here, realism is driven to invent situations [...] in which characters give voice to contending ideas and thereby in a certain sense embody them. The notion of embodying turns out to be pivotal. In such debates ideas do not and indeed cannot float free: they are tied to the speakers by whom they are enounced, and generated from the matrix of individual interests out of which their speakers act in the world. (*Elizabeth Costello* 9; *What is Realism?* 16)

As delivered in lecture form at Bennington College by J. M. Coetzee, an author in the real world, does the textual content of the lectures in fact remain tied to their speaker, even though they come through the focalization of the fictitious Australian novelist Elizabeth Costello? Though "generated from the matrix of individual interests out of which their speakers act in the world," such performative utterances cannot achieve a level of textual play like their printed counterparts. Only when Elizabeth Costello's utterances appear in printed, textual form do they achieve a certain level of disembodiment and distance, which Coetzee strives to preserve. In another "lesson," "The Novel in Africa," the narrator relates Elizabeth Costello's apparently

pronounced position towards the tendency in postcolonial literature and criticism to place undue value on orality and oral performance. Revealing Costello's interior monologue as she practically mocks fellow novelist and lecturer Emanuel Egudu, the narrator notes:

Nevertheless, there is something about the talk she does not like, something to do with orality and the mystique of orality. Always, she thinks, the body is insisted on, pushed forward, and the voice, dark essence of the body, welling up within it. *Negritude*: she had thought Emmanuel would grow out of that pseudo-philosophy. (46)

Though a fictional representation, appearing only in print format, Costello's thoughts betray an aversion to placing undue emphasis on the power of speech. Rather, as Costello's thoughts intimate, and as Coetzee's remarks elsewhere demonstrate, an interpretive gap in the reading present remains essential to Coetzee's conception of an intertextual and more successfully political space: the space of writing.

In an interview with David Attwell, Coetzee clearly makes note of his preferential treatment of writing and its potentially liberatory nature, interestingly, to the detriment of speech. Coetzee remarks: "Speech is not a fount of truth but a pale and provisional version of writing" (*Doubling the Point* 66). Writing, as opposed to the transient nature of the speech act, remains in open dialogue with both the historical past and the unnamed future through the space of the intertextual, postcolonial reading present. As Julia Kristeva notes: "The text is therefore a productivity, and thus means...that it is a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another" (*Desire in Language* 36). As for Kristeva, the printed text—in strict opposition to the fleeting instance of the speech act—functions for Coetzee as a place whereby meaning evades a readily essentialist interpretation: the text functions in the historical present, the space between the

historical past and the unnamed future, which functions in a liberatory manner for both discourse and meaning; the possibilities for interpretation and reevaluation remain extant as long as the text has readers. Coetzee, in another interview with David Attwell, further confers upon writing a greater range of interpretation and dissemination when compared to the speech act, specifically in regard to the connection between postcolonial author and the imposition of interview forums and obligatory public appearances. Coetzee argues:

Writing is not free expression. There is a true sense in which writing is dialogic: a matter of awakening the countervoices in oneself and embarking upon speech with them [...] Whereas interviewers want speech, a flow of speech. That speech they record, take away, edit, censor, cutting out all its waywardness till what is left conforms to a monologic ideal. (*Doubling the Point* 65)

Coetzee, conversant in Bakhtinian dialogism, recognizes the potentially liberating space of writing as a site of intertextuality in the reading present, as unlike speech, writing allows a dialogic voice to emerge among “the countervoices in oneself.” As such, the lectures delivered by Coetzee at both Bennington College and Princeton take on a different and more open-ended signification with their inclusion as foundational inter-texts within the larger fictional work, *Elizabeth Costello*, as the lectures now can reach various external audiences, without the mediating and restricting limitations of the synchronic performance, locked in a single historical context. Coetzee’s argumentation, presented through the personage of the fictitious Costello within the lecture content, detaches itself from a strict relationship to Coetzee as the subject of enunciation, joining the semantic openendedness of the historical present, as the dialogic space of fiction frees up the space for the unbounded function of intertextual play.

In printed form, first separately and then later in the larger montage *Elizabeth Costello*, Costello/Coetzee's lectures avoid entrapment in the historical past. Once joined with the reading present by means of appearing on the printed page, the linguistic content of the lectures can effectively compete against any essentialist reading based upon a direct and locked relationship with the historical past. Bringing the historical past into direct dialogue with the unnamed future affords Coetzee, as postcolonial author, the ability to demonstrate performatively the liberatory gesture essential to his preferential treatment of writing as means of political expression. As opposed to the arena of performance, the printed page serves as a site for Coetzee to responsibly critique history, social/cultural/sexual injustice and oppressive political realities. Homi K. Bhabha describes the implied ethicality and political power of a present(ing) discourse in the postcolonial setting: "The contribution of negotiation is to display the 'in-between' of the crucial argument; it is not self-contradictory but significantly performs, in the process of its discussions, the problems of judgment and identification that inform the political space of the enunciation" (*Location of Culture* 29). Coetzee, by recycling and recontextualizing Costello's/his lectures within the textual space of *Elizabeth Costello*, liberates the discourses from their fixed position in the historical past, the time and place of enunciation. Embedding the lectures within a framework of five additional "lessons," *Elizabeth Costello*—as a work of fiction—challenges a monologic reading of any of the original lectures, as the reader, by means of engaging the larger text, automatically brings the lecture content into dialogue with the other competing voices in the textual space of the reading present. Placing a more comfortable and arbitrary distance between himself and his lecture content as a concrete and completed event in the historical past, Coetzee employs the modality of fiction to provide a certain degree of buffer between art and artist,

exploiting the liberatory space of the postcolonial present in any subsequent interpretation of meaning, a space productive for both the artist and the text.

* * *

Throughout the reception history of J. M. Coetzee's fictional and critical output, critics question the degree to which Coetzee effectively and responsibly engages the sociopolitical and cultural injustices of his native South Africa within the potentially political space of writing. Critics and commentators often compare the level of engagement within Coetzee's work to fellow Nobel laureate and South African writer Nadine Gordimer, as both writers enjoy rather sizeable international audiences and critical attention. Central to critical comparisons between Gordimer and Coetzee, discussions concerning authorial commitments to realism dominate discussions paralleling both writers' qualification as political novelists. In his reading of J. M. Coetzee as an inherently political novelist, David Attwell delineates the major lines of such a debate:

The linguistic-systemic orientation of [Coetzee's] novels involves the recognition, rooted in all linguistic inquiry, that language is productive [...] This conviction, couched in broad terms here, has cost Coetzee a great deal in South Africa. Many writers, and many more readers, would see the assertion of that "difference" as a form of political and ethical evasion: in South Africa, life under apartheid seems to demand a realistic documentation of oppression [...] the white liberal tradition since Olive Schreiner, continuing down to the radicalism of Nadine Gordimer today [...] [has] adopted various forms of realism as the unquestioned means of bearing witness to, and telling the truth about, South Africa.

(J. M. Coetzee 11)

Coetzee's linguistic inventiveness, theoretically informed and well-formulated, provides a stark contrast to the fundamentally realist mode of representation espoused by Gordimer and other critical proponents of realism, as they endorse and insist upon its ability to accurately portray and focus upon the nature of historical injustice. Though apartheid may have ended in 1993, South African society and culture still exhibit radical social and political injustice, which Gordimer and other South African writers and critics view as the writer's responsibility to relate in its fullness via the realist writing tradition, as linguistic obfuscation and theoretical ambivalence only serves to unethically displace attention from injustice to the mechanisms of art.

Gordimer, a writer whose commitment to activism rests on a par with her dedication to literature (the two being one and the same) has criticized South African writing that fails to engage the historical past in the realist mode, arguing against the ethical and political import of such work. In her essay, "References: The Codes of Culture," Nadine Gordimer unambiguously puts forth the position from which she writes, a position that depends on her readership's ability to relate and engage with the experience of reading fiction:

[...] books are not made out of other books, but out of life. Whether we like it or not, we can be "read" only by readers who share terms of reference formed in us by our education—not merely academic but in the broadest sense of life experience; our political, economic, social, and emotional concepts, and our values derived from these; our cultural matrix. (41)

J. M. Coetzee's fiction, arguably in diametric opposition to such a stance, implicitly critiques such an implied reader model, but from the other side of the argument. As Coetzee remarks in an interview: "what short-circuits the imagination, what forces one's face into the thing itself, is what I am here calling history [...] Therefore, the task becomes imagining this unimaginable,

imagining a form of address that permits the play of writing to start taking place” (*Doubling the Point* 68). Unlike Gordimer’s insistence on a democratic form of writing that resounds in its accessibility to a large and politically pre-determined reading audience, Coetzee approach appears more comfortable in exploiting the liberatory ambivalence, or perhaps fundamental indeterminacy, of “the play of writing.” As a theory of reading and literary interpretation, intertextuality functions to open up the space of literature to the type of play Coetzee defiantly endorses over a strict realist modality. Wolfgang Klooss argues for a theory of intertextuality that contains marked similarities to Coetzee’s textual approach to fiction, as he remarks: “It thus cannot suffice to make a plea for intertextuality as a merely decolonizing form of deconstruction; one should, rather, conceive of it as a strategy to communicate meaning across cultural boundaries” (xi-xii). Concerned with the manner in which texts achieve meaning and nuances of meaning, Coetzee—as a postcolonial, white, South African author—avoids making essentialist presuppositions regarding his potential readership, which could limit the freedom of his fiction to subvert strict interpretation. Thus, within the criticism surrounding the act of reading J. M. Coetzee as a political author, the issue remains roughly drawn along these lines, arguably, intertextual lines.

