

**Fiction Beyond Words: Late Style in J. M. Coetzee's Jesus
Trilogy**

Diana Mudura

PhD

**University of York
English and Related Literature
July 2022**

Abstract

This thesis looks at the paradoxical representation of non-verbal modes of communication in J. M. Coetzee's late works, focusing particularly on the trilogy formed by *The Childhood of Jesus* (2013), *The Schooldays of Jesus* (2016), and *The Death of Jesus* (2019). It uses the idea of the non-verbal as a reading strategy that enables the exploration of how characters communicate through music and dance, and with animals. Each chapter examines a specific dimension of language. Chapter 1 foregrounds an alternative form of language that echoes through the characters' mother tongue. In Chapter 2 the limits of what constitutes language are tested by Coetzee's imagining of a kind of human–animal communication that verges on the miraculous. Chapters 3 and 4 examine music and dance as aesthetic modes of intelligibility and communication. The aim of this engagement with Coetzee's use of language is to show that the trilogy reflects an existential dimension governed less strongly by the linguistic and more by a new connective tissue resulting from the subordination of ordinary language in favour of modes of communication that allow the reaching of a more fundamental experience of being in the world. These three novels epitomise Coetzee's experimentation with aesthetic, ethical, and affective experience that often resists verbalisation, while highlighting a form of pre-linguistic and pre-rational interconnectedness. The idea of the non-verbal is therefore crucial as a way of bringing to the forefront the underlying possibilities of communication and connection resulting from a conscious engagement with ordinary language and an inherent desire to transcend it that characterises Coetzee's late style.

List of Contents

Abstract	2
List of Contents	3
Acknowledgements	4
Author's Declaration	5
Introduction	6
Chapter 1: Language	35
Chapter 2: Animals	72
Chapter 3: Music	106
Chapter 4: Dance	142
Afterword	174
Bibliography	179

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Prof David Attwell for the excellent, patient, and careful guidance in this intellectually rewarding journey and for his unwavering belief in the project. I would also warmly wish to thank my co-supervisor Prof Claire Chambers for her excellent supervision and words of encouragement in challenging times. My thanks go to Prof Hugh Haughton for his astute reading of the project as a member of my thesis advisory panel, my examiners Dr Kai Easton and Dr Alice Hall, and Prof Derek Attridge for the intellectually stimulating conversation over coffee. I am profoundly grateful to my family for their generous support without which I would not be here. My heartfelt thanks to Vlad for always believing in me and for all the thought-provoking conversations about the project, to Andrei for being so encouraging and a great listener, and to Yannick for all the snacks and moral support. Finally, I want to thank my dear friend Dr Michela Borzaga for encouraging me to do this PhD.

Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author.

This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other,

University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

Introduction

One can think of a life in art, schematically, in two or perhaps three stages. In the first you find, or pose for yourself, a great question. In the second you labor away at answering it. And then, if you live long enough, you come to the third stage, when the aforesaid great question begins to bore you, and you need to look elsewhere. (Coetzee, *Here and Now*)

She tries a test that seems to work when she is writing: to send out a word into the darkness and listen for what kind of sound comes back. (Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*)

The aim of this project is to explore and give a name to the “elsewhere” evoked in this epigraph. Focusing particularly on the enigmatic Jesus novels, *The Childhood of Jesus* (2013), *The Schooldays of Jesus* (2016), and *The Death of Jesus* (2019), I want to create a critical pathway through the third stage of J. M. Coetzee’s oeuvre, which I will refer to as the late stage, in order to foreground the set of questions that the trilogy and late works raise. To explore these questions, I use the idea of non-verbal communication and connection by which I understand an expanded and extended view of language ungoverned by verbal speech which nevertheless makes social interaction possible. There is a paradox at the heart of my project, which nevertheless sits comfortably in the subjunctive life of fiction, and that is that Coetzee uses language to represent non-verbal communication. However, it is all the more crucial to examine the aesthetic possibilities that open up when non-verbal modes of interaction are foregrounded in Coetzee’s literary representations. Thinking through the idea of non-verbal language illuminates new forms of communication, ways of connection, and modes of being. My project demonstrates how the idea of non-verbal language

becomes a way to read and interpret the Jesus trilogy and to bring to the forefront the innovative aesthetic of Coetzee's late style.

The title of this project, *Fiction Beyond Words: Late Style in J. M. Coetzee's Jesus Trilogy*, emphasises the importance of the non-verbal, implied, and felt as experiences which often resist being discursively formalised. As Jarad Zimbler remarks in *J. M. Coetzee and the Politics of Style* (2014), "Coetzee's 'Australian' novels [by which he means the late works] have had to do, by and large, with features and factors beyond the word, phrase and sentence" (199).¹ This sense of linguistic detachment is also captured by Coetzee scholar Elleke Boehmer in whose view the late works seem "to strive towards some new awareness or alterity, some perception of a world now within and now beyond, which the reader must be fully centred in their reading to experience, and at the same time opened to wonder" ("Take Wing" 244). Indeed, as we will see, Coetzee's use of language in the late works, and more prominently so in the Jesus trilogy, suggests a sense of going beyond the words on the page, as if what is not said is more important than what is said. If, in keeping with Zimbler, Coetzee's late style can be characterised by "a certain striving against generic limits", then these boundaries also include the linguistic (199). The late works are therefore a body of fiction in which Coetzee strives to push at the limits of what can be expressed in language, specifically English, in an attempt to access new dimensions of experience that are residual.

This is the first critical study to examine the fictional representation of non-verbal communication in Coetzee's Jesus trilogy.² This thesis is also the first study

¹ For a further discussion on Coetzee's "Australianness" see writer Nam Le's "Who Gets to be Australian?". The full article can be viewed online:

<https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2019/04/30/who-gets-to-be-australian/>.

² There is one study by Liudmyla Harmash et al., "Nonverbal Means of Communication in Modern Literature: J. M. Coetzee's Novel "The Master of Petersburg"", which examines the idea of non-

that systematically analyses the idea of non-verbal language across the body of writing with the aim of foregrounding it as a defining feature of the late works and more specifically of the Jesus novels. The contextualisation of the Jesus trilogy in the oeuvre therefore accentuates the idiosyncrasies of Coetzee's latest fictional experiment. Scholarship in Coetzee studies has so far specifically focused on individual novels from the trilogy. For instance, Ileana Dimitriu has looked at questions of genre and form in "J. M. Coetzee's *The Schooldays of Jesus*: A Novel of Ideas?" (2016), while Patricia Álvarez Sánchez has interrogated the role of rationality in "The limits of reason in J. M. Coetzee's *The Schooldays of Jesus*" (2019). Jennifer Rutherford and Anthony Uhlmann's edited collection *J. M. Coetzee's The Childhood of Jesus: The Ethics of Ideas and Things* (2017) brings together philosophical, socio-political, intertextual, and stylistic concerns through its exploration of topics as varied as memory, mathematics, ethics, and late style. The other book of criticism that engages with the Jesus trilogy is Robert B. Pippin's *Metaphysical Exile: On J. M. Coetzee's Jesus Fictions* (2021). In his book, Pippin argues that the trilogy is illustrative of the human condition characterised by its exilic state whose nature is metaphysical. Throughout this project, I will be conversing with Pippin's ideas. However, in contradistinction to the philosophical stance which he adopts in relation to the trilogy, my thesis examines these novels as aesthetic experiments.

This project is premised on the critical concept of late style, alluded to in the epigraph by Coetzee as the third stage. The concept proves to be a productive notion for mapping continuities and breaks as well as new tendencies from the earlier work to the Jesus fictions. I draw on David Attwell's taxonomy of Coetzee's body of work,

verbal communication in *The Master of Petersburg*, focusing specifically on gestures as markers of emotional states, psychological insights, and means of characterisation.

featured in *J. M. Coetzee and the Life of Writing: Face to Face with Time* (2015), which facilitates recording the formal, aesthetic, ethical, philosophical, and thematic changes that have occurred in the oeuvre without simplifying the complexity of the writing. Attwell identifies three stages. The first stage comprises the first two novels, *Dusklands* (1974) and *In the Heart of the Country* (1977) and involves the posing of questions such as the legitimacy of the rational discourse of imperialism and its effects on human reciprocity. The second stage includes the works from *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) to *The Master of Petersburg* (1994) in which Coetzee seeks to answer the questions posed in the first stage as well as raise new ones. The third stage exhibits a turn to the self-reflection of writing, a tendency that, although present in the first two stages, does not constitute the main focus of the writing. This stage begins with *Disgrace* (1999) and, adding to Attwell's taxonomy, ends with the Jesus novels (Attwell 233-34). In choosing to write about Coetzee's late works, I am aware that the critical concept of "late style" contains the potential danger of reducing the complexity of his writing to a dry list of specific features or of presuming rather wishfully that these texts disclose a set of profound truths which can be interpreted as Coetzee's final statements. Far from understanding late style as a universal aesthetic category, I deploy the term reflexively, analysing Coetzee's individual and idiosyncratic lateness as it emerges from the works published after *Disgrace*.

This thesis addresses the developmental features specific to the texts published after *Disgrace* in which I detect new formal, thematic, affective, and linguistic innovations.³ The signs of a transition to a late mode of writing begin with *Disgrace*,

³ In *J. M. Coetzee and the Archive: Fiction, Theory, and Autobiography* (2021), Kai Easton, Marc Farrant, and Hermann Wittenberg outline three sets of questions that emerge from the archive, the third of which relates to the intermediality of Coetzee's fiction that extends the authorship "beyond the prose forms for which he has received public recognition" (5). The transposition into writing of non-verbal modes of expression and communication is thus in keeping with Coetzee's interest in intermediality.

where Coetzee brings the arts to the forefront more explicitly as ways of communicating in themselves. For instance, *Disgrace* abounds in direct references to artistic media such as music, dance, and film which aid intersubjective communication. The dance film by Norman McLaren, *Pas de Deux* (1968), that David Lurie shows his student, Melanie Isaacs, functions as a mode of seduction meant to bridge the gap between their respective cultural and philosophical affiliations which hinder communication.⁴ Despite the fictional experimentation with other arts in *Disgrace*, notably opera, at the time of composition, Coetzee was still committed to a conventionally realist mode of writing that focused more on plot than formal self-reflexivity. The publication of *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), though, reveals a writer who has not made peace with realism but who reinterrogates it in the opening lecture-chapter of the novel simply titled “Realism”, which I will explore in more depth in Chapter 1. *Elizabeth Costello* together with *The Lives of Animals* (1999) announce an affective sensibility toward non-human beings. The growing interest in second order questions and the challenging of realism as a mode of writing reaches a peak in *Slow Man* (2005). This novel is essentially about migration and starts in a conventional realist way, although it becomes highly metafictional when the character Elizabeth Costello enters the story, claiming ownership of Paul Rayment, the protagonist. That such a metafictional impulse asserts itself is an indication of Coetzee’s impatience with realist conventions and his need to look elsewhere. *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007) reveals Coetzee’s formal self-consciousness reasserting itself through the experimentation with the layering of the story in different sections. Drawing on these

⁴ Another attempt to bridge the communicative gap, this time, between centuries, is made in *Summertime* where Coetzee ironises his younger self, John, who tries to convince his mistress, Sophie Denoël, that feeling the music of a different century through one’s body allows access to that particular worldview. In other words, John suggests that music can effect a kind of communication with another century.

examples, these works pave the way to what constitutes a new phenomenon in Coetzee's oeuvre that manifests in a different engagement with the conditions governing the writing of fiction and the limits of representation, and a renewed interest in ordinary language as a medium that is not transparent.⁵ The arts, non-verbal communication, and different forms of connection and attachment appear in the late works and more prominently so in the Jesus novels.

Increasingly substantial scholarly attention has been paid to the question of late style in Coetzee's body of work. Hermann Wittenberg is among the first Coetzee scholars to address the topic in "Late Style in J. M. Coetzee's *Diary of a Bad Year*" (2010). In the essay, Wittenberg analyses formal, conceptual, and stylistic techniques in *Diary* and argues that the novel exhibits narrative minimalism, caused by the sketchiness of the prose and characterisation techniques, overt political commentary, and a rich implicature of the prose. These characteristics lead Wittenberg to argue that *Diary* represents an instance of Saidean late style by which he means that the text is characterised by "intransigence, difficulty, and unresolved contradiction" (Said 7). Indeed, he continues, *Diary* challenges "our assumptions about the novel form itself", encouraging readers to engage with the text as a "split-screen novel" (Wittenberg 44). The careful analysis of formal features and stylistic techniques reveals how the texture of the prose has significantly changed from early works, such as *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), to the novel under critical scrutiny. While the early fiction can be characterised by its "richness of description and a full-texturedness of characterization", he observes that the late works exhibit "stylistic simplification" whereby "that which really matters is that which is not described" (Wittenberg 47, 48).

⁵ I am aware of ordinary language philosophy as a long-standing tradition, represented by leading figures such as J. L. Austin and Stanley Cavell, although my use of the notion of "ordinary language" is as a reference to common sense uses and expressions of language.

Utilising *Diary* in order to make larger statements about Coetzee's late style, Wittenberg identifies descriptive sparseness as a trademark of the late works. To a certain extent, my project follows a similar structure to Wittenberg's analysis in that it also examines questions of form, content, and style in Coetzee's late novels, but it takes the Jesus trilogy as its main case study. In addition, my study also aligns itself with Wittenberg's observation about the implicature of the prose though it differs in that it uses the idea of the non-verbal in order to unearth new meanings.

Yoshiki Tajiri also takes up the question of late style in "Beyond the Literary Theme Park: J. M. Coetzee's Late Style in *The Childhood of Jesus*" (2017). Borrowing the idea of the literary theme park from *Elizabeth Costello*, Tajiri uses it to argue that, on the one hand, in *Childhood* Coetzee recycles common literary themes and styles of important literary figures such as Kafka, Don Quixote, scatology and utopia. On the other hand, *Childhood* reflects Coetzee's return to common themes in his own fiction, which Tajiri calls the Coetzee museum, most notably themes such as parenthood, disability, the unknowability of the other, and the contingency of existence. Tajiri aligns his Saidean understanding of Coetzee's late style with Wittenberg in the sense that the elements, ideas, and themes exist without a seemingly clear connection to the rest of the work. This, Tajiri argues, contributes to a sense of flatness in *Childhood* caused by a more schematic engagement with ideas, themes, and motifs at the level of representation. I agree with Tajiri when he contends that there is a sense of flatness, compositional looseness, and unadorned language in *Childhood*. However, I choose to read this minimalist quality of the writing as Coetzee's oeuvre seeking to move into new fictional, formal, and representational territory that allows more space for the foregrounding of non-verbal connection and communication. My project thus pushes

this idea further by arguing that this quality of the writing is what gives the Jesus novels a sense of striving to get beyond language.

The term “late style” belongs to Theodor Adorno, who first introduced it in his famous “Spätstil Beethovens” (Late Style in Beethoven) (1934). In his essay, Adorno argues that what characterises the late works of artists is a “lack [of] all the harmony” due to the occurrence of sudden breaks, and the presence of “traces of history rather than growth” which renders them as process rather than development (Adorno 564). As he observes, in Beethoven’s late style, there are conventional formulae “scattered about” which fragment the unity of the work through their impossibility of being synthesised (Adorno 565). In the posthumously published collection that comprises Adorno’s notes and fragments on the German composer’s relationship to his society, *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music* (1998), Adorno states that Beethoven’s late style is about pure music, “the bare language of music, purified of all individual expression” (154). Put differently, late style implies that music is stripped of any inflections that would determine its belonging to a particular formal tradition. Essentially, Adorno is concerned with the function of convention in late works of art which, he argues, becomes a means of expression in the absent presence of subjectivity. For Adorno, subjectivity in an artist’s late works is

the irascible gesture with which it takes leave of the works themselves. It breaks their bonds, not in order to express itself, but in order, expressionless, to cast off the appearance of art. Of the works themselves it leaves only fragments behind, and communicates itself [...] only through the blank spaces from which it has disengaged itself. (566)

Adorno thus contends that subjectivity creates form instead of breaking through it in order to reveal authorial presence. He dismisses the conventional view that the

substance of late style is mortal subjectivity, arguing instead that a technical analysis reveals traces of the presence of lateness in an artist's work.

The complete absence of metaphysical meaning in Adorno's understanding of late style, which translates as the denial of death's looming presence as an element affecting the creative process, is observed by Edward Said, also a theorist of "late style", in his posthumously published work, *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (2009). Lateness, in Said's less radical understanding, is not instigated by death, but deepened. As a result, as artists approach the end of their lives, their work acquires "a new idiom, what I shall be calling a late style" (Said 6). This new idiom, characterised by intransigence and irreconcilability, is the result of an artist developing a different relationship to the world and a new understanding of his place in it. In the case of Beethoven, whom Said also looks at as he responds to Adorno, the German composer "abandons communication with the established social order of which he was part and achieves a contradictory, alienated relationship with it" (Said 8). Hence, Beethoven's late work has "an episodic character, its apparent disregard for its own continuity" which consequently gives the impression of incompleteness (6). Furthermore, these works are "beyond their own time, ahead of it in terms of daring and starting newness, later than it in that they describe a return or homecoming to realms forgotten or left behind by the relentless advancement of history" (97). To Said, late style represents a creative space which artists inhabit as a result of their refusal to conform to the specific aesthetic conventions governing the creative process.

Coetzee's own observations on late style seem to draw on both Adorno and Said's understanding of the concept. In a letter to Paul Auster in *Here and Now: Letters, 2008-2011* (2013), Coetzee reflects on the concept of late style, adopting a position that challenges Said's take on the subject (97). He writes, partly echoing

Adorno's observation about the purity of Beethoven's music in the late stage of composition, that "late style, to me, starts with an ideal of a simple, subdued, unornamented language and a concentration on questions of real import, even questions of life and death" (Coetzee, *Here and Now* 97).⁶ Nonetheless, Coetzee acknowledges the autonomy and authority of the writing process when he continues by stating that "the writing itself takes over and leads you where it will. What you end up with may be anything but simple, anything but subdued" (Coetzee, *HN* 97). In the episode "Migrant Being in the Jesus Novels" (2022) of Attwell's podcast, *Full Particulars*, Attwell raises the question of late style in relation to the Jesus novels in a conversation with Pippin and two other Coetzee scholars, Derek Attridge and Elleke Boehmer.⁷ While Pippin confirms that Coetzee is exploring second order questions, or "questions of real import" in the Jesus novels, Attridge expands this point by stating that these novels are "late" in the sense that Coetzee is less concerned with adhering closely to realist conventions, and submitting himself to the labour that that entails. Instead, Attridge argues, the novelist is by this stage of his career more interested in focusing on a deeper set of questions whose nature is ethical.

Coetzee is a writer who is well-versed in identifying signs of lateness in other artists, and his collection of essays, *Late Essays: 2006-2017* (2017), which examines the late works of writers such as Daniel Defoe, Heinrich von Kleist, and Robert Walser, attests to the fact. Yet he is also self-conscious about potential signs of lateness in his own writing. One of the texts that deals with late style at length is *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007). This novel exhibits signs of fragmentation through its unique formal

⁶ Henceforth referenced as *HN*.

⁷ The full episode can be viewed online: <https://www.litnet.co.za/full-particulars-podcast-migrant-being-in-the-jesus-novels/>.

innovation, whereby the text on the page is split into three separately demarcated sections, as well as an impatience with the novelistic form:

A novel? No. I don't have the endurance any more. To write a novel you have to be like Atlas, holding up a whole world on your shoulders and supporting it there for months and years while its affairs work themselves out. It is too much for me as I am today. (Coetzee, *DBY* 54)

The passage announces a transition to a schematic mode of writing, echoing Attridge's point about Coetzee paying less attention to the rules of realism. As Señor C, the protagonist of *Diary* explains, there are two ways to interpret this phenomenon. From the perspective of the reader, the schematisation of plot, character, and narrative techniques potentially gives the impression of fragmentation, which is attributed to the waning powers of the writer. From the perspective of the author, however, this can be seen as "a liberation, a clearing of the mind to take on more important tasks" (Coetzee, *DBY* 193). As an example of an author who experienced an alleged attenuation of creative force Señor C refers to Leo Tolstoy, a master of realism, who suffered a "decline into didacticism that culminated in the aridity of the late short fiction" (Coetzee, *DBY* 193). However, Señor C contends that Tolstoy would have perceived this decline differently, as "ridding himself of the shackles that had enslaved him to appearances, enabling him to face directly the one question that truly engaged his soul: how to live" (Coetzee, *DBY* 193). The remark encapsulates the points Coetzee makes in the letter to Auster about unornamented language, indicated by the aridity of Tolstoy's prose, and the focus on important existential questions such as that of "How to live?".

Attwell's *J. M. Coetzee and the Life of Writing*, a seminal archival study that carefully documents Coetzee's authorship, sheds light on the creative process behind

the writing. The manuscripts of *Diary* reveal quite a strong authorial presence behind the opinions of Señor C. Contrasting his writerly evolution with Tolstoy's, Coetzee acknowledges experiential differences, yet admits to the schematisation of his own writing style when he confesses to have "certainly lost for ever the simple urge to represent" (Attwell 236). The result is what Coetzee refers to in the typescript drafts as a "perfunctoriness" to his writing: "Readers who come to my recent books looking for the kind of pleasure that one can legitimately expect from the novel, and that one perhaps gets from a book like *Michael K*, find them thin and artificial, and who can blame them?" (qtd. in Attwell 236). In light of these observations and given that Coetzee reflects on the question of late style not only in his non-fiction but in his fictional work as well suggests that the subject deeply preoccupies him to the degree that it becomes an aesthetic as well as an existential concern.

The transition to a late mode of writing is the result of his having exhausted a set of questions that persistently feature in the early works. Some of these questions are connected with power, colonialism, and apartheid, with their ethical, socio-political, and physical implications. For instance, *Dusklands* (1974) explores the violent effects of colonisation while critiquing Western rationalist discourse. *In the Heart of the Country* (1977) concerns itself with settler-colonialism and its consequences for interracial relationships and subjectivity. *Waiting for the Barbarians* explores the effects of violence on human interaction. *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983) similarly takes up the question of meaning through the protagonist K, who evades institutionalized meanings, resembling the Derridean trace whereby meaning continually recedes. *Foe* (1986) interrogates the ethics of authorship from the perspective of postcoloniality. I agree with Attwell when he points out in *J. M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing* (1993) that these novels challenge

“the authority of the colonial legacy and the forms of ideology that obscured its destructiveness” (118). The fictional works published after *Disgrace*, however, rid themselves of the heavy burden of colonial history (and Coetzee himself in *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews* (1992) has suggested, quoting Stephen Dedalus, that “[h]istory is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake” (67)) in order to focus on new sets of questions, modes of representation, formal devices, and a different engagement with language.⁸

In *Politics of Writing* (1993) Attwell observes that the early fictions show Coetzee working “on the experimental fringes of his genre”, leaning “toward a reflexive examination of the constitutive role of language in placing the subject within history” (3). An example that illustrates Attwell’s point is *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), a text in which Coetzee self-consciously experiments with signs, hidden meanings, and questions of form through the poplar slips that the magistrate tries to decipher. In addition, the manuscripts of *Waiting for the Barbarians* show that Coetzee himself understood the text as one in which “meaning is continually held back” (qtd. in Attwell 128). While Coetzee’s late writing maintains the experimentalist quality seen in works such as *In the Heart of the Country*, there are changes at the level of representation and the author’s use of ordinary language. Demotic diction is deployed as a way of accessing new epistemic frames in his fictional representations.

My project aligns itself with Julian Murphet’s call for the need to develop new critical frameworks through which to read Coetzee’s late works, as argued in

⁸ In the Author’s Note to *The Good Story* (2015), Coetzee and Arabella Kurtz write about a shared interest that a writer and a psychotherapist have in human nature and human experience, and how language serves as the medium through which their interest is conveyed. When ordinary language is not enough, the writer and psychotherapist need to develop ways of “finding or inventing linguistic and narrative structures within which to contain experience, and with the outer limits of experience” (Coetzee and Kurtz viii).

“Lateness and the Detours of Globalization” (2011).⁹ This need is the result of the critical habit of approaching Coetzee’s texts via what has become the dominant mode of reading his works, namely through a postcolonial lens.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Coetzee’s emigration to Australia and his having received the Nobel Prize have “disoriented a generation’s worth of critical investment in Coetzee” (Murphet 3). These changes propelled Coetzee’s creative work into a new space that the scholarship must now address. The formal challenge that the post-*Disgrace* works also pose is an invitation “to think critically with the times in order to produce knowledge otherwise invisible and unintelligible; the knowledge lodged in the paradoxical existential interplay of sensations and concepts” (“Lateness” 4).¹¹ Murphet here touches on an idea that Coetzee remarked on in another letter to Paul Auster from *Here and Now* that “[s]omething happened, it seems to me, in the late 1970s or early 1980s as a result of which the arts yielded up their leading role in our inner life” (Coetzee, *HN* 98). Building on Murphet’s argument that Coetzee continues to respond to the challenges that history throws at him in creative ways in the late phase of writing, the approach my project takes – looking at the fictional representation of non-verbal forms of communication and connection – partly fills the gap in the critical corpus on Coetzee’s late works that Murphet points out. The project enquires into and gives shape to the

⁹ In “Why We Love Coetzee; or, *The Childhood of Jesus* and the Funhouse of Critique” (2017), Elizabeth S. Anker similarly stresses the need to develop new modes of reading Coetzee’s work and narrows her focus on *Childhood* which raises the question of how to approach, read, and interpret it.

¹⁰ In the introduction to *J. M. Coetzee and the Archive*, Kai Easton, Marc Farrant, and Hermann Wittenberg write that Coetzee scholarship has “for the most part been influenced by the theoretical paradigms of post-structuralism and postcolonial studies” (4).

¹¹ Murphet pushes his argument further by arguing that Coetzee’s late writing, which experiments with the novel form, is symptomatic of a crisis in the history of the contemporary novel (4). As we will see shortly, Rebecca Walkowitz in *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature* (2015) similarly refers to one of Coetzee’s late works, *The Childhood of Jesus*, which, she argues, reflects the novel in crisis. While Murphet seems to overlook the experimental quality of the early works, such as *In the Heart of the Country*, which is a creative manual in itself, I acknowledge a continuity in the oeuvre but also a break in the late works in terms of Coetzee’s interest in aesthetic and ethical modes of intelligibility.

invisible or better yet implied knowledge in Coetzee's fictionalisation of the arts and of human–animal communication. I want to look at new forms of being, knowing, communicating, and connecting in the oeuvre that come to the forefront through the representation of non-verbal languages of communication, including aesthetic modes of intelligibility.

As a writer, Coetzee has always been linguistically self-conscious, aware of the nature of his creative medium with its intrinsic possibilities and limitations. In fact he has built this linguistic self-consciousness into his career both as a writer and academic. Before seriously committing himself to creative writing, he studied stylistics as part of a PhD programme which examined the English fiction of Samuel Beckett at the University of Texas at Austin in the United States. The dissertation was titled *The English Fiction of Samuel Beckett: An Essay in Stylistic Analysis* and was published in 1969. Apart from Beckett's style, what also interested Coetzee was Beckett's "unbroken concern with rationality, that string of leading men savagely or crazily pushing reason beyond its limits" (DP 26). The critique of rationality is indeed a consistent feature of Coetzee's fiction, beginning with the highly rationalist Eugene Dawn in *Dusklands* and continuing all the way through to the gentle ironising of Simón in the Jesus trilogy. Coetzee takes up the question of rationality in his fictional writing and prominently so in *Elizabeth Costello*, where the eponymous hero introduces a new way of understanding reason. To her, reason is not an all-encompassing mode through which to engage with the reality of experience. Instead, reason seems to be "like the being of one tendency in human thought. Reason is the being of a certain spectrum of human thinking" (Coetzee, EC 67). Costello's thoughts open up the possibility that thinking need not follow a rational, structural, linear, or mathematical process, but that there are other modes of thinking and responding to the

world. Indeed, in an interview with writer and academic Raquel Serur held at Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), Coetzee confirms this idea when he points out that Elizabeth Costello adopts a stance in relation to a problem such as animals that is not rational but empathetic.¹² In the trilogy, Coetzee explores the complexity of human thinking by turning to the arts, which represent aesthetic modes of thinking. His vehicle for this discussion is the little boy, David, whose response to the world is not primarily rational, as Simón would like, but aesthetic and ethical.

The anti-rationalist emphasis is tied to the question of language which forms the core of Coetzee's interest. Such an interest was amplified during his time in Texas at Austin where he familiarised himself with the Russian formalism of Roman Jakobson, the linguistic poststructuralism of Émile Benveniste, the later Roland Barthes, and Jacques Derrida, and the Chomskian revolution in generative-transformational grammar. To the extent that his wide reading of these scholars influenced his thinking, Coetzee states that their ideas enabled him "to see the effects I was undergoing with a degree of consciousness" (*DP* 25). In other words, being immersed in modern linguistics meant that Coetzee grew highly aware of language as a medium that is not transparent but filters knowledge and experience and determines the way one engages with and translates reality.

In "The Novel Today" (1988), Coetzee emphasised the epistemology of form. In this short piece, he criticised the intellectual climate of 1980s South Africa, condemning the prescriptive and restrictive rules imposed on fiction, which was expected to mirror society, and, in the then-present context, be a supplement to history.

¹² View the full interview on the website: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KowFc34iqcs&t=1207s>.