* * *

In analyzing and discussing the authorial strategies behind a work such as *Elizabeth Costello*—with its dizzying bibliographic code, which influences meaning as much, if not more, than the work’s actual linguistic content—the Freudian act of negation or disavowal begins to take on a rather instructive cast as a framework for understanding Coetzee’s use of intertextuality. The third-person, unnamed narrator in *Elizabeth Costello* comments upon the inability of realism to effectively engage with notions of abstract problems associated with an

essentially intellectual and interpretive foregrounding: “Realism has never been comfortable with ideas. It could not be otherwise: realism is premised on the idea that ideas have no autonomous existence, can only exist in things” (9). The speech act, here exemplified by the actual lectures delivered by Coetzee in the real world, constitutes the type of embodiment essential to a realist mode of representation. Given Coetzee’s ambivalence towards realism and its aversion to the ineffable, these lectures challenge any facile relationship between Coetzee and the specific lecture content, as he subverts expectations and draws his audience into a theoretical dilemma along the lines of agency and culpability in a typically clear-cut forum, the public performance. The situation, artfully played out within the actual lecture “The Philosophers and the Animals” and, importantly, repeated in the subsequent print editions, allows Coetzee to begin by stating the precarious nature of a situation in which the author figure fails to perform along expected—and arguably realist—lines of performance. The third person narrator of *Elizabeth Costello*—a role performed by Coetzee in the original lecture format—anticipates the mixed reaction such an unorthodox performance might well receive:

On the basis of her reputation as a novelist, this fleshy, white-haired lady has been invited to Appleton to speak on any subject she elects; and she has responded by electing to speak, not about herself and her fiction, as her sponsors would no doubt like, but about a hobbyhorse of hers, animals. (60)

Compounding the levels of indeterminacy at the heart of Elizabeth Costello’s remarks, the audience must then reconcile the adequate distance to place between Coetzee and the comments of the fictitious Costello. As both Princeton University and Bennington College engaged J. M. Coetzee—the postcolonial author writing in the real world—to deliver the lectures in question, what should represent the definitive realist moment in the form of an experiential performative

act, remains mired in uncertainty arising from the implementation of so many veils of fiction and narrative layering. J. M. Coetzee, embodied and in body behind the podium, challenges what should represent a rather straightforward link between speaker and spoken. However, much like Freud's conception of the neurotic's unconscious compulsion for repression, Coetzee—writing from a psychoanalytic, posttraumatic position—tempts such a correlation to then disavow it, both at the level of the metafictional lecture and then, most radically, by subsuming the terms of performance in an essentially intertextual format: the work, *Elizabeth Costello*. Coetzee, writing from the postcolonial present, acknowledges the loss of a stable (post)colonial subjectivity, exploring its various and not unproblematic symptoms through intertextual and metafictional devices within his fiction.

Coetzee has continually punctuated even his most grittily realistic fictional moments with a level of metafictional chiaroscuro, which many critics have aptly highlighted. As Ian Glen comments: “Coetzee the critic may be said to have attempted to make his works critic-proof, or at least resistant to available parameters. His novels understand his critics better than the other way around, anticipating their readings and objections” (25). Symptomatic of this trend in his fiction, *Elizabeth Costello* arguably takes such a “critic-proof” stance to another level of distancing. Coetzee's lectures, as originally delivered and printed, now enter into direct dialogue with the context of five additional lessons and a radically obscure postscript, forcing intertextual associations, as they appear as a coherent textual whole. Has Coetzee hoodwinked both his lecture and original publication audiences by affording them no stable place from which to mount a critique upon the linguistic content of the lectures in question? How can critics evaluate the meaning of the lecture content without taking into account the convoluted bibliographic coding and performative provenance of Coetzee/Costello's remarks? Coetzee refuses any undue

“authority” that critics and commentators might ascribe to the role of author. Though semantically intertwined, “author” and “authority” retain a fundamental disjunct with regards to the space of fiction for Coetzee, a “lesson” he attempts to demonstrate throughout both his fiction and critical output.

However, as certain critics are wont to argue, does such a rejection of authority confer upon the author a certain mantle of political ambivalence or irresponsibility? David Attwell, critic and Coetzee’s fellow contributor in *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*, argues against such a reading, as he reads Coetzee’s fiction within a framework whereby radical indeterminacy and hermetic narrative layering opens a space for criticism to function in a productive manner. Commenting upon Coetzee’s work written under the cultural ban of South African apartheid, Attwell notes: “As a way of bearing witness to the negation of subjectivity at the heart of apartheid, Coetzee incorporates foreign bodies into his narratives, bodies that remain obdurately unfamiliar despite the close attentions of his narrators” (*J. M. Coetzee* 18). Though apartheid officially ended in 1993, the cultural and social climate of South Africa remains ripe with injustice and inequality, which indicates a certain ethico-political position from which Coetzee as a postcolonial author can speak, though his commentary—as evinced by his theoretically complex fiction—highlights the instability of subjectivity in general, as opposed to making claims concerning the subjectivity of a particular group. Still, critics such as Benita Parry interpret Coetzee’s arguably dense and intellectual fiction as evading the postcolonial political context it could, in fact, represent and help to reform. Parry makes such a position clear, as she writes: “In protesting against the predicament of writing’s compliant instrumentality, Coetzee as his own critic appears determined to detach his novels from their worldly connections” (163). Yet, as a particular point of reference *Elizabeth Costello*, given its

bibliographic coding and programmatic textual instability, arguably highlights the problematic nature of a *direct* and *essentialist* connection between fiction and the real world, though never denies the possibility of any connection whatever.

As a proscriptive model for reading fiction, Coetzee's lectures, delivered through the mouthpiece of the fictional Elizabeth Costello, bring the connection between author and work to the forefront, in arguably its most embodied form: the performative space of the authorial lecture. However, as he notes in an interview with Attwell, Coetzee places little importance on the connection between himself and his works, if and when asked to comment on the manner in which they circulate in the reading present. Coetzee remarks about his ambivalence towards criticizing and explicating the mechanisms operating within his fiction:

While I hope what I say has some integrity, I see no reason to have any particular respect for it. True or false, it is simply my utterance, continuous with me; whereas what I am doing when I am writing a novel either isn't me or is me in a deeper sense than the words I am now speaking are me. (*Doubling the Point* 205)

Though Coetzee places no particular stock in his own interpretations of his work, he nonetheless respects the general situatedness and necessity of literary criticism in general. In an interview at the University of Kentucky, Coetzee notes the importance of literary criticism in the interpretation of fiction: "I believe very strongly in the critical activity of the literary critic—and I hope that I bring across to my fiction writing some of that concern with the importance of criticism, which is to me a matter of taking nothing for granted" (quoted in Penner 129). Though Coetzee's lectures at both Bennington College and Princeton University inherently contain distancing mechanisms that challenge a direct correlation among the intellectual, literary, ethical and political positions revealed through the fictional Australian novelist Elizabeth Costello and

the author contracted to deliver the lecture, the South African novelist J. M. Coetzee, such distance does not prove adequate *enough* for Coetzee.

With the publication of the lectures within the larger work *Elizabeth Costello*, the linguistic content of Coetzee's lectures assumes a concrete and material textuality in the postcolonial, reading present, whereby the faculties of literary criticism can dissect and examine the linguistic play in a disembodied, and more explicitly intertextual, format. The historical past—necessarily the place of such an already-completed, embodied performance without the possibility of direct access in the postcolonial present—finds an opening in the reading present, via Kristevan intertextuality, whereby the linguistic content of Coetzee's lectures transcends the historical past and may participate in dialogue with an unnamed future in the space of the postcolonial present. Within the "lesson" entitled "Realism," Elizabeth Costello/Coetzee highlights the tension concerning any reading trapped in the historical past. Modifying the Borgesian model of the Total Library to show the detrimental nature of closed dialogue with the historical past, Costello/Coetzee describes what such a library would entail: "Not a library in which all conceivable books, past, present and future coexist, but a library from which books that were really conceived, written and published are absent, absent even from the memory of the librarians" (18). Could such remarks symptomatically reveal a certain tension regarding the instability and, ultimately, ineffectiveness of speech to responsibly engage in the politicized postcolonial present? Reading Costello/Coetzee's metaphor in such a manner demonstrates the didactic, critical leaning informing Coetzee's fiction; but, more importantly, perhaps such a reading provides another instance of Coetzee's insistence on the empowerment of the reading present as the space by which to mount viable and, accordingly, relevant sociocultural and literary critique. If "books that were really conceived, written and published are absent," then it

follows that the historical past succumbs to a fundamental impotence in regards to its ability to effectively enter into constructive dialogue with the unnamed future; the postcolonial and reading present cannot offer an effective space for intervention, which represents an authorial stance Coetzee attempts to disprove and discredit within his fiction.