The argument targeted certain kinds of fiction which engaged with the historical context, in particular the Lukácsian framework developed by Stephen Clingman in *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer* (1986), subtitled “History from the Inside”. Rather than allow itself to be subsumed by the oppressive force of history, Coetzee emphasised the necessity of fiction to demythologise history. Only in this way would fiction maintain its autonomy and authority. What he envisioned was

[a] novel that operates in terms of its own procedures and issues in its own conclusions, not one that operates in terms of the procedures of history and eventuates in conclusions that are checked by history [...] In particular I mean a novel that evolves its own paradigms and myths. (Coetzee, “Novel Today” 3)

The passage indicates a striving to liberate the novel form from the constraints of politico-historical judgement. The metaphor which he used to capture fiction’s autonomous state was the cockroach.¹³ Like cockroaches, fiction, or storytelling, has existed from primitive times and is likely to continue to exist even after the current phase of history is over (4). Despite being liable to colonisation, consumption, and destruction, fiction is ineradicable. Similar to history, which is a kind of discourse whose constructed categories are cast upon reality and held together through mutual agreement, fiction is also a type of discourse that represents “*another, an other mode of thinking*” (4; emphasis added). That is to say, fiction represents a way of thinking and responding to the world.

¹³ I am aware that the cockroach as a metaphor has violent, racist overtones, however my understanding of Coetzee’s use of the term in this specific context is as a means of highlighting the ineradicable nature of fiction.

An experimentation with the limits of language has always interested Coetzee and his linguistically informed immersion gave him better insight into the art of fiction writing. In *Doubling the Point*, the linguist in Coetzee makes an observation with regard to Franz Kafka's writing. He writes that Kafka opened up new dimensions in the texture of reality. Having mastered the temporal structure of the German language, Coetzee notices that Kafka had "an intuition of an alternative time, a time cutting through the quotidian" which could not, however, be formalised in English or German (DP 198). In Kafka's writing, Coetzee detects "a pressure of writing that [...] pushes at the limits of language, and specifically of German" (DP 198). Kafka's style revealed for Coetzee that "it is possible, for snatches, however brief, to think outside one's own language, perhaps to report back on what it is like to think outside language itself. [...] What is interesting is the liberating possibility Kafka opens up" (DP 198-99). In keeping with Attwell's observation, Coetzee similarly operates on the margins of English, an experimentation that culminates in the Jesus trilogy in his frequent echoing of a Spanish syntax that strips English from its colloquial versions.

Coetzee's formalist self-consciousness has led him to experiment with other artistic media in his fiction. While his early work is highly experimental, featuring the juxtaposition of planes of discourse in *Dusklands*, numbered paragraphs and narrative techniques inspired by cinematography in *Heart of the Country*, and double narration in *Michael K*, Coetzee brings this experimentalism with art to the forefront in the late fiction in which he is interested in the possibilities of thinking in mediums other than ordinary language. Coetzee has previously touched on the idea that there may be other forms of thinking accessible to the subject in *Elizabeth Costello* where the eponymous hero mentions the case of Srinivasa Ramanujan, whom she refers to as "the greatest intuitive mathematician of our time", who was also "a self-taught man who thought in

mathematics” (Coetzee, *EC* 68). As we will shortly see, the Jesus trilogy in particular develops music and dance into epistemologies in themselves or what Coetzee referred to in “The Novel Today” as other modes of thinking. These alternative forms of thought indicate Coetzee’s endeavours to seek ways to capture the complexity of human thinking in novelistic form by branching into other art forms such as music, dance, photography, and film to revolutionise the novel form from within. He therefore expands the possibilities of what can be said, showing that there are modes of thinking that cannot be accurately expressed in language. These modes are what I refer to as non-verbal.

The idea of non-verbal forms of communication features in the early works as well. Friday’s creative self-expression through dance and the scattering of petals in *Foe* (1986) and K’s gardening in *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983), paired up with their inability or reluctance to speak using the existing cultural codes made available by their society foreground a different mode of being in the world that sidelines the importance of language as a system of reference used to capture the reality of experience and one’s subjectivity. This idea enters new fictional terrain in the Jesus trilogy, where even the Spanish that characters use to understand one another and verbally express an alternative mode of being is undermined when these characters must acquire it forcefully as a new mother tongue.¹⁴

Epiphanic moments of human–animal connection that bring about ethical change feature episodically in Coetzee’s early works. These include novels such as

¹⁴ Coetzee’s sceptical and interrogative representation of one’s relationship to the mother tongue is symptomatic of what Yasemin Yildiz in *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition* (2011) calls the monolingual paradigm which has eclipsed the initial commonality of the multilingual paradigm. With its emphasis on the idea that the subject has one “true” mother tongue, the monolingualism, Yildiz argues, is a “key structuring principle that organises the entire range of modern social life” (2). To a certain extent, Chapter 1 sheds light on how Coetzee’s trilogy plays into that sensibility.

Waiting for the Barbarians (1980), which features the magistrate's encounter with an animal, *Life and Times of Michael K* where K's reluctant killing of a ram leads to his turn to vegetarianism, and *Age of Iron* (1990), in which the representation of the relationship between Vercueil and a stray puppy introduces an affective and ethically charged strand into the story. The late works, notably *The Lives of Animals* (1999), *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), and *Disgrace* (1999), create an encompassing fictional space for animals to inhabit while using that locale to raise ethical, philosophical, and affective questions.¹⁵ These works are in search of an answer to the question of whether a connection with animals is possible and what that might look like in literary terms, and the Jesus trilogy is Coetzee's most elaborate fictional undertaking that imagines what this connection between human and animal beings might be represented. The trilogy offers an in-depth fictional exploration of commonality through its representation of the dog, Bolívar, for example, as a valued family member whose presence spans all three volumes and who often reciprocates communication with human beings, albeit not through words. By bringing to the forefront moments of non-verbal communication, Coetzee develops a new ecology of being characterised by a kind of language common to all living beings, yet one that, instead of privileging rationality, is concerned with a more fundamental experience of being in the world.

¹⁵ One of the most prominent themes which Coetzee explores in the late works is animal suffering. In the manuscript to *The Lives of Animals*, Coetzee interrogates the cultural habits that cushion a society from the brutality of witnessing animal suffering. He writes that “[s]cenes of sadistic violence [...] can be borne only in a cushioned (aestheticized) environment. Against whoever brings them naked into the open, mechanisms of exclusion come into play” (Coetzee Papers, Notebook, *The Lives of Animals*, 28 May 1996 qtd. in Attwell 217). The trilogy, too, takes up the question of animal suffering in scenes such as the one I explore in Chapter 2, which features the attack of a duck family by a group of rebellious children, alongside questions linked to vegetarianism, animal soul life, and the role of animals in society. Nevertheless, in the Jesus novels Coetzee also introduces the possibility of a communicative channel with animals, more specifically with the dog Bolívar, which has the effect of fleshing out more fully the animal as a character.

In a different essay from the same collection, “Coetzee and Late Style: Exile Within Form” (2011), Murphet argues that the late works represent “a literature of leave-taking, a trilogy of novels [*Elizabeth Costello*, *Diary of a Bad Year*, *Slow Man*] in flight from homeland, from the body, from the very comforts of the novelistic form”; they are “a literature touched by death, and intimately so” (86); and they constitute a “trilogy of exile” – an idea that Pippin also uses to ground his argument in *Metaphysical Exile* (94). As Murphet argues, this exilic condition results from tensions within the novel form. While transcendent immanence characterised the early works, transcendence recedes from the late works being substituted by immanence. This absence casts the late works the impression of fragmentation and intransigence, undermining a smooth integration of ideas and giving the late texts the appearance of “novels of ideas” (Murphet 95).

In Coetzee’s formal withdrawal or narrative minimalism, I detect a new, or different sense of openness to and even playfulness with the novel form. Coetzee previously referred to the ethics behind fiction writing in *Doubling the Point* where he writes that “[t]he *feel* of writing fiction is one of freedom, of irresponsibility, or better, of responsibility toward something that has not yet emerged, that lies somewhere at the end of the road [...] Where I do my liberating, my playing with possibilities, is in my fiction” (246; emphasis in original).¹⁶ One of the ways in which he experiments with possibilities in the late works, and specifically the trilogy, is by imagining a story

¹⁶ One of the foci of Emilie Cameron in “New geographies of story and storytelling” (2012) is the scrutiny of the renewed interest in (post)phenomenological approaches to story and storytelling which foreground new affective, experiential, and non-representational geographies. She challenges common understandings of story as representation and, by drawing on critics such as Mitch Rose and Kathleen Stewart, rethinks story and storytelling in similar terms to Coetzee, namely as “a form of play with possibilities” (585). Following Rose’s lead, Cameron states that rather than depicting an external reality or pursuing conventional argumentative avenues to persuade the reader, stories are “*orientations* and *inclinations* that draw us places”; their aim is “to gesture, orient, and to *move*” (584-85; emphasis in original).

universe in which characters' memories have been wiped clean and where, despite having lost their sense of historicity, they must adapt to their new social and cultural environment and learn a new mother tongue, allegedly from scratch. There is a ludic quality in Coetzee's refusal to give explanations as to why this is the case – what happened to these characters before their arrival to this new land, what is their life story, why are they there, what languages they spoke – and in his subsequent invitation to the reader to make a pact, what Elizabeth Costello also refers to as “a simple bridging problem” and agree that some of the narrative detail might not duly correspond to reality (Coetzee, *EC* 1). More than the playfulness of the fiction, the late phase is characterised by Coetzee's experimentation with the fictionality of fiction.

That Coetzee has always been sceptical of language as a referential system, wary of the instability of the verbal sign and the fluidity of meanings suggests the prevailing influence of modernism on his writing. In “Homage” (1993), Coetzee pays tribute to a lineage of “literary paternity”, who represent “some of the writers without whom I would not be the person I am” and who have “taught me to hear, feel, write” (Coetzee 5, 7). What he admires most in the writers that he mentions is their ability to push at the limits of what can be said and thought in language through their idiosyncratic style (5). (This is not unlike what Coetzee admires in Kafka, as seen earlier.) Most of the examples he provides are of modernist writers such as Rainer Maria Rilke, Robert Musil, William Faulkner, Ezra Pound, Samuel Beckett, and Herbert Zbigniew.¹⁷ Nevertheless, Coetzee's sympathies lie with the German poets, “who really rooted themselves in me”, and from whom he singles out “above all” Rilke (“Homage” 5). In Rilke's poetry, Coetzee detects “a certain intensity and inwardness,

¹⁷ For instance, the lesson Coetzee learnt from Samuel Beckett is that of “finding a form for the movements of the mind” (6).

qualities I could swear I heard in the German itself: images, insights [...], being pushed to what one thought was their limit and then beyond that limit into a space of what I can only call magisterial freedom” (“Homage” 5). Furthermore, Rilke’s poetry “stretched the limits of the possible and thus seemed to say [...] that the possible really had no limits, that anything and everything could be said” (Coetzee, “Homage” 5). The fascination with the linguistic achievement of pushing at the limits of German thus energising it from within – a quality of writing he found in Rilke and in Kafka – Coetzee identified in the Swiss modernist writer Robert Walser who also wrote in German.

From early on in his career Coetzee had been interested in Robert Walser’s writings – an interest that manifested in the form of several reviews published on the Swiss author. In 2000, Coetzee published “The Genius of Robert Walser”, a substantial piece for *The New York Review of Books* which primarily focused on Walser’s novel, *Jakob von Gunten* (1909).¹⁸ In this piece, Coetzee writes not only about the historical Robert Walser, but also minutely analyses the quality of the prose in *Jakob* and *The Robber* (1925). The review was republished with minor changes in the essay collection *Inner Workings: Literary Essays, 2000-2005* (2007). Interestingly, in *Late Essays, 2006-2017* (2018), he briefly returns to the review as part of a larger analysis of Walser’s *The Assistant* (1936), though the text exhibits signs of fragmentation. The thread running through all these reviews is the fascination with the innovative, imaginative, formal, and linguistic possibilities that Walser’s work brought to literary modernism. Coetzee describes *Jakob* as “wildly inventive and radically subversive”, capturing a cutting-edge quality in Walser’s writing (“*The*

¹⁸ View the full review online: <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2000/11/02/the-genius-of-robert-walser/>.

Assistant” 97). Abandoning a logical narrative sequence, Walser adopted a creative, belletristic style whose driving force was a cumulation of “moods, fancies, and associations” (Coetzee *Inner Workings* 23). More generally, in *Late Essays*, Coetzee revisits Walser’s style, praising the Swiss author’s “lucid syntactic layout, its casual juxtapositions of the elevated with the banal, and its eerily convincing logic of paradox” (103). Coetzee’s indebtedness to Walser could be read as an indebtedness to the modernist tradition to whose sensibility Coetzee’s late work significantly contributes. I read Walser as representing a crucial point of departure for Coetzee in terms of the freedom of experimentation with alternative modes of communication and ways of being, and of the exploration of how modernism shaped ideas of dance, the body, and aesthetics.

The idea for the present study arose from my reading of Daniel Heller-Roazen’s *Echolalias: On the Forgetting of Language* (2005).¹⁹ In this book the Canadian critic and translator interrogates the nature of language in general and that of the mother tongue in particular, which in his case is English.²⁰ Instead of an understanding of the mother tongue as limiting, Heller-Roazen sees it as enabling in the sense that it prompts knowledge formation.²¹ More specifically, Heller-Roazen examines the curious phenomenon of language remembrance and loss, surveying classical,

¹⁹ The full talk can be accessed online: <https://soundcloud.com/babel-festival/daniel-heller-roazen>.

²⁰ Currently the Arthur W. Marks ‘19 Professor of Comparative Literature at Princeton University, Heller-Roazen’s research interests span medieval and modern literature and philosophy, with an emphasis on the philosophy of language. A book that deals with language loss, *Echolalias* holds a comfortable position in a series of publications on topics related to language phenomena such as the invention of new idioms within language in *Dark Tongues: The Art of Rogues and Riddlers* (2013) and the more recent exploration of the ethics and politics of naming in *No One’s Ways: An Essay on Infinite Naming* (2017). His most recent publication, *Absentees: On Various Missing Persons* (2021), is a natural development from *No One’s Ways* in which Heller-Roazen extends the idea of naming to explore the archaeology of missing, unnamed or no longer named human beings in communities.

²¹ View the full review on the website: <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v28/n04/michael-newton/tsk-ukh-hmmm>.

medieval, and modern world literatures and cultures in order to map forms of linguistic forgetfulness. As Michael Newton notes in his review of *Echolalias*, “Tsk, Ukh, Hmmm” (2006), Heller-Roazen’s archaeology of moments of linguistic forgetting spans twenty-one chapters and covers topics as varied as “Freud’s writings on aphasia; ‘dead’ and ‘dying’ languages; vanishing phonemes; absent letters; a journey to paradise; and a tour of the Tower of Babel” (Newton n.p.). Heller-Roazen challenges prevailing ideas about the nature of the speaking being by arguing for the existence of a language that predates the subject’s mother tongue.²²

He starts by examining the nature of infant babble, grounding his research in linguistics, specifically Roman Jakobson’s study of the prattle of infants, which the Russian semiotician argues contains phonetic abilities that exceed the sound repertoire of a single language. Heller-Roazen builds on Jakobson’s research in order to argue that every individual possesses this phonetic ability in the prelinguistic stage of development, yet discards it to allow the first language (i.e. mother tongue) to crystallise, with the consequence that this reduces the phonetic ability of the subject to the sounds of a single language. The way in which this lost speech manifests is through interjections and onomatopoeia or, at the level of the written word, graphemes. What remains of this alternative language he refers to as “echolalia”, by which he understands remnants of “another speech and of something other than speech”; an “indistinct and immemorial babble that, in being lost, allowed all languages to be” (Heller-Roazen 12).

There is a scene in *The Childhood of Jesus* where Coetzee fictionalises a moment of babble that vividly illustrates Heller-Roazen’s theory and which I explore

²² Heller-Roazen’s “echolalia” is reminiscent of Julia Kristeva’s concept of “the chora” that refers to the pre-linguistic stage of development in which the subject becomes a repository of a complex dynamic between perceptions, affects, and drives.

in great detail in Chapter 1. In a conversation between Simón, the mediating consciousness, and the boy, David, about whether a private language exists, the boy empathically declares:

‘I want to speak my own language’.

‘There is no such thing as one’s own language’.

‘There is! *La la fa fa yam ying tu tu.*’ (Coetzee, *CJ* 186)

This is an instance of David babbling. Coetzee’s reference to babble could be read as his fictionalisation of Jakobson’s argument regarding the prattle of infants which Heller-Roazen refers to and that Coetzee most certainly came across while he was studying linguistics at Texas. The manuscript collection at Amazwi South African Museum of Literature in Makhanda, South Africa, contains Coetzee’s teaching materials from his time at the University of Cape Town where he taught courses on Literature and Linguistics. Jakobson’s work was among the names of linguists Coetzee selected as part of the reading list, thus confirming his close familiarity with Jakobson’s linguistic arguments.

When applied to Coetzee’s late works, Heller-Roazen’s concept opens up the liberating possibility of the existence of a language beyond ordinary language. In the Jesus novels, Coetzee interrogates the possibility of completely forgetting one’s mother tongue, acquired in early childhood, and by implication, completely forgetting the collection of memories which make up one’s subjectivity and that are contained in that language. Nevertheless, Coetzee intuits a more fundamental mode of communication between beings which the idea of the non-verbal aims to bring to the forefront. More generally, the notion of echolalia proves crucial for Coetzee’s late stage because it allows an entirely new signifying system or “language” to surface. In

a similar vein to how, according to Newton, Heller-Roazen's book helps "us see what was always there, but somehow invisible or, more often, inaudible", my project aims to bring into the realm of the visible aesthetic, affective, and ethical dimensions of Coetzee's writing in a systematic way by means of the non-verbal (n.p.). This study therefore creates a synergy between Coetzee and Heller-Roazen who, in their own ways, seek to create an ontological language where language has been lost.

Chapter 1 foregrounds an alternative language of communication that lies beyond the mother tongue. Focusing on the relationship between language, memory, and stories, I start by considering Coetzee's relationship to English and how it informs his recent decision to shift his focus on the South (Spanish) thereby challenging the hegemony of English as a global lingua franca. I then look at the phenomenon of language loss and the mutability of memory through Simon's experience of learning Spanish. David's idiosyncratic language and his access to a numinous world beyond the world of reality is another aspect I explore in the analysis. I refer to this language as echolalic. This alternative signifying system exists within the Spanish that characters use, permeating their speech and occasionally surfacing in seemingly unintelligible forms, such as a series of speech sounds or in the confusion of German with English, but it also exists in the deep recesses of characters' memory. I read this juxtaposition of languages as indicative of Coetzee's refusal to be confined by the epistemology of one single language and a willingness to explore the possibility of a plurality of epistemologies, ways of seeing, and modes of communication.

Chapter 2 examines an extreme form of experimentation with language through Coetzee's exploration of the question of human-animal communication which pushes at its limits of what can be expressed. The chapter shifts the focus to the literary representation of an embodied, creaturely form of human-non-human

communication that verges on the miraculous. I argue that through the representation of such exchanges Coetzee draws attention to a rawness of being that connects people, and particularly children, to animals. Communication, Coetzee shows us, can also be non-verbal; it can be achieved through states of being which lead to transformative ethical experiences for the human. Though these intense moments of connection are make-believe and not necessarily true in lived experience, Coetzee shows how fiction is able to create the impression of connection between different modes of being.

The insights Coetzee gains from working on the experimental fringes of English he then uses for the fictionalisation of music. In Chapter 3 I critically engage with music as an epistemology in itself which allows imaginative access to new planes of feeling and modes of perception. I argue that Coetzee's representation of music suggests that it is a mode of thinking and expressing human experience not in language but in sound. Though actual music in fiction is non-representational, I nevertheless examine the effect of music on the human subject by analysing the mental and emotional associations it evokes. Fictionalising music allows Coetzee to emphasise the affective faculty as a basis for interpersonal connection. The act of listening to music is an intersubjective experience that enables emotional rather than rational connection. I am therefore interested in the relational aspect of music, that is, music as an alternative language of communication between characters. Coetzee's "What Is a Classic?" (2001) is central to this chapter because it presents his exposure to the music of Johann Sebastian Bach, a figure which Coetzee transposes in fiction in the Jesus texts. Although the emphasis is on the Jesus novels, I also revisit *Disgrace* (1999), *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007), *Youth* (2002), and *Summertime* (2009) in order to tease out the importance of music in the late works.

In Chapter 4 I explore how Coetzee represents dance as an aesthetic, embodied “language” of communication and mode of thinking, focusing particularly on *Schooldays* and *Death of Jesus*. The trilogy marks a return to the aesthetic, with its emphasis on bodily language. I argue that dance allows Coetzee to experiment with a form of (non-verbal) communication between humans through movement. Rather than portraying the body as disabled and suffering, there is instead a celebration of the body in the trilogy. Rudolf Steiner’s ideas about eurythmy are essential to an understanding of the representation of dance in the trilogy. But I also illuminate the crucial influence of Robert Walser’s *Jakob von Gunten*, which seems to be pushing beneath the surface of *Schooldays*. I want to connect this book’s ideas, particularly around the body, to the larger European context which witnessed the emergence of new ways of thinking about the body. Especially pertinent here are Jacques Dalcroze and Rudolf Steiner, whose ideas helped shaped early modern dance in the German-speaking world and beyond.

Chapter 1: Language

In *The Good Story: Exchanges on Truth, Fiction, and Psychotherapy* (2015), Coetzee proposes an interesting dilemma: on the one hand, we are invested in our past, aware of ourselves as historical beings; on the other hand, in a proposition that teaches the opposite moral, “our lives are ours to make and remake as we wish [...] the past is past [...] secrets can freely be buried and forgotten. Can there be such a story that works as a story?” (Coetzee and Kurtz 33). In the Jesus novels, Coetzee’s latest fictional experiment, he tries to imagine how a world in which people have cut ties with their past might look like. The experiment is ambitious, if not paradoxical, since Coetzee himself writes that “[t]o *really* cut your ties with the past is a logical impossibility, since it would mean denying your ancestry and your ancestors, the purest representatives of the past, and in effect claiming to be born anew, out of nothing” (Coetzee, *GS* 86; emphasis in original).¹ Would such a story work or would it ultimately be what Coetzee has referred to as a “synthetic” story (Coetzee, *DP* 23).² In the trilogy, he takes up this challenge of creating such a story.

From the beginning of the trilogy we find ourselves in a strange world that is geographically and temporally unrecognisable. We are told that everyone who comes to this land has had to make a sea voyage across the ocean during which “all your memories are washed away and you start a completely new life” (Coetzee, *CJ* 17). On arrival, newcomers are given new names, “Spanish names”, and assigned an arbitrary

¹ This is an observation Coetzee makes when thinking about present-day Australia, where he currently lives, and its relationship to a violent colonial past. Specifically, Coetzee wonders how Australians pride themselves with their ancestors while attributing to them a cruel history of colonisation which nearly exterminated aboriginal peoples.

² In *Doubling the Point*, Coetzee writes about his fascination with Vladimir Nabokov’s analysis of how stories are created. Based on Nabokov, Coetzee experimented with his students “in putting together synthetic stories – constructions built up out of common story elements – and then seeing which worked and which didn’t work, and so coming to ask what a nonstory might be” (23).

age, depending on how old they look (Coetzee, *CJ* 3). They must stay at a refugee camp of sorts in Belstar, the point of entry into the country. There they learn Spanish, the language that will facilitate their integration into society, which is also the language of Miguel de Cervantes. As it turns out, “all human relations have to be conducted in beginner’s Spanish”, it being the only spoken and taught language (Coetzee, *CJ* 127). At the Institute where most citizens spend their evenings taking courses in subjects as diverse as Philosophy, Life Drawing, Calligraphy, and Calculus, Spanish is the only language course on offer: “[n]o other language courses. No Portuguese. No Catalan. No Galician. No Basque. No Esperanto. No Volapük” (Coetzee, *CJ* 143). There are Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced Spanish courses, alongside Spanish Composition and Spanish Conversation. There are no indications of other languages throughout the story, apart from a moment when a song in German is mistaken for English. In fact, the novels which form the trilogy and are written in English purports to have been written in Spanish and what we are reading is supposedly a translation of the original text.

At the beginning of *Childhood*, we make the acquaintance of a forty-five-year-old man, now called Simón, who has arrived in Novilla, via Belstar. He is accompanied by a five-year-old boy, now called David, who has become separated from his mother during the sea voyage, and for whom Simón has assumed responsibility. While the two of them look for David’s mother, Simón tries to teach the child “the way the world is. The world was not made for our convenience, my young friend. It is up to us to fit in it” (Coetzee, *CJ* 200). Without memories, Simón is compelled to find creative ways of teaching David values and principles to guide him through life. Hence, he resorts to stories – about life, death, morality, and even natural phenomena. Stories abound in the trilogy both textually and intertextually. The

biblical story definitely operates as an intertext, but also the story of *Don Quixote*. This narrative is crucial to David's formation and to the ideas underpinning the trilogy, such as the refusal to accept the world as it is, and a willingness to embrace alternative meanings. The stories Simón tells David are nevertheless tainted by the lingering presence of the idea of a prior existence which Simón refuses to give up.

In this chapter I explore the relationship between language, memory, and stories in the Jesus novels. Considering the above, it is evident that a central question which Coetzee explores in these texts is the phenomenon of language loss, and more specifically the loss of the mother tongue.³ Given the absence of memories and a language fit to evoke them, characters use Spanish, their newly acquired mother tongue, to reinvent themselves. They do this through stories. Therefore, I argue that in the Jesus novels stories are modes of self-making. In this sense, the narrative imagination, understood "as a faculty we use to elaborate for ourselves and our circle the story that suits us best", triggers recollections that lie behind those memories which have been washed clean (Coetzee and Kurtz 4). These recollections resurface in the minds of some of the characters in distorted and encoded ways. They are not memories per se, but shadows of memories, transmitted either in the form of an echolalic language or present in the Spanish that characters speak.

To illuminate this alternative language, I interweave some of Heller-Roazen's ideas on language forgetting, developed in *Echolalias*, with ideas from Plato and Wordsworth. From the manuscripts of Coetzee's novels, expertly examined by Attwell, and made available in *J. M. Coetzee and the Life of Writing*, we learn that

³ In "Mother Tongue, Father Tongue" (2011) Amer Hussein reflects on his growing alienation from English, which although initially his mother tongue, came to be regarded as "an adopted language, even a borrowed one" (202). The sense of detachment from the idea of one's native tongue is also a prominent theme in Coetzee's trilogy.

both Plato and Wordsworth have been crucial influences on Coetzee. At the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago, Coetzee had spent entire semesters focusing on single texts, notably Plato's *Phaedrus*, co-taught with Jonathan Lear, and Wordsworth's *Prelude*, co-taught with Robert Pippin (Attwell 212). As Coetzee himself has remarked in the statement he gave on receiving the Nobel Prize, the Committee offered him "an intellectual home" for seven years (*The University of Chicago Chronicle* n.p.).

The Platonic dialogue which I mainly focus on is *Meno*, because, as Benjamin Bowett remarks in the introduction to the dialogue, it contains the "first intimations of the doctrine of reminiscence" (knowledge as recollection) and the idea of the immortality of the soul, further elaborated in *Phaedrus*, which I also briefly revisit (Bowett 254). In *Meno*, Socrates develops his theory of anamnesis which refers to the idea that the soul is born with previous knowledge, forgotten at birth yet regained through recollection in the process of learning. As we shall see, although these Platonic ideas underlie the structure of the world that the trilogy constructs, they are nevertheless adapted, complicated, and even called into question.

Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" (1807) is also an intertext for the entire trilogy which continuously gestures towards a heavenly realm through, for instance, the analogy between David and the figure of Jesus. While Coetzee's immersion in *The Prelude* at the Committee would have implications for his approach to autobiography, in the Jesus novels he is interested in Wordsworth as "a poet of recollection", concerned with "the workings and significance of remembering" (Armstrong 215). The Intimations Ode is particularly relevant here because it presents life on earth as a forgetting of an earlier, divine existence. Proximity to this heavenly realm determines the ability to remember

one's previous life, with childhood and old age being the closest to it. Though similarities between conceptions of memory exist between Wordsworth and Plato, Wordsworth rebuffed the idea that the Intimations Ode endorsed Plato's concept of anamnesis (Armstrong 217). The cross-pollination of these ideas helps illuminate the existence of an alternative, echolalic language of communication in Coetzee's trilogy.

Why write a novel that pretends to take place in Spanish, and why the choice of Spanish? In "The South According to Coetzee" (2019), Derek Attridge sheds light on biographical details that help answer these questions.⁴ Attridge writes that following his move to Australia in 2002, Coetzee has begun to visit countries in Latin America, such as Argentina, Chile, Brazil, and Colombia giving talks, readings, and seminar series on "Literature of the South" at the National University of San Martín in Great Buenos Aires. The aim of these seminars is to gather writers, translators, and editors from the South, which encompasses Latin American countries, Australia, and South Africa, in order to forge transnational networks as a way of fighting against the cultural hegemony of the North, or those "who decide which stories by the South about itself will be accepted into the repertoire of world literature and which will not" ("In Conversation: J. M. Coetzee with Soledad Costantini" 2018 qtd. in Attridge n.p.). The desire to forge networks of the South, Attridge continues, arises from a disillusionment with the North, particularly the USA and the UK, and its global hegemony. From Attridge's insights, we learn that Coetzee has embraced a new continent, Latin America, where his body of writing has found a growing readership and he himself has been interested in how his works have been received in the South.

⁴ View the full article here: <https://www.publicbooks.org/the-south-according-to-coetzee/>.

Therefore, it is not surprising that more recently Coetzee has chosen to publish some of his works first in Spanish, then in English, or simply in Spanish, as is the case with Coetzee's new novel, *El Polaco* (2022). For instance, *The Death of Jesus* was initially published as *La muerte de Jesús* by the Argentinian publisher El Hilo de Ariadna in Buenos Aires, while *Siete cuentos morales*, translated as *Moral Tales*, which is a collection of seven short stories, is only available in Spanish, despite the publication of some of these stories in English newspapers such as *The New Yorker* which features "The Dog" and *The New York Review of Books* where the story "As a Woman Grows Older" was published. Asked by Raquel Serur whether such a decision is political, Coetzee revealed that publishing in Spanish first is a political gesture only in so far as it remains confined to the politics of language (UNAM Interview, 2019). Such a response re-echoes Coetzee's observation made in the interview with Costantini about his scepticism around the hegemony of English.