As this chapter attempts to argue, *Elizabeth Costello*—as an intertextual space for intervention in the reading present—allows Coetzee not only to explore the indeterminate boundaries between fiction and the real world, but also to disavow any reading of his work that assumes a facile and unproblematic link between Coetzee as author and Coetzee as authority on his own works and fictional output. The didactic impulse, arguably a feature of all of Coetzee’s fiction and criticism, takes on a politically liberatory function within the context of the bibliographic provenance of *Elizabeth Costello*. Coetzee enters into the performative and public forum of the academic lecture, only to then negate and disavow the premises on which such a performance stands, a move made explicit only upon the publication of *Elizabeth Costello* as a textually grounded work of fiction. When placed within the context of a published work of fiction, Costello/Coetzee’s arguments find an opening in the intertextual present, whereby the potentially liberatory play of Kristevan intertextuality can open a previously closed historical past to unlimited dialogue with the future, an important political move, which the forum of fiction allows Coetzee to explore and exploit. In response to criticism that highlights psychoanalytic currents running throughout his fiction, Coetzee enigmatically remarks: “If one believes that stories must aspire to more than merely to be interesting, then one must go beyond psychology. Does this mean that I am anti-Freudian? Far from it—the traces of my dealings with Freud lie all over my writings” (*Doubling the Point* 245). Disavowal, or negation, in the Freudian sense functions rather effectively for Coetzee in his attempt to instruct his readership to

read his novels on their own terms. Both engaging and frustratingly elusive, *Elizabeth Costello* as a work of fiction insists on recognizing its intertextual nature, and, arguably, encourages readers to recognize the potential of employing intertextuality as a constructive theory of reading applicable to all of Coetzee's fiction, not simply this particular and peculiar work.

Chapter 2
Ladies and Gentlemen: Present(ing) *Elizabeth Costello*

And metatextual questions are the real ones now: the issue of identity is now refocused on the critic and critical text. The identity of the reader and of the reading now matters more than what used to be called in a quaint down-home fashion the “characters” of the novel.

-Valentine Cunningham, In the Reading Gaol

Elizabeth Costello, as a work of postcolonial metafiction, continually encourages the reader to focus attention not only on aspects of its formal narrative construction, but perhaps more importantly, on its constructedness. As the semantic distinction between fiction and nonfiction would imply, the work not only flaunts the radical heterogeneity of its previously published parts, but also invites the reader to judge the overall mechanistic, aesthetic and, arguably, political effects of such an arrangement. As this study argues, the postcolonial present—when considered as both the location of the encounter between reader and text and the space within which to bring into dialogue the conflicted colonial past and the unnamed future—relates directly to Kristeva’s notion of intertextuality which functions in the creation of meaning. However, as this chapter highlights, the tenuous nature of representing and orchestrating a direct and unproblematic correlation between the time of reading and the time of narrative action provides significant barriers in the articulation of a perpetual present temporality. Yet, as Bhabha and other postcolonial theorists argue, the present remains the most politically and ethically effective space in which to break open essentialist discourses concerning the colonial past in order to retain the liberatory promise of the future. The liminality of the postcolonial present, the context in which J. M. Coetzee writes, organizes and publishes *Elizabeth Costello*, functions successfully only if the temporality retains its fixity as such, without backsliding into the impotence of the colonial past or the unknowability of the future where the postcolonial author loses whatever authority the present might confer. In an examination of *Elizabeth Costello*, or more specifically, the linguistic code of the published work, intertextuality functions

as a metafictional device through which Coetzee (a university-trained and practicing linguist, it is worth noting) manipulates the narrative limitations inherent in creating a fictional space which functions to both respect and maintain the temporality of the present as the space of political and ethical intervention. Though the inherent limitations of effectively relating narrative events in a present temporality contiguous with the reading frame may prove mechanically impossible, or at best technically improbable, to obviate, Kristevan intertextuality—as Coetzee convincingly demonstrates by *Elizabeth Costello*—provides a textual device by which individual reader response to the narrative events necessarily occurs in the space of the reading present.

The structural limitations revealed by attempting to forge a coherent and unproblematic narrative completely within the present tense has drawn the attention of a number of writers and critics. Dorrit Cohn, in her essay “I Doze and Wake: The Deviance of Simultaneous Narration,” makes explicit the difficulty of creating a truly present tense within any fictional narrative, no matter how complexly theorized. Cohn writes:

Narrative poetics, however, has as yet failed to account for the most serious challenge to the accepted truth that ‘narrative is past, always past’: the mounting trend in modernist first-person fiction to cast a distinctly narrative (not monologic) discourse in the present tense from first to last. (97)

Focusing on Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* as one of its primary sources for textual analysis, Cohn’s essay explores and highlights the limitations of maintaining the potentially liberatory temporality of the present within any fictional narrative, including narratives attempting to circulate and intervene within the context of a postcolonial present. Yet, to argue that Coetzee’s work functions in a disingenuous present tense would negate the effective space in which *Elizabeth Costello* operates. As Cohn rightly points out: “As most grammars tell us, the

present is the most pluri-significant of all tenses” (106). A complete negation of the potentiality for present tense narration, for Cohn, would result in one of the following: “either to deny that its tense is a genuine present, or to deny that its discourse is genuine narrative” (102). In order to preserve the “pluri-significant” potentiality of the present, neither option would appear to suffice. A strict acceptance of verb tense and the representational possibility of the present appears naïve at best; however, the issue remains lively, even if the present tense remains illusory at level of narration, then perhaps the temporality of the reading act provides a segue into the space for intervention in the reading present.

Though the temporality of past narration directly confronts the reader with the knowledge that the narrator/author has carefully selected which details to present and describe, the use of the present tense as the main temporal frame for narrative action distracts the reader’s attention in recognizing that events are not simply “as they are presented” and thus read. Therefore the reader confronts the speed at which present tense narration occurs *as if* events take place in the same temporality as the reading frame, which leads to certain aporias characteristic of any narrative fiction, as Umberto Eco argues. In his essay, “Entering the Woods,” Eco writes: “any narrative fiction is necessarily and fatally swift because, in building a world that comprises myriad events and characters, it cannot say everything about *this world*. It hints at it and then asks the reader to fill in a whole series of gaps” (3, Emphasis mine). In failing to address “everything about *this world*,” the necessarily abbreviated narrative act must rely upon a certain level of reader participation in establishing the links and connections that contextualize and ground a work of fiction in the world of the reader. And, in so doing, the narrative, as a whole, enters into the reading frame, which necessarily resides in the present. Yet, Cohn concisely relates the problematic nature of maintaining a definitively present tense narrative structure:

The highlighting impact generally attributed to the use of the historical present—variously expressed in terms of enhanced vividness, dramatic effect, or presentification—is accordingly understood as being wholly dependent on its intermittence: if it were not embedded in normal tensual surroundings, its tensual deviance would not stand out. (99)

Despite the “tensual deviance” apparent when trying to effectively carry-over the linguistic tense at work in the narrative and place it directly over the present tense of the reader’s world, a third space, as Kristeva argues for in relation to the semiotic, could function to reconcile or make unproblematic such deviance. Such reconciliation necessarily would not have to attempt to subvert and hide the linguistic and representational limitations posed by present tense narration, but, rather, could draw attention to such limitations in order to offer an alternative and complementary space in the historical present whereby reader and text interact in a communal type of meaning formation, which would allow the historical past to interact and influence the unnamed future. Such a space, arguably the space of literature, could find an opening within an intertextual theory of reading.

As developed in the introduction to this study, the Kristevan notion of intertextuality, borrowing as it does from Bakhtinian theories of narrative discourse, allows for the historical present to remain an open and viable place for critique and intervention, as it pertains to the generation of meaning between reader and text. Fundamental to such a discussion, both space and time as narrative dimensions must function in a complementary manner for Bakhtin, as both coordinates determine the situatedness of the reading act. Bakhtin condenses such a relation in his conception of the chronotope, as he writes: “We will give the name chronotope (literally, “time space”) to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (“Forms of Time” 84). The chronotope, as developed *within*

the work of literature, does not interact with other chronotropes comprising the actual text.

Rather, and importantly for the development of Kristevan intertextuality, Bakhtin argues that the nuances of meaning affected by the chronotrope enter into the discursive sphere of the reader, not the text itself. Bakhtin notes:

The general characteristic of these interactions is that they are dialogical (in the broadest sense of the word). But this dialogue cannot enter into the world represented in the work, nor into any of the chronotropes represented in it; it is outside the world represented, although not outside the work as a whole. It (this dialogue) enters the world of the author, of the performer, and the world of the listeners and readers. (252)

The chronotrope, as it enters into direct dialogue with the real world, as opposed to the fictitious world contained within the actual text of the work, reinscribes the work itself as a place of meaning formation and creation, as opposed to simply a location of meaning dissemination.