In the laureate address of his receiving the title of Honoris Causa from the University of Silesia in Katowice in 2018, Coetzee spoke about the dangers of embracing the worldview embedded in the English language. "I believe [...] that a language comes to us with, embedded in its syntax, its lexicon, and its history, a worldview, a set of assumptions about what constitutes reality. English is no exception" (Coetzee, "Laureate Address" 58-9). His scepticism is reinforced by the familiarity with the work of Polish-born linguist Anna Wierzbicka, whom he refers to in the laureate address and in an interview with María Soledad Costantini, in which he reiterates his concerns about English and Englishness. A prolific academic, Wierzbicka has published extensively on numerous topics on the English language in works such as *English: Meaning and Culture* (2006) and *Imprisoned in English: The Hazards of English as a Default Language* (2013). In her work she has sought to

deconstruct the structures of thought, feeling, and living embedded in English and so expose the shortcomings inherent in the language and their implication in the modern world. Indeed, as Attwell points out, Coetzee's relationship to language has always been "a field of contestation" (Coetzee, *DP* 8). Although he writes in English, Coetzee is nevertheless aware of the implications of such a decision. This scepticism around Anglophone monolingualism undoubtedly contributed to his opting for Spanish in the trilogy.

In the introduction to *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature* (2015), Rebecca Walkowitz also takes up the question of Coetzee's writing and publishing in Spanish, arguing that this decision symbolically pays tribute to Spanish and the Spanish literary tradition, particularly in the Golden Age, which preceded the English tradition. By writing a novel – at the time of Walkowitz's publication of her book, *Childhood* was the only novel available – whose dialogue is in Spanish, Walkowitz continues, Coetzee seeks to retrieve the importance of this language, still the currency of many national literatures today, while also undermining the hegemony of English as the dominant medium of circulation.⁵ Here it should be mentioned that, despite not having the same status as a global lingua franca as English, Spanish is nevertheless a powerful language, often associated with colonialism. Hence Coetzee's choice is not entirely unproblematic. Whether Coetzee had the Spanish literary tradition in mind when writing the trilogy cannot be ascertained, though he

⁵ In his ground-breaking book *What is World Literature?* (2003), David Damrosch, a leading scholar in the field, stresses the importance of circulation when formulating his definition world literature as "all the works that circulate beyond their culture or origin, either in translation or in their original language" (4). Instead of being conceived as a canon of works, world literature should be understood as a mode of reading and circulating.[1] He explains that, despite its preservation of a national imprint, the more a text circulates away from its national origins and into world literature, the more diffused its imprint becomes. What facilitates circulation is translation. According to Damrosch, literary language can either gain or lose in translation. Provided a work is enriched by its translation, it becomes part of world literature.

does, to a certain extent, pay tribute to the novelistic tradition established by Miguel de Cervantes, with *Don Quixote* being the archetypal modern novel. However, Coetzee's displacement of the comfortable position of English as an international language as well as the language of science, higher education, and international affairs is closer to his views as expressed, for instance, in the laureate address.

His late works, but more particularly the trilogy, lend themselves quite easily to translation into foreign languages due to the stylistic simplicity of the writing (which echoes the plainness of biblical stories). Having lived on three different continents before moving to Australia, Coetzee notes in the same interview with Raquel Serur that he has come to think of himself as an international writer with no particular location in a specific language or country. Attridge points out in the same article that this lack of specificity is evinced in the trilogy geographically and linguistically. The linguistic versatility of Coetzee's writing prompts Walkowitz to argue that *Childhood* is a "born translated" novel. Such novels are conceived and written with the specific purpose of being translated. Interestingly, Coetzee sheds light on the paradox of the Jesus novels, commenting that once the books are translated into another language, the paradox of them being written in English dissolves.⁶ There is a Borgesian playfulness about these novels, which refuse to be confined to a particular language, echoing Coetzee's own resistance to the epistemology embedded in English.

Interlacing Attridge and Walkowitz's ideas offers a more complex picture of Coetzee's relationship to Spanish. Here I also want to weave another thread into the discussion around the question of Spanish by briefly turning to a moment at the end of *In the Heart of the Country* (1977). Magda imagines communicating with beings in

⁶ Derek Attridge complicates Coetzee's argument in *Full Particulars* where he states that reading the Spanish translation is an "unsettling" experience because one is reading a work in Spanish that, in English, produces "Spanish" effects yet in Spanish translation these effects hit a false note (n.p.).

flying machines which speak to her in Spanish. This is not the Romance language we are familiar with, but “a Spanish of pure meanings [...] The words are Spanish but they are tied to universal meanings” (Coetzee, *IHC* 157). As early as *Heart of the Country*, Coetzee toys with the idea of Spanish as a universal language. The choice is undoubtedly odd, though no less meaningful, given the remoteness of the language from the African continent. To answer these god-like beings, Magda collects stones, paints them white, and arranges them to form messages in a language that resembles Spanish, possibly Esperanto, which she accesses “by introspecting” the words that lie buried in her memory (Coetzee, *IHC* 163). In the context of the trilogy, Coetzee seems to develop this idea further, imagining a world where Spanish is not only the national language, but the only language available, the *lingua universal* – an analogy to Simón’s looking for a *llave universal* on his arrival to this new place.⁷ As we will see, Spanish is more problematic for the characters than Magda’s idealised vision, as they are caught in between the memory of their previous language and their new mother tongue. In the Jesus novels, Coetzee seems to have found a middle ground between Spanish as a universal language and the memory of the character’s previous mother tongue. The trilogy indicates that there might be a more fundamental form of communication between characters, located in between these languages and resurfacing in the memory and speech of characters.

In “J. M. Coetzee and Samuel Beckett: The Translingual Link” (1996), Steven G. Kellman rightfully observes that “[t]he relations between words and thought, the boundaries between one language and another, and the limits of language have been

⁷ Coetzee’s choice of Spanish may also be tied to the language’s similar resemblance to Latin. In the Katowice lecture, he remarks rather disheartened that until the mid-eighteenth century, Latin was used as the language of science, education, communication. However, in the second half of the twentieth century, English began to assert its dominance thus replacing Latin.

central to Coetzee's concerns as both a novelist and a scholar" (161). Moreover, in his doctoral thesis on Samuel Beckett's English fiction, Coetzee attempted to find signs of why Beckett had lost faith in English and consequently turned to French. He did this by examining patterns of repetition in Beckett's style. As Kellman remarks, "[t]he awareness that Beckett abandoned his native language governed Coetzee's study" (163). The interest in switching between languages persists in the trilogy, where Coetzee experiments with the effects of abandoning one's mother tongue and being reborn into a new language.

According to Kellman, Coetzee's resistance to the confines of English has pushed him to seek alternatives:

[t]o adopt another language is to cultivate empathy for alternative modes of apprehension [...] Like Beckett, Coetzee has been able to move from one language [Afrikaans] to another [English]. Yet linguistic versatility bred a longing for linguistic freedom, for the chimerical possibility of thinking beyond any language. In Coetzee's fictions, all words are problematic and provisional. They are heuristic devices designed to try to capture thoughts that forever outrace expression. (Kellman 171)

The first point about embracing another language – in the case of the trilogy, Spanish – is reminiscent of Coetzee's deliberate decision to shift his focus on South-South connections. Kellman's observation about Coetzee's longing for linguistic freedom, "for the chimerical possibility of thinking beyond any language", is undoubtedly pertinent, but while Coetzee admires Kafka, who "hints that it is possible, for snatches, however brief, to think outside one's own language, perhaps to report back on what it is like to think outside language", he finesses this point by stating that that is not to be confused with the idea that there may be thinking outside language altogether (*DP*

198). Particularly in the late works, Coetzee is exploring the possibility that thinking and communicating can occur in different *languages*, verbal and non-verbal.⁸

The story begins with Simón and David arriving at a relocation camp, *Centro de Reubicación*, in Novilla, looking for a place to live and for employment for Simón. The name of the centre is suggestive of the river Rubicon, which Julius Caesar crossed in 49 BC when he invaded northern Italy which would eventually lead him to become a powerful dictator. Nowadays, the phrase “crossing the Rubicon” refers to “a step that definitely commits a person to a given course of action” (Britannica: n.p.).⁹ In the context of the trilogy, the idea of the Rubicon unfolds in the form of an exploration of what it means to lose one’s former life without the possibility of return.

Not only does the man experience the newness of this land, but also the foreignness of the language he must speak. “‘We are new arrivals.’ He articulates the words slowly, in the Spanish he has worked hard to master” (Coetzee, *CJ* 1). Echoing Kellman’s point about words being problematic and provisional, Simón’s utterance further emphasises the slipperiness of speaking a foreign language. Through him, we experience the vulnerability associated with learning a new language. This time, however, he has nothing to hold on to, no other language that he can remember or put to good use to make himself understood. Like a skin which he must grow accustomed to, Spanish is an alien medium that he lacks full control over. This is further evinced in his shaky command of the language: when the key to the room they have been

⁸ That Coetzee is aware of the crucial importance of non-verbal communication is evinced in an observation he makes in *Here and Now* regarding the representation of electronic devices in his novels: “The telephone is about as far as I will go in a book, and then reluctantly [...] because if people (“characters”) are continually going to be speaking to one another at a distance, then a whole gamut of interpersonal signs and signals, verbal and nonverbal, voluntary and involuntary, has to be given up. Dialogue, in the full sense of the term, just isn’t possible over the phone” (226-7).

⁹ Read the full entry online: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Rubicon>.

assigned to is nowhere to be found, Simón asks “[d]o you not have a – what do you call it? – a *llave universal* to open our room?” (Coetzee, *CJ* 5). A universal key to open all doors would be the simplest solution to Simón’s problem. However, in the trilogy, there are no simple solutions. Accordingly, he is quickly reprimanded and told “[t]here is no such thing as a *llave universal*”, only a *llave maestra* (Coetzee, *CJ* 5). Simón therefore has to learn to work with what is available in this new world, starting with a master key that will only open the door to his room.

If there is no *llave universal*, the *lingua universal*, Spanish, also fails to provide Simón with a sense of comfort. This new home is so saturated with Spanish that, at a certain point, Simón even imagines the birds chirping in Spanish.¹⁰ While for Magda in *In the Heart of the Country*, Spanish was *the* universal language, suggested by her heartbreakingly painful and desperate question “[w]hy will no one speak to me in the true language of the heart?”, for Simón, Spanish is anything but that; it is limited and limiting (Coetzee, *IHC* 166). He confesses to Elena that “these Spanish words that do not come from the heart” fail to carry the weight, substance, and strength of his thoughts and feelings (Coetzee, *CJ* 77). An acute sense of alienation takes hold of Simón, making it difficult for him to establish his identity in a language over which he does not have complete control.

The reason why he cannot assimilate Spanish fully is because of the persistence of memories of a past life and former native tongue. The echoes of this previous language linger behind his Spanish words: “I am beginning to think there is something in my speech that marks me as a man stuck in the old ways, a man who has not

¹⁰ The reference could be to Richard Wagner’s *Siegfried*, who in the opera suddenly understands a bird’s song. Such a connection is plausible since Coetzee is familiar with the music Wagner. I shall discuss Coetzee’s relationship to music at length in chapter 3. Another possible intertextual allusion might be to Virginia Woolf who refers to Greek-talking birds in relation to her own mental illness and that of Septimus Smith from *Mrs Dalloway* (1925).

forgotten” (Coetzee, *CJ* 169). In *Echolalias*, Heller-Roazen writes about thresholds between languages, stating that “[t]he recognition of the advent of one tongue entails that of the passing of another; and the coming to consciousness of a new language must simultaneously imply a “coming to unconsciousness,” so to speak, of the old” (74). The nature of the boundary between mother tongues is a central idea underpinning the Jesus novels. Simón’s words indicate that speech is not so much neutral as tainted by the linguistic sediments of one’s prior language. In the words of Heller-Roazen, speech is “[e]ssentially variable [...] incapable of being fully possessed and so, too, completely lost; always already forgotten, it can never be recalled” (75). The idea that Coetzee is interested in here is whether one can truly forget a language that one has acquired or whether linguistic residues remain. Simón is a character who, though he cannot recall his previous language, has not completely forgotten it.

At this point I want to digress slightly from the trilogy to bring in an example from *Echolalias* which adds depth and complexity to the phenomenon of language acquisition and language forgetting, particularly as it is represented through Simón’s experience. The example is Elias Canetti’s painful process of acquiring another mother tongue. I use the word “painful” because, as Kellman asserts in *Switching Languages*, Canetti “did not settle for a language of and as convenience” (162). After spending the early years of his life in Bulgaria speaking Ladino, a Judeo-Spanish idiom, and Bulgarian, at the age of eight, Canetti was forced to learn German.¹¹ It was the death of his father that led him to have to adopt German, which was “the special language of intimacy between his mother and father” (Kellman, *Switching* 299). Over the course

¹¹ With regard to Canetti’s command of German, Kellman emphasises that it “eventually became adept enough to earn him a Nobel Prize in Literature, in 1981. Though he lived in England for more than fifty years, he did not employ English as his literary medium” (*Switching* 299).

of one summer, while in Switzerland with his mother, Canetti learned German by painstakingly committing words and entire sentences to memory in a language which at first was completely new to him. On recollection, learning German was for him the equivalent of a second birth. Trying to recall early memories, Canetti was surprised to realise that the memories in Ladino had remained almost entirely intact, while those in Bulgarian had been unconsciously rendered in German. Years later, on a trip to Prague, the force of the Czech language profoundly affected him through its melody, reminding him of the seemingly forgotten Bulgarian. Heller-Roazen notes that in the music of the Czech language Canetti heard “not a language [Bulgarian] but an echo: the sound within one tongue of another that had been forgotten” (176). The conclusion Heller-Roazen draws from Canetti’s example is that, instead of being fully forgotten, languages open onto one another.¹² Despite the feeling of having completely purged one’s mother tongue from memory, it nevertheless leaves behind linguistic remnants which manifest in the form of echoes of another speech in one’s current language.

Drawing on this example, an analogy can be made to Simón’s relationship to his new mother tongue. In his use of Spanish, he detects the lingering presence of another language, and implicitly, of another worldview. The boundary between his mother tongue and Spanish becomes fluid, with one language unconsciously merging with the other and occasionally resurfacing in his speech. Simón tells David that “[y]ou may think you are washed clean, but you aren’t. You still have your memories, they are just buried, temporarily” (Coetzee, *CJ* 26). By implication, the memory of having had a mother tongue prior to Spanish is also buried temporarily. Hence, Simón

¹² There has been an intense debate in postcolonial studies, made prominent by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o in *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), in which Ngũgĩ argues strongly for the naturalization view, in which he is opposed by Chinua Achebe in *The Education of a British-Protected Child: Essays* (2009). Coetzee’s position (and Heller-Roazen’s) does not, however, take this debate into account.

refuses to be reborn completely into his new language and new life. Instead, he preserves a sense of history that comes “not [from] memories themselves but [from] the feel of residence in a body with a past, a body soaked in its past” (Coetzee, *CJ* 169).