Bakhtin further argues: “The contemporaneity from which the author observes includes, first and foremost, the realm of literature—and not just contemporary literature in the strict sense of the word, but also the literature of the past that continues to live and renew itself in the present” (255). As Kristevan intertextuality attempts to describe and articulate the manner in which texts (not just printed texts, but also nonmaterial “social” texts) function performatively in providing a space in the historical present, such a space facilitates the type of dialogue Bakhtin endorses, which brings the historical past into communication with an unnamed and unfixed future.

However, if a literary work—especially a self-consciously literary work such as *Elizabeth Costello*—foregrounds and facilitates the opening of such dialogue between historical past and future, to what degree does the historical present remain inscribed by the work’s presuppositions? Bakhtin relates this tension inherent in the reading present, as he notes: “Every

literary work focuses outward away from itself, toward the listener-reader, and to a certain extent thus anticipates possible reactions to itself" (257). Yet, as literature finds its medium in language, Kristeva dismisses the possibility for linguistic constructs to enact explicit control over meaning formation; linguistic constructs, as such, cannot achieve any essential meaning across the limitless reading present for Kristeva. Kristeva makes such a point directly, as she writes:

What we discover, then, within this texture, is the function of the subject caught between instinctual drives and social practice within a language that is today divided into often incommunicable, multiple systems: a Tower of Babel that literature specifically breaks open, refashions, and inscribes in a new series of perpetual contradictions. (*Desire in Language* 97)

Therefore, the historical present remains an ever-shifting and elusive frame in which to pen/pin a definitive reader/readership; Kristeva's notion of intertextuality depends on such an indeterminate historical present. However, what of literary works which exploit this space, drawing the reader into an explicit understanding of its mechanisms of representation and temporal situatedness? For Kristeva, the process remains unchanged: a literary work, even if it calls attention to its constructedness and over mechanisms of representation, still remains a place of meaning formation in the historical present. Though Dorrit Cohn convincingly argues that a work can never completely reconcile the impasse posed by the present tense narrative's inability to reconcile deviances emerging from the temporality of narration, the temporality of the reading frame remains constant: the historical present. What of a book that flaunts such a relationship, in fact insists on the reader recognizing her or his participatory role in the formation of meaning? *Elizabeth Costello* provides a number of such metafictional moments, whereby the site of meaning creation rests in the reading present (where chronotope and real world most explicitly

interact), as the reading experience correlates directly with the functioning of intertextuality within the narrative.

* * *

From its first lines, *Elizabeth Costello* draws the reader into direct conflict with his or her attempt to establish a comfortable temporality within which to place and pace the narrative action, and deliberately so. Just as Dorrit Cohn argues that narrative has yet to develop a strategy to reconcile the functional limitations posed by the temporality of the present tense, *Elizabeth Costello*, as a work of fiction, does not try to hide nor subvert such an assessment. Rather, the third-person omniscient narrator begins with the problems posed by the tensual deviance of present tense narration, a passage worth quoting at length here:

There is first of all the problem of the opening, namely how to get us from where we are, which is, as yet, nowhere, to the far bank. It is a simple bridging problem, a problem of knocking together a bridge. People solve such problems every day. They solve them, and having solved them push on.

Let us assume that, however it may have been done, it is done. Let us take it that the bridge is built and crossed, that we can put it out of our mind. We have left behind the territory in which we were. We are in the far territory, where we want to be. (1)

In addition to the willing suspension of disbelief relied upon by fictional narratives, *Elizabeth Costello* appears to require the reader to endorse a willing suspension of tensual deviance.

Within the opening two paragraphs, the narrative has brought the reader into “the far territory, where we want to be,” from the “territory in which we were.” Not only does the narrative “bridge” an abstract amount of narrative space, but also attempts to manipulate the tensual deviance posed by such present tense narration. Assuring the reader that “we can put it out of

our mind,” nonetheless the shift from “were” to “are” poses a structural problem that the inherent mechanics of the narrative appear to have no definitive way of solving or averting; a “problem of knocking together a bridge,” which does not effectively remove the distance between point A and point B, but changes the manner in which to cross such a distance. Yet, importantly for Coetzee, the shift does take place, even if drawing explicit attention to the problematic nature of such a move, as the present tense, according to the narrator, remains “where we want to be.”

In another such metafictional moment, the third person narrator of *Elizabeth Costello* directly addresses the speed at which the narrative can naturally progress. If the narrative present tense attempts to fit directly overtop the reading present of the real world, then the structural limitations of such a narrative strategy present themselves as blaringly obvious to the reader. The reader, as proscriptively addressed by the author/narrator, does not experience the present of narration in the same manner as a subject within that particular narrative. As Umberto Eco notes: “A story may be more or less quick—that is to say, more or less elliptic—but how elliptic it may be is determined by the sort of reader it is addressed to” (7). The narrator of *Elizabeth Costello* makes no secret of the need to pick and choose between which events to portray and which to ignore, even as the narrative remains strictly within the present tense structurally. In explaining the decision to skip one of Elizabeth Costello’s heavily foreshadowed lecture performances, the narrator addresses the reader directly about the necessity of elliptic narrative:

Breaking into the dream draws attention to the constructedness of the story, and plays havoc with the realist illusion. However, unless certain scenes are skipped over we will be here all afternoon. The skips are not part of the text, they are part of the performance.

(16)

This seeming ambivalence towards realism not only highlights the “constructedness” of *Elizabeth Costello*, but arguably *any* narrative event as such, even those appearing to take place in an unproblematic present tense. As “the skips are not part of the text,” but rather “part of the performance,” such a double entendre forces the reader to decide whether such a performance relates to the lecture within the narrative or rather the performance of reading the text. Perhaps, both. However, in either reading, the elliptic nature of the narrative does not comprise part of the text *en sensu stricto*; rather, the ellipsis relies on the reading act to gain any semblance of significance, as such gaps and spaces have no direct correlation to concretely represented narrative events within the text itself. Here, in the space of the reading performance, specifically a performance of engaging *Elizabeth Costello* in the reading present, the elliptic nature of the narrative forces itself upon the reader to demonstrate its limitations as a mode of representation. Though such metafictional moments might appear as self-defeating and self-deprecating moves with respect to the overall coherence of the narrative, Coetzee does not simply dismiss the space of the reading present as a place by which to effectively generate meaning between reader and text. Coetzee continually draws attention to the inability of narrative mechanics to provide a means for fictional narrative to successfully achieve a space of programmatic intervention in the reading present. Though *Elizabeth Costello* flaunts such self-reflexivity at numerous junctures, it does not preclude the possibility of intervention *ein sich*. The performative nature of reading, which necessarily places the reading event within a perpetual present, provides a manner by which Coetzee can reconcile the limitations of textual deviance to forge a space for effective intervention in the formation of meaning between reader and text. Here, in the space of the reading present, the Kristevan notion of intertextuality provides the means by which the

postcolonial narrative can pragmatically bring the historical past into dialogue with an unnamed future.

* * *

Within the rather abbreviated narrative action (eight lessons, each little more in length than a typical academic lecture), *Elizabeth Costello* develops numerous literary allusions, intellectual references and strict textual analyses of literary texts circulating in the real world. Though Elizabeth Costello has definite, and sometimes quite strong, opinions/judgments concerning the works and authors she references, never does her discourse suggest that the reader should agree with or even accept the terms of Costello/Coetzee's interpretation. As a theory of reading and/or textuality, Kristevan intertextuality remains largely uninterested in simply tracing textual references and making note of where they appear within the text under analysis. Kristeva approaches the circulation of disparate texts within a particular narrative in a much more interesting and, arguably, fruitful manner. Kristeva writes:

And analysis should not limit itself simply to identifying texts that participate in the final texts, or to identifying their sources, but should understand that what is being dealt with is a specific dynamics of the subject of the utterance, who consequently, because of this intertextuality, is not an individual in the etymological sense of the term, not an identity.

(*Interviews* 190)

By challenging this notion of the individual—in terms of a stable subject identity immune to the collaborative process of meaning formation inherent in the reading act—Kristeva provides a certain semantic openendedness in the reading present, which helps to develop the import of intertextuality as a functional narrative device. In discussing the liberatory nature of Kristevan intertextuality, Anne-Marie Smith notes:

Thus Kristeva refers to a phenomenon whereby avant-garde literature can be seen to produce a spectacular *éclatement du sujet* or explosion of subjectivity and of the ideological limits which surround that subjectivity. These ideological limits [...] are then thrown into question, prevented from becoming totalitarian and made ripe for renewal.

(20)

Such an “*éclatement du sujet*” allows for subjectivity, as developed within a particular narrative, to retain a certain liberatory instability, which in turn prevents an essentialist reading of the text and ensures the dynamic nature of dialogue between the historical past and the unnamed future within the space of the reading frame. Though the intertextual traces left on the page refer readers—no matter how (un)successfully—back to a previous text or discourse, the manner in which such texts and discourses achieve signifi-ance in the reading present remains fundamentally open for Kristeva.

Elizabeth Costello, as a fictional text, deliberately draws its readership into the dilemmas posed by judging the weight and import of the seemingly endless literary references, which each character, not just Elizabeth Costello, regularly employs to help bolster and support his or her argumentative positions. Interestingly, such overt intertextual references not only encourage connections between texts circulating in the real world, but also connections between the fictional Elizabeth Costello and the author of the text as identified on the dust jacket, J. M. Coetzee. Some of the following comparisons, though certainly not a definitive list, make explicit Coetzee’s manipulation of such a link: 1) Elizabeth Costello established herself as an important feminist, postcolonial novelist by giving voice to Joyce’s Marion Bloom, wife of Leopold Bloom, in her critically acclaimed novel *The House on Eccles Street*; J. M. Coetzee, as a postcolonial author, has received great critical attention for a number of his works, including *Foe*

(1986), which gave voice to Susan Barton, the apparent narrative source of *Robinson Crusoe*, whose story Daniel Foe (an earlier patronym of Defoe, it turns out) incorporated into the narrative which bears his name as author, not Barton's. 2) Many of Elizabeth Costello's literary references pertain to readings of Kafka; much of J. M. Coetzee's critical work in linguistics has focused on sensual deviance and inscrutability in Kafka's works. Also, the main character of Coetzee's novel *Life and Times of Michael K* (1989) exhibits strikingly close thematic ties with Kafka's Josef K. 3) Costello has developed a reputation as a major international literary figure, having won numerous awards; Coetzee, winner of the Booker Prize twice and the Nobel Prize in 2003, meets the same qualifications. 4) Of the eight "lessons" within *Elizabeth Costello*—importantly the lectures Costello delivers within the time of the narrative—Coetzee has published six in previous venues. Such a list could continue, to varying degrees of success; however, such an exercise would arguably miss the point of such textual and metatextual layering.

Yet, how should the reader approach the intertextual references brought to the forefront within *Elizabeth Costello*, though never completely disavowed? How far should the reader take the referential material in judging meaning at the site of the text? Though such questions appear quite valid given the complexity of the textual devices Coetzee sets into play, perhaps more interesting questions emerge from their analysis. In Costello/Coetzee's lecture "The Philosophers and the Animals," Costello engages in an analysis of primate research published by Wolfgang Köhler, a behavioral scientist and primatologist in the real world. Costello's remarks serves as an admonitory allegory about the problematic nature of reading by means of strictly delimited rules and conventions. In attempting to provide an alternate, but nonetheless valid,

interpretation of Sultan's responses to Köhler's battery of behavioral experimentation, Costello/Coetzee argues:

At every turn Sultan is driven to think the less interesting thought. From the purity of speculation (Why do men behave like this?) he is relentlessly propelled towards lower, practical, instrumental reason (How does one use this to get that?) and thus towards acceptance of himself primarily as an organism with an appetite that needs to be satisfied [...] a carefully plotted psychological regimen conducts him away from ethics and metaphysics towards the humbler reaches of practical reason. (*Lives of Animals* 29; *Elizabeth Costello* 73-74)

Could a similar conscripted battery of questions structure the manner by which a reader approaches the text? Do the intertextual references serve as so many tools which the reader must use to effectively reach the necessary objective, meaning for the reader, the banana for the ape? If the reader answers "yes" to either of the above questions, then reading loses its potentially liberatory power as a means of direct and dynamic engagement in the present, as the historical past of intertextual references retain a fixity of interpretation and interaction that Coetzee would appear to argue against, enforcing a type of reading that moves "away from ethics and metaphysics towards the humbler reaches of practical reason." Practical reason, in such an analysis, emerges as suspect, not only in regards to the mechanics of the narrative, but arguably with respect to its larger ethical and political import in the reading present.

In the subsequent lecture/"lesson" contained within *Elizabeth Costello*—"The Poets and the Animals"—the unbounded poetic imagination offers a certain reprieve to essentialist modes of interpretation and representation. For her/his paradigmatic text, Costello/Coetzee focuses upon Ted Hughes's poem, "The Jaguar," to demonstrate such a reading. Costello/Coetzee argues

that Hughes's work represents "poetry that does not try to find an idea in the animal, that is not about the animal, but is instead the record of an engagement with him" (*Lives of Animals* 51; *Elizabeth Costello* 96). Emphasizing "the record of an engagement," Costello/Coetzee highlights the interactivity inherent in the production of meaning in the reading present. As Costello/Coetzee argues, the jaguar does not represent some fundamental and essential mode of being; rather, the jaguar and Hughes collaborate at the creative site of the poem, as poetic language and form capture only the "record of an engagement"; it does not set the terms on which such an engagement depends upon for its staging. Continuing, Costello/Coetzee argues:

When Hughes the poet stands before the jaguar cage, he looks at an individual jaguar and is possessed by that individual jaguar life. It has to be that way. Jaguars in general, the subspecies jaguar, the idea of jaguar, will fail to move him because we cannot experience abstractions. Nevertheless, the poem that Hughes writes is about *the Jaguar*, about jaguariness embodied in the jaguar. (*Lives of Animals* 53; *Elizabeth Costello* 98)

Importantly, the strict classificational schemas used in any essentialist description of the jaguar—such as, "jaguars in general, the subspecies jaguar, the idea of jaguar"—would appear to negate both the power and potentiality of Hughes's poetic engagement with his subject.

However, as "the poem that Hughes writes is about *the Jaguar*, about jaguariness embodied in the jaguar," the ability to articulate some relevant meaning does not necessarily slide into abnegation. Costello/Coetzee argues that Hughes, via the reading present of his poem, has *something* to say about "jaguariness," even if it does not represent *the thing*. In this move, the ambiguity and fluidity of openended meaning in the reading present provides Hughes's poem a necessary relevance and, one could argue, literary import. Just as Hughes views the jaguar as "an individual jaguar and is possessed by that individual jaguar life," could such a form of

individual engagement apply to an engagement with literature or, more specifically, with a particular text such as *Elizabeth Costello*? In flaunting its generic instabilities and contradictions, does *Elizabeth Costello* warn readers from a strict interpretation of the intertextual references contained therein? If so, does this necessarily preclude larger judgments made by the reader in attempting to describe *something* about fiction? Yes and no: the text becomes the site of engagement in the reading present, which always contains the possibility of bringing the future into dialogue with the historical past; however, the conditions which foreground any interpretation of such an engagement remain elusive and, necessarily so for Coetzee's larger examinations of intertextuality as it protects and preserves the perpetual present of the reading frame.

* * *

The final "lesson" within *Elizabeth Costello*, "At the Gate," makes most explicit the degree to which previously written texts invade and inform the site of literary performance. Elizabeth Costello appears to find herself in some form of the beyond, but the reader never learns exactly beyond *what*. Does the reader have a record of one of Elizabeth Costello's dreams or perhaps one of the narrator's? Does the gate represent the barred entry point into that which comes after life, implying that Elizabeth has died? In order to pass through the gate, Elizabeth must first present a statement of her beliefs before an imposing and inscrutable court, in what would appear to function as some form of a trial. Where has the reader encountered such a representation of the absurd, such an unsettling encounter with the impersonality of bureaucratic entities? The reader, confronting narrative details which do not necessarily depend on an understanding of another text, but nonetheless open themselves blatantly to comparison, participates actively in the process of signification in such an intertextual encounter. Here, along

with the allusions piled upon allusions, the metafictional moments force the reader to notice the constructedness of such a fictional world. As the third person narrator relates, Costello at one point thinks to herself: “the whole thing put together from clichés, with not a speck of originality” (198). Who inhabits such a world? Where has the reader previously encountered such an unsettling narrative effect, whereby any sense of agency arises only to later fall to the uncontrollability, the impersonality, perhaps even the inhumanness of some ambivalent, external fate? Though Martin Amis denounces the “half-impressions subsumed by that wooly watchword ‘Kafkaesque’ (used, nowadays, to describe a train delay or a queue in the post office)” (399), nonetheless even the suggestive title of the lesson encourages the reader to pay attention to Coetzee’s use of intertextuality in achieving such a narrative aesthetic.

In the small, unnamed and nondescript border town in which Elizabeth Costello waits before passing through the gate, every detail carries the combined weight of association and personalization, no matter how clichéd the individual elements appear in and of themselves. The engagement for Costello, and arguably for the reader as well, assumes a tailored fit, a personal experience in the face of so much impersonality. At each of her hearings before the court, Costello must attempt to convincingly deliver a statement of belief, apparently justifying not only her career as a writer, but perhaps having to account for her life in general. Costello’s first appeal does not satisfy the court, when she argues: “In my work belief is a resistance, an obstacle. I try to empty myself of resistances” (200). Though she argues for the necessity of impersonality and unbiased representation as the prequalification to a career as a writer, such an answer proves unacceptable and the court encourages her to rewrite her statement and return only after having done so. When the court asks her to comment upon her own humanity and how it relates to writing, Costello responds: “On my own humanity? Is that of consequence?”