Here it is worth pausing to look at Coetzee’s own relationship to his mother tongue. In a letter to Paul Auster, published in *Here and Now: Letters, 2008-2011* (2013), he reflects on his relationship to English, comparing it to Derrida’s relationship to French. Growing up in a French-speaking community of Jews in Algeria, Derrida experienced linguistic displacement first-hand. As a result of the abolition in 1940 of the Crémieux decree, which granted citizenship to the Jews of Algeria, his French citizenship was removed and held for several years without him being given another one. Derrida thus faced a dilemma, namely that he spoke and thought in French but had no French citizenship. His recollections of this experience are gathered in *Monolingualism of the Other; or, the Prosthesis of Origin* (1996). In this book he contends that to claim a language as one’s own, that is to say, to claim that one has a “native” connection to one’s mother tongue, is an impossibility. Since one’s first language is acquired through an act of imitation from others, it cannot belong to oneself, but it always already belongs to the other. His famous statement “I only have one language, yet it is not mine” (2), despite containing an essential logical contradiction, accurately captures the lack of a complete correspondence between one’s language and one’s identity. Embedded in his remark is the idea that monolingual solipsism is not to be understood as an experience of belonging, but rather as one way of looking at the world.

To return to the trilogy, Simón cannot identify with Spanish, which is not his language but “always the language of the other[s]” (Coetzee, *Here and Now* 67). In

his review of *Echolalias*, “Tsk, Ukh, Hmmm” (2006), Newton observes that a language “belongs between people, possessed by no one, not even by society as a whole”. Characters such as Elena and Álvaro Avocado echo this sense of alienation. Elena reassures Simón that “[f]orgetting takes time [...] Once you have properly forgotten, your sense of insecurity will recede and everything will become much easier” (Coetzee, *CJ* 169). Her words suggest that she has also undergone the “coming to unconsciousness” of Spanish (Heller-Roazen 74). Álvaro Avocado, a colleague of Simón at the docks where he works, reassures him, “[a]s for your Spanish, don’t worry, persist. One day it will cease to feel like a language, it will become the way things are” (Coetzee *CJ* 14). On the one hand, these remarks foreground the contingency of being born into a particular language, in this case, Spanish.¹³ On the other hand, they suggest Coetzee’s renewed interest in language referentiality. Álvaro’s remark is charged with the weight of a long-standing linguistic and philosophical tradition in language referentiality whose foundation is in the linguistic relativity theory. This hypothesis, also commonly referred to as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, posits that each language sculpts a particular worldview in the mind of its speakers. The more languages differ, the greater the difference in their epistemologies and metaphysics.

Coetzee has been interested in this thesis at least since the publication of *Doubling the Point* in 1992, though he has downplayed it in later years, given its controversial and possibly questionable basis. So why has it now returned in the trilogy? Coetzee’s bilingual background, growing up in South Africa speaking both

¹³ The contingency of being assigned a particular language at birth resonates with Yoshiki Tajiri’s argument in “Beyond the Literary Theme Park” that the Jesus novels reflect continuously on the contingency of existence.

English and Afrikaans, has made him conscious of languages and of one's relationship to the mother tongue. Though he writes in English, Coetzee shares no particular connection with the language. Commenting about his relationship to English, particularly as experienced during his stay in the UK, where he worked as a computer programmer for IBM, Coetzee states that it is not his language but "the property of the English [...] It was their mother tongue as it was not mine" (*Here and Now* 66). The effect of his move to Australia, "an environment so saturated with English", has "created more and more of a skeptical distance between myself and what I would loosely call the Anglo weltanschauung, with its inbuilt templates of how one thinks, how one feels, how one relates to other people" (Coetzee, *Here and Now* 73). Wary of being too deeply immersed in this worldview, absorbing its structures of feeling, thinking, being, revisiting the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is therefore understandable.

Though Coetzee sympathises with this theory, he does not unequivocally accept it. Rather, in "Isaac Newton and the Ideal of a Transparent Scientific Language" (1982), he tests the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis by analysing Newton's English and Latin in order to determine whether there is a continuity between thought and language, or there are "signs of a wrestling to make the thought fit into the language, to make the language express the thought, signs perhaps even of an incapacity of language to express certain thoughts, or of thought unable to think itself out because of the limitations of its medium" (184). In short, Coetzee proves that Newton had indeed struggled to make language accommodate his ideas as he tried to bridge the gap between "the nonreferential symbolism of mathematics and a language too protean to be tied down to single, pure meanings" (194).¹⁴ Furthermore, in his PhD thesis on the

¹⁴ While contesting the Whorfian hypothesis, Coetzee nevertheless remained cautious of a certain linguistic idealism that this contradiction pointed to, namely the possible existence of a pure thought that a transparent language would potentially accommodate.

English works of Samuel Beckett (that is to say, the fiction he wrote before his turn to French), Coetzee was interested in “Beckett’s challenge to verbal determinism: does the language we use necessarily define the thoughts we can have?” (Kellman, “Translingual Link” 164). Drawing on these examples, it is evident that the Jesus novels revisit these concerns: the feeling of being ill at ease with one’s mother tongue, the scepticism of the worldview laid down by a particular language, and the mutability of language as it passes from one form into another, leaving behind an excess of signification.

To return to the trilogy, I want to link the absence of the mother tongue with the search for David’s mother. In “What does J. M. Coetzee’s *The Childhood of Jesus* have to do with the Childhood of Jesus?” (2017), Robert Pippin notes that Simón’s quest for David’s mother is “the main element of the narrative”, the driving force at the heart of *Childhood* (10). Although he has never seen the boy’s mother, Simón is firmly convinced that either “[t]he boy will recognize her from a photograph. Or I will. I will know her when I see her” (Coetzee, *CJ* 23). One day, while on a trip in the countryside, they arrive at *La Residencia*, where the two of them encounter Inés, a woman in her thirties who is David’s (future) mother. As the story unfolds, her virginal behaviour and adoption of David allude to the biblical story of Mary’s begetting of Jesus.¹⁵ In addition to the biblical analogy, the name “Inés” has Portuguese origins meaning “pure, virginal”. We are reminded of Simón’s remark “[a]nd in the name the essence” meant to strengthen an association of Inés with a pure being (Coetzee, *CJ* 97). What is more, Anthony Uhlmann points out in “Creative Intuition: *The Childhood of Jesus*” (2020) that Inés’s name is the “Spanish version of Agnes, one of the Catholic

¹⁵ Simón remarks that David’s sudden apparition in his and Inés’s life “had burst on him like a star, and he had failed it” (Coetzee, *CJ* 92)

Church's more prominent virgin saints" (187). Hence, Coetzee portrays Inés not just as any mother, but as an ideal mother.

The description of the encounter serves to highlight her otherworldliness. This is how Simón narrates the encounter:

I recognized her as soon as I set eyes on her, which means I must have some kind of prior knowledge. [...] It is true: I have no memories. But images still persist, shades of images. How that is I can't explain. Something deeper persists too, which I call the memory of having a memory. It is not from the past that I recognize Inés but from elsewhere. It is as if the image of her were embedded in me. I have no doubts about her, no second thoughts. At least, I have no doubt that she is the boy's true mother. (Coetzee, *CJ* 116-117)

How can Simón know with certainty that Inés is David's real mother? Here we enter Plato's territory. As Uhlmann contends in the same essay, the structure of the trilogy's world corresponds to the Platonic myth of the world above (172). Drawing on this observation, Simón's recognition of Inés implies that he accesses an alternative epistemology which is based on intuitive knowledge. This form of knowledge, the passage suggests, lies deeper than the rational, thinking self. To Robert Pippin, Simón's recognition of Inés bears religious overtones as it is based on a "(strictly speaking, wholly irrational) 'act of faith'" – also suggestive of the biblical overtones of the novel (10). Yet Simón accesses the image of Inés from the deep recesses of memory. Her image comes to him as an echolalia, "from elsewhere". In a sense, the encounter facilitates the overlapping of an abstract idea(l) of David's true mother with the "shadow" of that idea, Inés as embodied being.

Plato discusses the paradox of knowledge in *Meno*. Challenging Socrates, Meno asks how he can enquire into “that of which you know nothing at all? [...] And even if you happen to come full upon what you want, how will you ever know that this is the thing which you did not know?” (Plato 277). This is followed by Socrates’s canonical rephrasing of Meno’s question: “a man cannot inquire either about that which he knows, or about that which he does not know; for if he knows, he has no need to inquire; and if not, he cannot; for he does not know the very subject about which he is to enquire” (Plato 277). Here Socrates develops his theory of anamnesis, suggesting that the soul is born with and carries knowledge which is forgotten with each incarnation, but which one can remember through recollection.

The concept of anamnesis is at the heart of the trilogy. We have seen it manifest in Simón’s stern belief that his memories of a previous life have been forgotten temporarily, despite being washed clean on arrival to this new land. If Simón refuses to let go of his past, he also rejects abandoning the idea of memory itself, claiming that “the past is not dead in me. Details may have grown fuzzy, but the feel of how life used to be is still quite vivid” (Coetzee, *CJ* 66). And later, he adds:

I suffer from memories, or the shadow of memories. I know we are all supposed to be washed clean by the passage here, and it is true, I don’t have a great repertoire to call on. But the shadows linger nevertheless. That is what I suffer from. Except that I don’t use the word suffer. I hold onto them, those shadows. (Coetzee, *CJ* 77) ¹⁶

The passage captures the impossibility of ridding oneself of memories completely, echoing Plato’s idea about being born with a set of pre-given ideas. In *Doubling the*

¹⁶ Simón’s suffering is reminiscent of Elizabeth Costello’s affliction. Interestingly, both characters describe their intellectual misgivings using a semantic field of pain.

Point, Coetzee puts forth this idea, in discussing *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), particularly the magistrate's choice of siding with the idea of justice despite it not being in his interest to do so. Coetzee imagines the reason that the magistrate would give to justify his decision, explaining that it is "because we are born with the idea of justice" and "with the idea of truth" (Coetzee, *DP* 395). In the Jesus novels, Coetzee places memory alongside other innate ideas. This decision is paradoxical since characters have presumably forgotten their past.

The passage also highlights the world-making powers of stories as acts of language. Following a "conviction", Simón creates a story around Inés as David's real mother which, though "an unusual story, I admit", he chooses to believe in (Coetzee, *CJ* 100, 96). While he is merely a guardian for the boy, he believes Inés shares a more profound connection with the child: "in the case of Inés the bond seemed altogether stronger and deeper, altogether less easy to escape" (Coetzee, *Death* 157). But this bond, however strong, is possibly a fictional one. According to Uhlmann, in the trilogy, intuition contains apparent contradictions. On the one hand, it is the "recognition of an ideal and immutable truth" (Plato); on the other hand, it is "that which in some sense 'creates' or brings truth into being" (Bergson) (178). In this passage, Simón seems to lean towards the second option of how intuition works, by creating a fiction around Inés. Finding David's mother would mean finding (a) meaning, establishing a form of coherence in David's life; it would also give Simón a sense of achievement that he has kept his promise of finding the boy's mother. However, the novels remain inconclusive as to whether Inés is David's true mother. The use of words such as "images" and "shadows" are suggestive of this inconclusiveness since they envelop Inés in a smokescreen.

The story around Inés as the boy's mother, reiterated time and again by Simón, is a way of rewriting David's memories or better yet of entrenching them into the child's mind. This is a point Coetzee raises in *The Good Story*, namely in how far parents should take the liberty of rewriting their child's memories of a time before he or she can remember. In the trilogy, Coetzee suggests the existence of different kinds of memory as alternatives to reawakening a child's past experiences. If, in Simón's case, some memories are triggered visually - on seeing Inés, he "feel[s] a strange movement in your breast [...] a kind of tug at the heartstrings, as if you [David] might have seen her before, in some other place", in David's case, they might be reawoken sensorily (Coetzee, *CJ* 85). Reflecting on the encounter between the boy and Inés, Simón thinks "[b]etter if he had found a way of giving the boy into her arms, body to body, flesh to flesh. Then memories lying deeper than all thought might have been reawoken, and all would have been well" (Coetzee, *CJ* 92). Implicit in this remark is a mode of knowing that relies on the body.¹⁷ The words gesture to the existence of a somatic dimension of human perception underlying the speaking and thinking self.

Let us now turn to David, a child who has clearer intimations of his past than Simón. In "There is No Other Place: J. M. Coetzee's Jesus Trilogy" (2020), Marie Luise Knott observes that David is "the only citizen who is in contact with an otherworld".¹⁸ In the sandpit of an empty playground near their apartment, David scribbles a message. He informs Simón that he will write the message and attach it to the bird Blanco, his new pet pigeon, should he get lost and need rescuing by Señor Paloma ("Mr. Dove"), who

¹⁷ I will return to this idea in Chapter 4 in which I discuss the importance of the body as having its own mode of knowing.

¹⁸ View the full article on the website: https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/there-is-no-other-place-j-m-coetzees-jesus-trilogy/?fbclid=IwAR2dUvohm-BxFBxcDqeSfuGx-1HtxEhTNBAzDnhuI_ArUZWDT32mpJ4KeM.

gifted him the bird. “He [Simón] reads over his [David’s] shoulder: *O* then *E* then a character he cannot make out then *O* again then *X* and again *X*” (Coetzee, *CJ* 206; emphasis in original).¹⁹ According to David, this unusual configuration of letters is Spanish and translates as “*Follow Blanco, Blanco is my best friend*” (Coetzee, *CJ* 207; emphasis in original). What are the origins of this cryptic language? David retrieves from memory these written symbols, which resemble some letters of the Spanish alphabet, and translates them into Spanish for Simón to understand. Yet in David’s message lie the traces of an alternative system of signs, the remainder of a previous language discarded with their arrival to the new land yet preserved in a mutated form. David’s writing indicates the mutability of language: its capacity to transform endlessly into seemingly inscrutable forms. More important in this example is that a particular language once acquired cannot be completely forgotten but resurfaces not necessarily in its actual form but as an echo or what Heller-Roazen calls an echolalia. I read this echolalic language as indicative of Coetzee’s refusal to be confined by the epistemology of one single language and his desire to explore the possibility of a plurality of epistemologies, ways of seeing, and modes of communication.

David’s idiosyncratic writing system reminds us of Heller-Roazen’s example in *Echolalias* about a story found in the first book of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* concerning the water nymph, Io, who was transformed into a cow. The god Jupiter took her against her will to be his lover. However, the affair was short-lived because to avoid being caught by his jealous wife, Juno, Jupiter had no choice but to transform the beautiful nymph into a cow (Heller-Roazen 121). He was then forced to gift Io to

¹⁹ Coetzee’s character Friday in *Foe* also uses an idiosyncratic language to communicate. Because Friday’s tongue has been severed, and he can no longer speak, Friday’s language is an embodied one. The scattering of petals, the dancing, and his lettering are forms of communication through which Friday expresses himself. In the final chapter of *Foe*, Coetzee opens up the possibility that in another context, or perhaps in a different world, one would be able to understand Friday and his language, despite readers not being able to understand him.