What I offer to those who read me, what I contribute to their humanity, outweighs, I would hope, my own emptiness in that respect” (201). Further, Costello argues against the ascendancy the court places on such a notion of belief, continuing to attempt to divorce herself and her work from such contextual ties. Costello concludes her statement by noting: “Let me add, for your edification: beliefs are not the only ethical supports we have. We can rely on our hearts as well. That is all. I have nothing more to say” (203). Yet, Costello does not gain admittance to what lies behind the gate, as her ability to persuade the court fails and the possibility of some form of escape or transcendence remains deferred indefinitely. The reader, continually taking note not only of Costello’s arguments, but also of the textual framework in which they appear, attempts to draw upon the intertextual clues circulating throughout the chapter, as the overt textual mechanics of the narrative give no direct clues as to how to achieve some semblance of resolution.

At this juncture, Costello begins once again to take more explicit notice of her surroundings in her attempt to situate herself within the present through an opening of dialogue with past experience. Costello observes the following, as the narrator provides access to Costello’s interior monologue:

Exactly, she thinks to herself, what one would expect in an obscure Italian or Austro-Italian border town in the year 1912. Out of a book, just as the bunkhouse with its straw mattresses and forty-watt bulb is out of a book, and the whole courtroom business too, down to the dozy bailiff. (206)

The literary allusions mount, not just for the reader, but also for Elizabeth Costello, and appear to influence the dynamics of her subjectivity as character. Do the increasingly overt intertextual references provide essential information necessary for the reader to uncover and interpret

properly in order to effectively reach the *meaning* of such an unsettling text? And, indeed, unsettling appears an apt description of the effect achieved both inside and outside of the text, as Costello asks herself: “why does the simulation fail so consistently, not just by a hair’s breath—one could forgive that—but by a hand’s breath” (209)? Again, Coetzee provides no answer to this question; but the reader knows that, in writing, the hand holds the pen: Coetzee’s textual arranging does not function haphazardly within his fiction. Coetzee does, however, make explicit the intertextual references bombarding the reader within the work’s final “lesson,” as Costello surmises:

It is the same with the Kafka business. The wall, the gate, the sentry, are straight out of Kafka. So is the demand for a confession, so is the courtroom with the dozing bailiff and the panel of old men in their crows’ robes pretending to pay attention while she thrashes about in the toils of her own words. Kafka, but only the superficialities of Kafka; Kafka reduced and flattened to a parody. (209)

Coetzee directly implicates the intertextual relationship between *Elizabeth Costello* and the works of Kafka within this passage, but to what effect? The intertextual mechanics of the passage, deferred to this point for the judgment and interpretation of the reader, now appear obvious and overstated in such a metafictional move. How does J. M. Coetzee reconcile the intertextual reading experience with Costello’s literary analysis, which argues that the “lesson” functions as “Kafka reduced and flattened to a parody”? Coetzee’s choice of the word “parody,” as opposed to pastiche, might provide a clue. Frederic Jameson delineates between parody and its contemporary variant pastiche as such:

Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of

such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. (17)

By drawing explicit attention to the manner in which the intertextual references to Kafka direct the reading of the text, Coetzee allows the reader to recognize the mechanisms of such parody, which does imply some type of reconciliation between reader and text, as opposed to slipping into the complete and resigned indeterminacy of pastiche. Pastiche, according to Jameson's definition, would function differently: while still appropriating the intertextual connections between *Elizabeth Costello* and a canonical reading of Kafka, pastiche would not allow for effective commentary on the nature of such a textual device. The possibility for commentary proves important for Coetzee, whose metafictional devices function less to confuse and disorient the reader from engaging with the text, than to ironically highlight the not-so-evident mechanisms and assumptions that inform each reading act, no matter how covertly.

Somewhat circularly, Elizabeth Costello herself questions the nature of a world in which Kafka references abound, a question that numerous characters within the text, ironically enough, ask of Costello, as many of her lectures rely upon textual references to Kafka's works. Costello thinks to herself:

And why is it Kafka in particular who is trundled out for her? She is no devotee of Kafka. Most of the time she cannot read him without impatience... So why the *mise en scene* into which she has been hurled so—she dislikes the word but there is not other—Kafkaesque? Perhaps that is what these border towns are for: to teach pilgrims a lesson. (209)

Yet, what lesson does the pilgrim take away from an engagement with the formidable but not entirely unwelcoming border town? Coetzee does not provide a definitive answer within the text, but the structural parallels between Costello, as pilgrim attempting to successfully navigate the power structures of the border town, and the interactive event of the reader coming to the text deserve some attention. The ending of Kafka's short story, "Before the Law," highlights the mechanisms of such a contingent situation. As the main character nears the end of life and still has yet to pass through the gate to which the sentry continually denies admittance, the resolution, no matter how unsettling, reveals much about the nature of the impasse. Kafka writes:

Before he dies, all his experiences in these long years gather themselves in his head to one point, a question he has not yet asked the doorkeeper [...] "Everyone strives to reach the Law," says the man, "so how does it happen that for all these many years no one but myself has ever begged for admittance?" [...] [The doorkeeper replies] "No one else could ever be admitted here, since this gate was made only for you. I am now going shut it." (4)

The experience for Kafka's character, Elizabeth Costello and the reader, in the end, remains essentially a personal and contingent engagement. And, as per the nature of the reading act, the engagement takes place in a perpetual present, albeit outside of the narrative itself. Here, the existence of such a chronotope—to borrow Bakhtin's neologism—functions as a lesson in and of itself for Coetzee. Though the intertextual relationship with Kafka slips into self-conscious parody, it does not necessarily strip the potential power from Coetzee's performative demonstration. Rather, by tracing the specific references employed in generating the hyper-intertextual section of "At the Gate," Coetzee demonstrates that intertextuality does not open the space for meaning formation in the historical present by simply providing narrative scraps and

tidbits that the reader should then trace back to their source in order to obtain some form of truth within the text. For Coetzee, like Kristeva, intertextuality provides the reader with the possibility of more freedom and arguably less effort: every textual encounter functions as an intertextual encounter, as the act of reading in the historical present necessarily draws texts from the historical past into dialogue with the unnamed future, regardless of whether the reader can trace each allusion (or perhaps seeming allusion) to another concrete, identifiable text. Subjectivity, both within and outside the text, experiences the possibility of achieving a radical and potentially liberatory instability through such an encounter, a point Coetzee dissects within *Elizabeth Costello* to then reaffirm in the reading act.

* * *

As the final “lesson” within *Elizabeth Costello* demonstrates, intertextuality, as a poetic mechanism, functions within any encounter with literature, therefore the same would obviously apply to the act of reading in the context of an explicitly postcolonial present. Reader competency, which Michael Riffaterre argues remains essential to the proper understanding of a particular work’s meaning, appears to have no place in Coetzee’s interest in a Kristevan model of intertextual practice. Riffaterre writes:

It should be clear by now that the intertext of the narrative acts as the unconscious of fiction and that readers recover or discover that intertext because the narrative itself contains clues leading back to it...It must also be clear that the narrative is produced by repressing and displacing the intertext, and that the visible sign of the repression or displacement at the surface of the fictional text is the loss of narrativity. (91)

By stating forthright the “intertext,” which “acts as the unconscious of fiction” for Riffaterre, Coetzee forces the reader to question the import of a necessarily hermetic text, which attempts to

conceal a particular meaning. Though Coetzee does not have an interest in fiction that requires no effort or engagement on behalf of the reader, an intertextual reading that *necessarily* relies upon the uncovering of the intertext misses the point and the politically liberatory possibilities which intertextuality makes possible in the semantically opened present. Such hermeneutic attention proves essential to fulfill Riffaterre's requirement for reader competency, whereas Kristeva—and arguably Coetzee—would view such a programmatic approach to reading as intertextuality “in the banal sense” as a facile “study of sources” (*Revolution* 60), ultimately of little political import in the historical present of the reading frame.

Just as Köhler's experiments with Sultan force the ape to “think the less interesting thought” (*Lives of Animals* 29; *Elizabeth Costello* 73), a theory of intertextual reading reliant upon reader competency forces the reader to constantly pay attention to the minor details at work in the text, encouraging little, if any, direct engagement with the context in which reading occurs. In preventing an engagement with “the purity of speculation,” the reader must relegate larger questions such as—What does it mean to read in a postcolonial context? How does one establish narrative authority? Does the text in question conceal as much as it reveals? How else could one interpret this text, given a different contextual backdrop?—to the background and pay attention to “clues” within the narrative that always point elsewhere to the detriment of the here and now of reading. Within *Elizabeth Costello*, as the above discussion attempts to highlight, J. M. Coetzee challenges a model of reader competency as it applies to a postcolonial reading in the historical present, as such a model privileges and rewards certain readings to the detriment of other, arguably valid nuances of meaning. Therefore, addressing the “simple bridging problem” set forth in the first paragraph of *Elizabeth Costello*, Coetzee highlights the infidelities that emerge from any reading that relies strictly on the text of a particular work as opposed to

functioning as a site of engagement between text and context. The interpretive action of linking text and context represents an intertextual engagement itself, which functions in present(ing) the narrative in a manner that simple textual variance cannot. The work of fiction, drawing into dialogue the historical past and the unnamed future, most effectively functions in such an explicitly intertextual reading present, yet one that does not require a level of reader competency to realize its liberatory potential.

Conclusion(s)
Costello or Coetzee: Both/And

It is in practice impossible for us to talk about texts without the presence of a presumed writing hand and of the person the hand belongs to, and (sooner or later) the history, the context, the ideology, the whole matrix of that person, invading the discussion, as these had no doubt previously invaded the text.

-*Valentine Cunningham, In the Reading Gaol*

As a foray into the larger questions of postcolonial writing and conceptions of authority—*Elizabeth Costello*, a strikingly complex (inter)textual artifact in its own right—provides nuanced forms of such questions, perhaps, as opposed to concretized answers. Importantly, for the relevancy and immediacy of postcolonial writing and criticism, the fact that such questions emerge from the act of reading demonstrates a certain level of relevancy in the context of the historical present and its potential for providing the space for opened dialogue. Arguably, one such question would encourage the type of biographical and autobiographical probing that poststructuralist and deconstructionist criticism would consider in the first place naïve, the second perhaps even dangerous. Yet, as readers of *Elizabeth Costello*, can we effectively ignore such questions that continue to mount over the course of the reading? How does the reader ignore the feeling that the authorial hand has attempted to grab her or his attention from the work's first line? Though most contemporary scholars and readers of literature would not ascribe unquestionably to what Jerome McGann critiques as a “romantic ideology of authorship,”⁷ nonetheless, as evidenced by *Elizabeth Costello*'s convoluted bibliographic coding and marked pedagogical tendencies, the text not only demands a certain level of reader participation in the formation of meaning, but perhaps functions to demonstrate that every reading requires such a level of participation, no matter how straightforward the narrative mechanics. So to whom/what does the reader devote her or his attention: character or

⁷ McGann, Jerome. *The Romantic Ideology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

author; text or context; Costello or Kafka? In a move typical of postcolonial critique, the answer—itself given to continuity with critical inquiry—insists upon breaking an oppositional strategy of representation and interpretation: clearly, the answer has always been, can/must/will be both/and.

Taken as a material text, *Elizabeth Costello*, as a work exhibiting inherent and self-confessed literariness, can neither escape nor subvert questions of authority. Inextricably bound to its meandering bibliographic code—which, as mentioned before, appears in the “Acknowledgments” section of the printed text—the work continually draws attention to its materiality in the historical past, as it remains open to dialogue with the potentiality of the future in the space of the reading present. As a postcolonial author, J. M. Coetzee writes from a position which emphasizes a particular manner of placing his work within the larger generic framework of international literature. Though *Elizabeth Costello* never directly acknowledges or brings into question the particular situatedness of Coetzee’s circumstances in writing as a white male within the racially and politically divided context of South Africa, certain tensional parallels between Costello as character and Coetzee as author encourage the reader to examine their structural functions and limitations. As Coetzee notes in an interview with David Attwell: “Because in a larger sense all writing is autobiography: everything that you write, including criticism and fiction, writes you as you write it” (*Doubling the Point* 17). Yet, the reader should remain somewhat skeptical of establishing a direct connection between Costello’s thoughts/remarks and those of Coetzee in regards to literature, literariness or anything else discussed explicitly within the linguistic code of the text. Simply put: such a reading misses the point. So what does Coetzee’s decision to develop a fictional alter-ego as a fictional, female Australian author reveal about the precarious nature of writing fiction and the problems of

authority that emerge from a postcolonial context? In another interview with Attwell, Coetzee clearly demonstrates the necessary self-consciousness of his authorial position, as he notes:

A historicizing consciousness, or as you [David Attwell] put it, the distancing effect of reflexivity, or even textualization—in the present context these are all ways of tracing the same phenomenon: an awareness, as you put pen to paper, that you are setting in train a certain play of signifiers with their own ghostly history of past interplay. (63)

This type of historicizing consciousness—or, as this study has implicitly argued, *intertextual* awareness—both realizes and respects the potentially liberatory space of the postcolonial present, as a form of space/time, or chronotope, that allows for the uninterrupted flow of dialogue between the historical past and the promise of the future. The binary of Costello/Coetzee—set up and perhaps even encouraged by the bibliographical code of the work—breaks open conceptions of subjectivity in much the same manner as the attempt to simplify intertextuality in terms of following literary traces to their intended meaning fails consistently throughout the linguistic code of the text.

The question of authority, a prominent feature in all of Coetzee's fiction, appears to have shifted into the foreground with *Elizabeth Costello*, demanding perhaps greater attention than it has in his earlier works. Such an assessment squares nicely with Coetzee's recap of his career up to the publishing of *Doubling the Point* (1992), in which he writes: “the essay on confession, as I reread it now, marks the beginning of a more broadly philosophical engagement with a situation in the world, his situation and perhaps still mine” (394). In attempting to establish a position from which to write in the postcolonial present, Coetzee appears to place considerable importance on the philosophical premises behind what exactly “being an author” entails, a theme at the heart of *Elizabeth Costello*. However, the oddly parasitic nature of *Elizabeth Costello*, as

it relates to the real world, brings the relationships between author and character, text and context, authorship and authority to the level of plot and narrativity. Coetzee—as evidenced by his numerous awards and accolades, especially the Nobel Prize in Literature—remains an author whose fictional works carry a certain amount of cultural and intellectual currency in the real world; yet, as this discussion attempts to show, Coetzee remains skeptical about such a facile connection between himself as author and someone who, by dint of his fictional works/worlds, confers authority on the nature of the postcolonial situation in the real world. The attempt to retain a certain semantic openendedness in the critical present, a hallmark of the liberatory potential in both Bakhtinian and Kristevan theories of texts and textuality, arguably generates much of the tension within the narrative of *Elizabeth Costello*—with its various intertextual investitures and investigations—and the situation of the text as it circulates within the real world in which Coetzee, himself, attempts to grapple with the constructedness of his own subjectivity before his fictional creations.

* * *

Intertextuality, as it functions within the works of J. M. Coetzee, and specifically *Elizabeth Costello*, displaces a direct and unproblematic connection between the author and the authority of the text. As such, the text in its potentially unbounded circulation within the context of the real world retains the power conferred by its openendedness, not a particular coded and essentialist meaning for the competent reader to uncover. As Wolfgang Klooss notes, a Kristevan notion of intertextuality functions productively in a postcolonial context:

It reinforces the claim that any study of intertextual traces ought to be aware of its own cultural conditioning as well as of the forces that have instructed the object of investigation. In this way, intertextuality as both a creative and critical practice opens

opportunities for the disclosure of literary and cultural manifestations that have become canonized. (xi)

Yet, Klooss's remarks draw attention to a common misinterpretation of intertextual practice within postcolonial writing: namely, that any such intertextual writing functions mainly to "write back," to reappropriate works the canon has already colonized and claimed as its own cultural and intellectual territory. In her analysis of J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*, Sue Kossew addresses the more effective space opened by a particularly postcolonial form of intertextuality and intertextual reading. If a postcolonial intertextuality functions as to simply challenge already canonized texts, then Kossew warns that "the notion of complicity and the links between authorship and authority are thus necessarily inscribed within this process of writing back" (155). If critically accepted as simply "writing back," the liberatory nature of reading within an intertextual framework fails to recognize the liberatory gesture of such works. Kossew writes: "However, it seems to me that these readings fail to take into account the counter-discursive nature of the text, which, by offering different versions of the same story, emphasizes the danger of single readings" (161). It would appear that Coetzee agrees with such a hesitancy to embrace the practice of intertextuality as another way to simply establish authority by the postcolonial author. As evidenced by the seeming breakdown of such an intertextual investigation within *Elizabeth Costello*—particularly within the final section, "The Gate"—intertextuality, as potentially instrumental in the formation of meaning, remains a tool for the reader to use, and to varying degrees, each arguably indicative of a certain level of success in retaining the openedness of any text within the context of the reading present.

As a textual artifact, given its contextually significant provenance, *Elizabeth Costello* would appear to draw Coetzee in closer proximity to his narrative creation to a greater degree

than any of his earlier works. Yet, by highlighting the specific literary functions afforded by intertextuality in the formation of meaning in the reading present, Coetzee distances himself from simple association with Elizabeth Costello. However, such an explicit negation has left critics somewhat at odds with the political import of such a move. Dominic Head makes the following observation in response to *The Lives of Animals*: “Coetzee’s listeners (and readers) cannot know the extent to which Costello espouses the author’s [Coetzee’s] own views and this forces our attention through and beyond the literal content to a consideration of the metafictional frame” (235). The metafictional frame, both pronounced and pronouncing, hints at a larger feature of all narrative experience: each reading event—as it draws the historical past and the unnamed future into direct dialogue—potentially expresses an essential intertextuality in opening unbounded possibilities for the formation and challenging of meaning in the historical present. In this sense, all narrative, not simply narrative disseminated from the outposts of the former colonial powers, takes on an a prescient and powerful intertextuality, as it functions as a fundamental characteristic and (dis)ordering principle of the postcolonial present.