Juno, who became suspicious of her husband's dealings. While in the custody of "the hundred-eyed Argus", Io nevertheless managed to find her way back to her home along the banks of Inachus's river (Heller-Roazen 122). In the sand by the river, Io used her hoof to trace the letters "I" and "O", therefore "succeed[ing] in communication of a sort", alerting her father of her true identity (Heller-Roazen 122). Heller-Roazen argues that these two alphabet figures reveal an incomplete, imperfect metamorphosis which leaves behind "a remainder [the two letters] that bears witness to the event of the mutation" (124). Despite having lost her ability to speak, Heller-Roazen continues, Io's language metamorphosed into written form; it had survived, despite being transformed. The example sheds new light on David's letters which indicate the remnants of a previous signifying system that has metamorphosed into an apparently unrecognisable form.

Coetzee's use of David's idiosyncratic language invokes larger philosophical debates, such as whether a language can ever be considered private. Despite speaking "very good" Spanish, the boy rebels against the limitations of his new mother tongue: "'Why do I have to speak Spanish all the time?' [...] I want to speak my own language" (Coetzee, *CJ* 221). As Knott remarks, "instead of obeying the laws of the land", David invents new rules that include the rules governing the national language. The allusion in the trilogy is to Wittgenstein's private language argument (the trilogy also engages with other ideas from Wittgenstein such as the rule following paradox and the nature of mathematical knowledge). The Austrian philosopher of language discusses private language in the posthumously published *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). In this work, Wittgenstein considers the possibility of the existence of a language comprehensible only to its originator, yet one that differs from

a private code into which the speaker records his experiences. In remark 243 from Part 1, Wittgenstein writes:

But could we also imagine a language in which a person could write down or give vocal expression to his inner experiences – his feeling, moods, and the rest – for his private use? – Well, can't we do so in our ordinary language? – But that is not what I mean. The individual words of this language are to refer to what can only be known to the person speaking [...] So another person cannot understand the language. (75)

What Wittgenstein is arguing is that, unless language facilitates communication beyond its speaker, it is not language. Simón reiterates Wittgenstein's idea when he explains to David that “[t]here is no such thing as one's own language” and that “[w]e have to speak some language, my boy, unless we want to bark and howl like animals. And if we are going to speak some language, it is best we all speak the same one” (Coetzee, *CJ* 221). Although the observation implies the existence of an agreement among people about the rules governing the use of a particular language, David refuses to consent, proclaiming the relevance of his private language.

David's echolalic language resists the limits of Spanish, challenging it in written as well as oral expression. The spoken variant of this language is peculiar: “[*I*] *la fa fa yam ying tu tu*”, pronounces the boy (Coetzee, *CJ* 221; emphasis in original). In *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), Ferdinand de Saussure argues that alliteration and assonance help build structure in language. David's repetition of sounds hints at the existence of a structure underlying the Spanish language. Though Coetzee does not concretely refer to the nature of this structure, he nevertheless indicates that it exists. But David's string of sounds can also be interpreted as sounds resembling onomatopoeia or interjections. Saussure writes that “onomatopoeic formations are

never organic elements of a linguistic system” (69). So what are they? Heller-Roazen elucidates by arguing that onomatopoeia and interjections represent the basic manifestation of a forgotten, echolalic language which penetrates the texture of the mother tongue one speaks. These phonemes are the remnants of an “indistinct and immemorial babble that, in being lost, allowed all languages to be” (Heller-Roazen 12). The boy is able to recall this alternative system of signs through his writing in the sand and his oral articulation.

Despite the cryptic quality of David’s babble, communication in this alternative system is possible. When David repeats the unintelligible words, this time without the last two phonemes, “[l]a la fa fa yam ying”, the expressive power of these sounds strikes a chord in Simon, who sees an inexplicable look in the boy’s eyes:

For the briefest of moments, he sees something there. *It is like* – that is what occurs to him in the moment. Like a fish that wriggles loose as you try to grasp it. But not like a fish – no, like *like a fish*. Or like *like like a fish*. On and on. Then the moment is over, and he is simply standing in silence, staring. (Coetzee 222; emphasis in original)

In David’s articulation of sounds there is something other than speech which is no less meaningful: an echolalic language which Simón immediately perceives. An analogy can be made between Simón’s question about a *llave universal* and his intimations of a *lingua universal* that lies underneath the boy’s Spanish. Despite being washed clean of his former mother tongue, for the briefest of moments, Simón remembers a previously forgotten language. If Coetzee fictionalises Wittgenstein’s private language argument by having David invent a new language, he also shows us that David’s language is ultimately not private. This is because it is not understood solely

by its originator, David, but some of its meaning is carried over and revealed to Simón, though obliquely through the constant deferral of meaning.

The passage quoted above, in particular the ideas that meaning is continuously held back and that there may be an alternative epistemology lying deeper than one's mother tongue, requires revisiting a relatively late text that shows Coetzee's radical scepticism about the capacity of language to mediate reality. That text is *Elizabeth Costello's* "Postscript: Letter of Elizabeth, Lady Chandos". I turn to this in order to show both continuity and change across the oeuvre. The postscript is seemingly written by Lady Elizabeth Chandos in the form of a follow-up letter to the letter written by her husband, Lord Philip Chandos, to Francis Bacon. In "'We Are Not Made for Revelation': Letters to Francis Bacon in the Postscript to J. M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello*" (2008), Dirk Klopper points out a metafictional technique that Coetzee employs whereby the fictional character Elizabeth Costello takes a step outside the text into which she has been written and adopts the persona of Lady Chandos. This is a similar technique to that which Costello uses in her novel, *The House on Eccles Street*, in which she liberates the voice of Molly Bloom by having her step out of the text (120). In the letter, dated 11 September 1603, Lady Chandos writes about a conflicted state she and her husband find themselves in due to a loss of faith in the representational function of language. She therefore makes an appeal to Francis Bacon, a firm believer in linguistic referentiality, to put a stop to the ever-shifting movement of a language that no longer has a link to the world of experience.

In writing the postscript to *Elizabeth Costello*, Coetzee anchors himself in Hugo von Hofmannsthal's famous "Ein Brief" (A Letter), published in 1902.²⁰ The

²⁰ This anchorage in a particular text is characteristic of Coetzee. We see it in *Foe* (1986), which rewrites the story of Robinson Crusoe through the perspective of Susan Barton, and in *The Master of Petersburg* (1994), which writes the backstory that led to Dostoevsky's writing *The Possessed* (1873).

text is emblematic in that it captures the climate in the literary world at the turn of the twentieth century which witnessed a crisis of language that was foundational to literary modernism. This crisis arose from a growing awareness of the inability of language to have purchase on reality. Hofmannsthal himself suffered an aesthetic crisis which led him to abandon prose writing and poetry in favour of drama. I therefore read the postscript in conjunction with Hofmannsthal's text to bring out the full force and significance of the crisis Lady Chandos experiences.

In "Ein Brief", Lord Philipp Chandos writes a letter to the real Francis Bacon, also dated 1603, explaining his decision to relinquish his literary career due to the loss of faith in the ability of language as a system of reference to organise experience. Lord Chandos confesses that "I have completely lost the ability to think or speak coherently about anything at all" (Hofmannsthal 121). If he had earlier seen continuity between the mental and the physical world, between the sign and its referent, now he has transitioned to a fragmented perspective in which thoughts "shoot into the void" and worldly ideas disappear from his mind (Hofmannsthal 121). When wanting to speak, the words "disintegrated in my mouth like rotten mushrooms" (Hofmannsthal 121). In short, Hofmannsthal's Lord Chandos suffers from a case of language forgetting. As we will see later, an analogy can be drawn between Lord Chandos's and Simón's linguistic alienation, which makes the former feel "like someone locked in a garden full of eyeless statuary" from which he tries to escape (Hofmannsthal 122).

While Lord Chandos gives up his belief in the abstracting quality of the language he speaks, he nevertheless celebrates the authenticity of a sensuous, embodied experience of the world, without the ability to describe the experience. Nevertheless, he alludes to a type of *Ursprache* underlying his mother tongue:

It is that the language in which I might have been granted the opportunity not only to write but also to think is not Latin or English, or Italian, or Spanish, but a language of which I know not one word, a language in which mute things speak to me and in which I will perhaps have something to say for myself someday when I am dead and standing before an unknown judge (Hofmannsthal 127).²¹

Hofmannsthal is not suggesting that this alternative language derives from a deep memory. Rather, its source is external. The example is analogous to yet not exactly the same as Heller-Roazen's echolalic language which underlies one's mother tongue. With his particular language no longer the filter of reality, Lord Chandos experiences the full force of the sensual as "a rising tide of heavenly feeling" that fills him and connects him to the world (Hofmannsthal 123). He advocates a turn from a rational mode of thinking to "think[ing] with our hearts" (Hofmannsthal 125). This type of reasoning relies on images rather than words and concepts; its medium is "more direct, fluid, and passionate than words. It has whirlpools too which seem to lead not into the abyss as whirlpools of language do but "into myself in some way, and into the lap of the most profound peace" (Hofmannsthal 127). Drawing on this observation, Lord Chandos opens the possibility that thinking can occur outside one's mother tongue. This is an idea which Coetzee borrows and fleshes out in the trilogy, as we will see in this and subsequent chapters. Instead of "drowning" in the whirlpools of language which never seem to lead him to his deeper recesses or even out into the world, by stepping outside the confines of his first language he is able to bridge the gap left by the traces of his former language and surface on the shores of his inner self.

²¹ I am using Joel Rotenberg's translation of Hugo von Hofmannsthal's "The Lord Chandos Letter" which slightly differs from the translation used by J. M. Coetzee.

Before the postscript to *Elizabeth Costello*, Coetzee inserts the excerpt from Hofmannsthal's text that refers to the fullness of sensation. Whereas Lord Chandos openly embraces this fullness, Lady Elizabeth Chandos is reluctant, referring to it as an affliction.²² As Dirk Klopper points out in his analysis of the postscript, Lady Chandos's reluctance comes from a concern with the effects of freeing oneself from the constraints of the mother tongue to embrace this sensation fully (122). Without a solid grounding in one's own language, with its fixed relationship between the sign and its referent, Lady Chandos appeals to Francis Bacon, whose "pragmatic use of language, as an instrument to perform operations in the real world, to create fixed and durable locations for human habitation" can save her (Klopper 125). Lady Chandos explains the phenomenon to Bacon as "[a]lways it is not what I say but something else" (Coetzee 228; emphasis in original). The observation captures the elusiveness and constant deferral of meaning, revealing a residual poststructuralism in Coetzee's thinking which have been carried into the trilogy and manifested in Simón's use of "like *like a fish*". More significant, however, is how Coetzee shows us the thin thread that ties the mother tongue to the world of experience.

Hence, Lady Chandos's plea is not eccentric. "*We are not meant to live thus* [...] where words give way beneath your feet like rotting boards (*like rotting boards* I say again [...] if I am to bring home to you my distress and my husband's, *bring home* I say, where is home, where is home?)" (Coetzee, *EC* 228). In this passage, Coetzee seems to gesture towards Heidegger's famous statement that "language is the house

²² Kellman's analysis of Coetzee's characters and their relationship to language is useful in this sense. For instance, Magda longs for "a life unmediated by words: these stones, these bushes, this sky experienced and known without question" (135) (qtd in Kellman 167). "'I signify something,'" laments Magda, who envies the density of nonverbal Being: "I stare out through a sheet of glass into a darkness that is complete, that lives in itself, bats, bushes, predators and all, that does not regard me, that is blind, that does not signify but merely is (9)."

of being” (Heidegger 239).²³ In fact, Lady Chandos’s torment regarding the loss of faith in language is comparable to the feeling of being thrown into the universe. She feels exposed to the world, without the comfort of the hearth of language. Francis Bacon is the only one who can put a stop to the agonising feeling through his ability to “set them [words] in place and build your judgements as a mason builds a wall with bricks” (Coetzee 230). Put differently, Bacon has the ability to use his words as building blocks necessary to build an ontological home for Lady Chandos and her husband.

In “Reading in the In between: Pre-scripting the Postscript to Elizabeth Costello” (2005), Reingard Nethersole puts this very well when she argues that the postscript represents an “*experimentum linguae*” that proves the self-referentiality of language, revealing that the confines of language reside in the experience of language itself (257). Nethersole’s idea resonates with Saussure’s definition of language as “a self-contained whole and a principle of classification” (9). She goes on to argue that the effect of Coetzee’s treatment of language leaves one “profoundly insecure with regard to firmly grounding utterance and hence meaning in distinctive nonfluid, irreversible signifiers that would fix and secure specific combinatorial signification” (262). The sense of insecurity is felt so acutely that it engenders an identity crisis, and in this sense, both Lady Chandos and Hofmannsthal’s letters imply the loss of self, which traditional rationalism conceived of as fully anchored in and master of language. In the trilogy then, we see a similar identity crisis in Simón which also occurs as a consequence of the loss of faith in the power of Spanish to represent Simón’s inner world.

²³ The question of Heidegger’s Germanicness is another issue that falls outside the remit of this work. Rather, the interest here is in language as an unreliable medium of communication, with its implication on stories.

The example of David's peculiar articulation of sounds is not the only form in which this echolalic language manifests. Another instance occurs in *The Childhood* when Simón asks David about his music lessons with Elena, their neighbour and the mother of David's friend Fidel. In addition to learning scales, David also learns to sing, and is not shy of demonstrating what he has learnt on the bus that takes them into the countryside (and to David's future mother):

Wer reitet so spät durch Dampf und Wind?

Er ist der Vater mit seinem Kind;

Er halt den Knaben in dem Arm,

Er füttert ihn Zucker, er küsst ihm warm (Coetzee, *CJ* 80; emphasis in original)

This stanza is a clear literary reference to Goethe's "Erlkönig", which was later adapted to music by Franz Schubert. Goethe's poem is about a son being pursued by death, the Erlkönig. His father cannot help save him so the patriarch tries to prolong the moment of death by attempting to convince the boy that he is not dying. Coetzee replicates this situation in the story by having Simón try to convince the child that he will escape the clutches of death. In a sense, both Simón and David have an intuitive knowledge of the latter's death.

Nevertheless, Coetzee's reference to the poem is an imperfect adaptation, as if to reinforce the idea of the unreliability of memory but also of the act of translation as ultimately an act of interpretation. The first stanza of Goethe's poem is:

Wer reitet so spät durch Nacht und Wind?

Es ist der Vater mit seinem Kind;

Er hat den Knaben wohl in dem Arm,

Er faßt ihn sicher, er hält ihn warm.²⁴

In contrast to Goethe's stanza, David's version differs: it contains different words, such as "küsst" (to kiss) instead of "hält" (to hold). The last line "[e]r füttert ihn Zucker" (he feeds him sugar; "füttern" is a verb that is used only when referring to the act of feeding animals) is presented instead of "er faßt ihn sicher" (he clasps him snugly). In Pippin's essay on the trilogy, referred to earlier, he points out that the reference to Goethe signals "some transmission of 'the classics' in Novilla, but at such a distance that the language is wrongly identified and the text begins to show signs of corruption" (19). Pippin contends that David remembers the stanza because of an intuitive understanding of his relationship to his guardian Simón. Building on Pippin, I want to foreground the idea that the echoes of eighteenth-century Romantic poetry underpin the trilogy.