* * *

J. M. Coetzee’s Nobel Lecture, “He and His Man,” revisits many of the tensions of postcolonial authorship and authority examined, yet never resolved, within *Elizabeth Costello*. Piling level upon level of potential intertextual engagement, Coetzee delivers a lecture from the distance of third person narrative, though focalized through the perspective of Robinson Crusoe.⁸ Though rather simplified, a survey of such levels would include a consideration of the following points: 1) Robinson Crusoe as main character of *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe; 2) *Robinson Crusoe* as a seminal work of colonial literature; 3) Daniel Defoe as the author and authority

⁸ Though at time of this writing unavailable in print format, “He and His Man” is published in its entirety along with video of the lecture at the official webpage of the Swedish Academy: <<http://www.nobel.se/literature/laureates/2003/coetzee-lecture-e.html>>.

figure behind the novel *Robinson Crusoe*; 4) Daniel Defoe and Robinson Crusoe as characters within *Foe* by J. M. Coetzee; 5) *Foe* as an intertextual novel examining the ambiguities of authorship and authority by J. M. Coetzee as author; 6) J. M. Coetzee as postcolonial author and *Foe* as highly-acclaimed postcolonial novel; 7) Coetzee's ambivalence towards questions of authority and the position of the author in the real world; 8) Defoe's initial decision to remain anonymous, putting forth Robinson Crusoe as author of *Robinson Crusoe*; 9) Coetzee's Tanner Lectures, delivered in dialogue which revolved around a fictional Australian author, Elizabeth Costello; 10) the performance of such lectures by J. M. Coetzee; 11) *Elizabeth Costello*, as printed text, identifies Coetzee explicitly as author; 12) central to the narrative within *Elizabeth Costello* rests the problems of authorship; 13) 7) J. M. Coetzee receives Nobel Prize on his merit as author engaged with ethical and political concerns in the real world; 13) Coetzee delivers Nobel Lecture, which in responding to his role as author, returns to a fictional Robinson Crusoe grappling with the problem of authorship and authority, after having published his memoirs to great financial success, a text ascribed to the efforts of William Defoe in the real world. And, of course, more levels remain to probe, not to mention more connections between the levels enumerated above. The resulting lecture, though economic in its prose, challenges what should represent a rather straightforward authorial event upon closer examination. Yet, should any engagement in the critical present of reading function as a simple and predictable exchange of meaning between the text and the effective context within which the reading takes place? As Coetzee appears to draw marked attention to such a question, the insistence upon such a question functions as the answer. Or, perhaps Elizabeth Costello answers most appropriately in her statement before the board of inquiry in "At the Gate": "Yes. No, emphatically no. Yes and no. Both" (221).

Works Cited

- Allen, Graham. *Intertextuality*. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Amis, Martin. "Nothing is Deserved and Everything is Accepted." In *The War Against Cliché: Essays and Reviews, 1971-2000*. New York: Vintage, 2003: 399-402.
- Attwell, David. *J.M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993.
- Bakhtin, M. M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Trans. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001.
- Barthes, Roland. *The Pleasure of the Text*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1999.
- _____. "The Death of the Author." In *Image-Music-Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Noonday Press, 1977: 142-48.
- Bell, Maureen, et al. *Reconstructing the Book: Literary texts in transmission*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- _____. "Statement for the *Critical Inquiry* Symposium." *Critical Inquiry* 30:2 (Winter 2004): 342-349.
- Coetzee, J. M. *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*. Ed. David Attwell. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992.
- _____. *Elizabeth Costello*. New York: Viking, 2003.
- _____. "He and his man: Nobel Lecture." *Nobel e-Museum*. 11 December 2003. 13 February 2004 <<http://www.nobel.se/literature/laureates/2003/coetzee-lecture-e.html>>.
- _____. *The Lives of Animals*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 2001.

- Cohn, Dorrit. "I Doze and Wake: The Deviance of Simultaneous Narration." In *The Distinction of Fiction*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1999: 96-108.
- Cunningham, Valentine. *In the Reading Gaol: Postmodernity, Texts, and History*. London: Blackwell, 1994.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Durrant, Sam. *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning: J.M. Coetzee, Wilson Harris, and Toni Morrison*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2004.
- Eco, Umberto. "Entering the Woods." In *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995: 1-26.
- Freud, Sigmund. "Negation." In *The Freud Reader*. Ed. Peter Gay. New York: Norton, 1985: 666-69.
- Gallagher, Susan VanZanten. *A Story of South Africa: J.M. Coetzee's Fiction in Context*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1991.
- Gass, William H. "Representation and the Wart for Reality." In *Habitations of the Word*. New York: Columbia UP, 1997.
- Glen, Ian. "Nadine Gordimer, J. M. Coetzee, and the Politics of Interpretation." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 93:1 (Winter 1994): 11-32.
- Gordimer, Nadine. "References: The Codes of Culture." In *Living in Hope and History: Notes From Our Century*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999: 36-48.
- Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2001.

- Head, Dominic. "Coetzee and the Animals: The Quest for Postcolonial Grace." In *Empire and the Gothic: The Politics of Genre*. Eds. Andrew Smith and William Hughes. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003: 229-244.
- Jameson, Frederic. *Postmodernism: Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke UP, 1991.
- Kafka, Franz. "Before the Law." In *The Complete Stories*. Trans. Edwin and Willa Muir. New York: Schocken Books, 1993: 3-4.
- Klooss, Wolfgang. *Across the Lines: Intertextuality and Transcultural Communication in the New Literatures in English*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998.
- Kossew, Sue. *Pen and Power: A Post-Colonial Reading of J.M. Coetzee and Andre Brink*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: Rodopi, 1996.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Ed. Leon S. Roudiez. Trans. Thomas Gore, A. Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1980.
- _____. *Julia Kristeva: Interviews*. Ed. Ross Mitchell Guberman. New York: Columbia UP, 1996.
- _____. *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Trans. Margaret Waller. New York: Columbia UP, 1984.
- Lodge, David. "Disturbing the Peace." Review of *Elizabeth Costello* by J.M. Coetzee. *New York Review of Books* 50:18 (20 November 2003): 6-11.
- Lundén, Bo. *(Re)educating the Reader: Fictional Critiques of Poststructuralism in Banville's Dr. Copernicus, Coetzee's Foe, and Byatt's Possession*. Stockholm, Sweden: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1999.

- McGann, Jerome J. *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.
- _____. *The Textual Condition*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1991
- Miller, D. A. *The Novel and the Police*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988.
- Miller, J. Hillis. *On Literature*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Nooteboom, Cees. *The Following Story*. Trans. Ina Rilke. New York: Harvest, 1996.
- Orr, Mary. *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts*. New York: Polity Press, 2003.
- Parry, Benita. "Speech and Silence in the Fictions of J. M. Coetzee." In *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970-1995*. Eds. Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly. New York: Cambridge UP, 1998: 149-165.
- Penner, Dick. *Countries of the Mind: The Fiction of J.M. Coetzee*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1989.
- Riffaterre, Michael. *Fictional Truth*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990.
- Smith, Anne-Marie. *Julia Kristeva: Speaking the Unspeakable*. London: Pluto Press, 1998.

Selected Bibliography (Works by J.M. Coetzee)

- Coetzee, J.M. *Age of Iron*. New York: Penguin, 1998.
- _____. *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life*. New York: Penguin, 1998.
- _____. "Breytenbach and the Censor." *Raritan* 10:4 (Spring 1991): 58-84.
- _____. "Critic and Citizen: A Response." *Pretexts* 9:1 (July 2000): 109-11.
- _____. *Disgrace*. New York: Viking, 2000.
- _____. *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*. Ed. David Attwell. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1992.
- _____. *Dusklands*. New York: Penguin, 1985.
- _____. *Elizabeth Costello*. New York: Viking, 2003
- _____. *Foe*. New York: Penguin, 1988.
- _____. *Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.
- _____. "He and his man: Nobel Lecture." *Nobel e-Museum*. 11 December 2003. 13 February 2004 <<http://www.nobel.se/literature/laureates/2003/coetzee-lecture-e.html>>.
- _____. *In the Heart of the Country*. New York: Penguin, 1982.
- _____. Trans., Ed. *Landscape with Rowers: Poetry from the Netherlands*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003.
- _____. *Life and Times of Michael K*. New York: Penguin, 1995.
- _____. "Meat Country." *Granta* 52 (Winter 1995), 41-52.
- _____. *Stranger Shores: Literary Essays 1986-1999*. New York: Penguin, 2001.
- _____. *The Lives of Animals*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 2001.
- _____. *The Master of Petersburg*. New York: Penguin, 1995.

Selected Bibliography (Works by J.M. Coetzee)

- _____. *Waiting for the Barbarians*. New York: Penguin, 1999.
- _____. *What is Realism?: Lecture Nineteen in the Ben Belitt Lectureship Series*. Bennington, Vermont: Bennington College, 1997.
- _____. *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1988.
- _____. *Youth: Scenes from Provincial Life II*. New York: Penguin, 2003.
- Coetzee, J.M. and Andre Brink. Eds. *A Land Apart: A Contemporary South African Reader*. New York: Penguin, 1987.