On reading the passage, the reader may look askance. What is a song in German doing in a fictional world in which characters only converse in Spanish? And why does David mistake it for English and not another language? That the child learns the song from Elena indicates the possibility that before coming to this new land, Elena's mother tongue was German and that what remained after being washed clean was the memory of this poem. Whether this is a wilful refusal to forget one's mother tongue is an open question, yet Elena's words seem to indicate that she has not entirely lost her memories and native tongue. She tells Simón that "[f]orgetting takes time", "[o]nce you have properly forgotten, your sense of insecurity will recede and everything will become much easier" (Coetzee, *CJ* 169). The observation implies that

²⁴ See the complete poem online: <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/1420>. Accessed 29 June 2022.

she herself has experienced the gradual loss of memories but that the process of forgetting has not been complete.

The memory of another language, and implicitly, another way of looking at the world, continues to resurface in David's speech. In one of Señor Arroyo's classes at the Academy of Singing, formerly the Academy of Dance, David learns a "mystery song":

In diesem Wetter, in diesem Braus,

Nie hätt' ich gesendet das Kind hinaus –

Ja, in diesem Wetter, in diesem Braus,

durft'st Du nicht senden das Kind hinaus! (Coetzee, DJ 12-13)

Coetzee is quoting from Friedrich Rückert, the nineteenth-century German poet, translator, and self-taught scholar of Oriental languages. Being a translator and a linguist, Rückert introduced German readers to Eastern literature, poetry and mythology. Specifically, the poem belongs to Rückert's *Kindertotenlieder* ("Songs on the Deaths of Children"), a collection of poems written following the death of his two children. The collection was published posthumously and was adapted to music by Gustav Mahler, as a song cycle of five poems bearing the same name in 1904.

The subject of Rückert's poem is that of children being taken away from a parent without the latter being able to save them. However, Coetzee adapts the poem to suit the context of his own story. Accordingly, he uses the singular – "das Kind" – instead of the plural, and he changes the stanza as well. While the two lines remain the same, with the minor change that now there is one child instead of two, Coetzee adds "[y]es, in this weather, this raging storm, You aren't allowed to send the child out" [my translation]. The lines specifically address a *you*, a parent, Simón. At the end of

Rückert's poem, the children are portrayed as resting "as if in their mother's house", protected by the hand of God.

The song seems to have been almost a slip of the tongue: "I was going to sing another song but when I opened my mouth that one came out" (Coetzee, *DJ* 13). David's sudden burst signals that "language, over time, thus remains, but it does not remain itself. It may last, but only as an other" (Heller-Roazen 127). David speaks this (German) language but, in a sense, the language speaks itself through David. Looking at it from a different angle, the moment is a manifestation of "the unconscious knowledge we carry in us" (Coetzee, *DP* 25). Although David does not know how to translate the "strange words" he remarks that Señor Arroyo reassured him that he will find out the meaning of these words in the next life. As though misunderstood or misinterpreted by Simón, he wonders "did he [Señor Arroyo] consider [...] that the song may come not from the next life but from your previous life, the life you had before you stepped on board the big boat and crossed the ocean?" (Coetzee, *DJ* 13). Here Coetzee questions the origins of intuitive knowledge once again, only this time opening the possibility that remembering can come from the past or from the future.

As a character, David, like the young Coetzee, is "inordinately given to fantasy" (Coetzee and Kurtz 156).²⁵ Fascinated by *Don Quixote*, a book which he receives from Simón in an abridged version for children, David learns the story by heart. He absorbs it completely; it becomes a guide that helps him navigate his way in the new land. Although the eponymous hero's adventures are a product of a fertile imagination, the boy refuses to distinguish between real or imaginary deeds. For him,

²⁵ Despite his predisposition to the life of the imagination, Coetzee writes that "I never thought of giving up my fantasy life and attaching myself to the real. Rather, I accepted fantasising as a kind of affliction that had been visited on me at birth, a congenital disease that I was doomed to carry" (Coetzee, *GS* 56).

like for Don Quixote, the real world and the world of fantasy dovetail. David introduces a different worldview into the text which challenges the dominant one embodied by Simón. Señora Oxtoa, a child psychologist who is responsible for David's case, explains that his troubled behaviour "comes out of a [...] mystifying family situation: out of uncertainty about who he is, where he comes from" (Coetzee, *CJ* 245). David's lack of grounding into the real is linked to his not having a real father and mother. As Señora Oxtoa tells Simón, "the illegible pages" that David writes for his teacher are "stories about where he comes from [...] They are stories for himself, not for us. That is why he writes them in a private script" (Coetzee, *SJ* 247). The act of writing and rewriting one's story is an exercise in capturing different versions of the self which make up one's subjectivity. David's private script encodes his personal history while indicating the need to find an alternative language of communication.

The trilogy therefore gestures to this analogy between losing one's mother and mother tongue throughout. The important presence of the mother in a child's life is captured in the words of Mercedes, Señor Arroyo's sister and a former dance instructor, who thinks that children need the soft touch of a woman in a "hard world of men and men's ideas" (Coetzee, *SJ* 202). David feels displaced, having neither maternal protection nor a mother tongue to rely on. Elena is convinced that Simón's and her generation "may not feel at home in Spanish, but David and Fidel[s generation] will" (Coetzee, *CJ* 127). Yet David acutely perceives his rootlessness; he "feels with unusual intensity the falsity of his new life" (Coetzee, *CJ* 147). Marie Knott observes that David is "apparently the only person in the country who suffers from the fact that he has no genealogy and knows nothing of his origins" ("No Other Place" n.p.). Despite the fact that throughout the story, there are pointers to find the boy's mother, whether Inés is his real mother remains inconclusive.

This chapter has focused on Coetzee's exploration of the question of whether one's mother tongue can be completely eradicated. What does it mean not to have a mother tongue, or even a mother? But more importantly, what does it mean not to be able to speak from the heart? If Magda, when seemingly accused by the beings in the flying machines that she has turned herself into a fiction out of boredom with her static life, protests, justifying her decision by explaining, quite movingly, that it represents an act of rebellion against oppression, in the trilogy Coetzee's characters turn to fictions-of-the-self for different reasons: not to fight against oppression, which contains a subtle form of aggression and denial, but because of their existential nakedness, which is based on vulnerability and openness to the world. They show us that, in the face of extreme vulnerability, without the safety and security of a "language of the heart", their communication is heartfelt.

Chapter 2: Animals

Animals feature prominently in the trilogy. Whether these are dogs, horses, lambs, sparrows, doves, or rats, animals are an integral part of the larger ecology of the novels. The way in which they are represented is as living in harmony with humans. The dog, Bolívar, is an Alsatian (German Shepherd) who is an equal “part of the family. We go nowhere without him” (Coetzee, *SJ* 3). El Rey, a Percheron at the docks, plays a crucial role in helping the stevedores transport heavy sacks of grains to the warehouse. Even rats are an essential part of the fauna of the trilogy, accepted without hesitation by the stevedores under the understanding that “[w]herever you have warehouses you have rats. Where our species flourishes, rats flourish too” (Coetzee, *CJ* 133). The white dove Blanco, who is temporarily David’s best friend, will potentially help him deliver his message. There is also an Academy of Dance which runs a menagerie comprising a lamb named Jeremiah, chickens and rabbits, with the aim of nurturing in children a sensitivity towards animals. Vegetarianism is the preferred lifestyle in the new land, with meat being hard to find. Such representation of animals announces an entanglement between human and nonhuman beings.

Further corroboration for the idea of living in harmony with other forms of life is Coetzee’s trip to India in 2011 as reported in *Here and Now*. In a letter to Paul Auster, he makes an observation regarding a state of peaceful co-existence between humans and animals which he noticed while in India, where he had accepted an invitation to speak at Jaipur Literary Festival. Describing his impressions of his trip around Rajasthan, what struck him was the relationship humans had with animals there, which seemed to have been based on “a decent *modus vivendi*” (Coetzee, *HN* 2012). This harmonious living-togetherness manifested in everyday life as “a simple

tolerance and acceptance of an animal's way of being, even when it intrudes among men" (Coetzee, *HN* 212). (The example of the rats mentioned earlier is significant in this sense.) In contrast, the relations established between different species which he had observed in Africa differed considerably in that "animals are also omnipresent but [Africa is a continent] where an unthinking cruelty toward them is common, an attitude of contempt toward them as a lower form of life" (Coetzee, *HN* 212). Coetzee's (perhaps idealised) impressions of the Indian human–animal *modus vivendi* become manifest in the Jesus novels whose ecology is founded on a rethinking of the concept of commonality through an expanded view of language.

In the trilogy, Coetzee seeks to imagine a language, a mode of communication between humans and animals.¹ When animals are introduced, they are presented in relation to humans – as catalysts of thoughts, emotions, and behaviours that would otherwise remain unavailable. As in Rita Felski's discussion of literary characters in *Characters: Three Inquiries in Literary Studies* (2019), animals are "not just bundles of signifiers" but "worldly actors haloed with affective and existential force" (Felski 87). In formulating my argument, I take my cue from an observation Coetzee makes in "On Appetite, the Right to Life, and Rational Ethics" (2009) which deserves to be quoted at length:

there are people (among whom I number myself) who believe that our ethical impulses are prerational [...] and that all that a rational ethics can achieve is to articulate and give form to ethical impulses.

¹ In formulating my argument that Coetzee reduces the importance of ordinary language in order to allow other forms of communication to manifest between living beings, I touch on an idea that Timothy C. Baker explores in *Writing Animals: Language, Suffering, and Animals in Twenty-First Century Fiction* (2019). In his book, Baker challenges the conventional anthropocentric stance on animal representation in literature whereby the animal's role is as a backdrop for the human in order to propose that 21st century literature which features animals destabilises firm distinctions humans and animals while it also questions the nature of representation.

Let me add that I by no means claim such an ethical foundation to the soul to be human and human alone. Many animals can clearly tell between just and unjust actions, at least as far as these directly affect them. (121)

In this chapter I look at the Jesus novels as literary experiments which seek to capture discursively the communication that goes on between humans and animals. The texts offer a possible answer to the question “how one is to confront an opponent who in some respects [...] gives little or no weight to reasoning and the fruits of reasoning?” (Coetzee, “On Appetite” 119-120) The way in which Coetzee allows us to see the human–animal connection is through a “miraculous dialogue” that takes place between alternative forms of life (Coetzee, *GS* 58). The human does not need to “speak” the language of the animal. As Elizabeth Costello reminds us, he or she can make use of sympathetic identification to understand another mode of being. Therefore, in this chapter I argue that despite animals being a fundamentally different mode of being, a connection with them is possible and the trilogy shows us how, in literary terms, that connection is imagined in language.

So far, a consistent body of criticism has addressed the question of the animal in Coetzee’s fiction. In *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading* (2004), Derek Attridge avoids reading Coetzee’s animals strictly allegorically, as a solution to the political context of the age. He argues instead for an appreciation of animals that goes beyond rationality and that acknowledges their singularity and fundamental value as living beings (188). In *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2006), Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin position Coetzee’s work within a postcolonial–ecocritical framework, exploring the political implications of the relationship between the human, the animal, and the environment. In keeping with the postcolonial lens, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, perhaps wishfully, interprets the newly imagined world

that *Childhood* harbours as Coetzee's envisioning of pre-colonial Africa – a place yet untouched by the violence of imperialism.² Stephen Mulhall, amid consideration of the question of the animal in *The Wounded Animal*, (2009) emphasises more universal concerns about the power of literature over philosophy to offer us an embodied experience of philosophical ideas about animals. In his recent *J. M. Coetzee's Revisions of the Human: Posthumanism and Narrative Form* (2019), Kai Wiegandt argues that Coetzee's works constantly revise and renegotiate the question of what it means to be human, not overlooking the fact that the human is always defined in relation to the animal through the idea of embodied experience.

My approach avoids situating Coetzee's representation of animals within a particular theoretical framework such as posthumanism, animal studies, or postcolonial ecocriticism. Coetzee has written his way out of strictly postcolonial and postcolonial ecocritical concerns, and his trilogy (and late works more generally) divorces the human–animal relation from its possible racial implications. Due to the theoretical versatility of the trilogy, there is no *llave universal* that renders the ultimate truth about the novels (Anker 188). My analysis focuses instead on the constellation Simón–Bolívar–David and what forms of connection, attachment, and communication become available between these characters.

There is a particular moment in the narrative that captures the essence of this connection and therefore serves as a good starting point for the analysis. Toward the end of *Childhood*, Simón, Inés, David, and Bolívar have left Novilla behind and are headed north in search of a “new life” (Coetzee, *CJ* 309). In the silence of the night, while driving,

² View the full article online: <https://www.publicbooks.org/lie-down-in-the-karoo-an-antidote-to-the-anthropocene/>.

[h]e [Simón] glances over his shoulder. The boy has fallen asleep, his arms around Bolívar's neck. He looks into the dog's eyes. *Guard him*, he says, though he utters no word. The icy amber eyes stare back at him, unblinking. He knows the dog does not like him. But perhaps the dog likes no one; perhaps liking is outside the range of his heart. What does it matter anyway, liking, loving, compared with being faithful? (Coetzee, *CJ* 311; emphasis in original)

The moment is undoubtedly powerful and goes beyond the familiar. This is suggested by the description of Bolívar who looks back at Simón, “unblinking” (Coetzee, *CJ* 311). Though an animal, Bolívar is represented as a sentient, thinking being, who returns the human gaze. He is neither an allegory nor a surface onto which Simón projects his own humanity. Instead, he is a fundamentally different mode of being whose singularity and interiority Simón acknowledges through the effort to understand the animal's consciousness.

This is not a usual exchange between a human and an animal but one which suggests the possibility of engaging in a form of dialogue. The description of the scene is careful to capture each step of the exchange, from the moment when Simón's eyes lock with Bolívar's to the message Simón communicates to the dog's response to Simón's look. Yet Simón's unspoken instruction confirms what Bolívar is already doing, that is, guarding David; it is as if the dog is putting these words in his mind. Simón thus arrives at the insight about the dog's faithfulness as a result of communication with the dog. In other words, Simón is articulating what the dog is doing rather than giving instructions, and so he seeks confirmation from the animal.

Donna Haraway, a biologist by training and a feminist theorist by profession, publishes on the intersections between science, feminism, and posthumanism. Haraway also writes about the interaction between alternative forms of life. In *When*

Species Meet (2008) she looks at the relationship between humans and dogs in particular, developing the idea of companion species, which refers to the entanglement between humans and animals and which is “less a category than a pointer to an ongoing “becoming with”” (16). In her book, she writes that to have an exchange with another mode of being means “[t]o hold in regard, to respond, to look back reciprocally, to notice, to pay attention, to have courteous regard for, to esteem” (Haraway 19).

In light of this remark, the moment in the trilogy suggests that Simón and Bolívar look back reciprocally, and they pay attention to each other. When their eyes meet, Simón experiences what Derrida in “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)” (2002) identifies as a tension between a “projection that appropriates” and “an interruption that excludes” (18). Though tempted to anthropomorphise Bolívar’s muted response, and thus appropriate the other into the self, Simón tries to refrain from interrupting the interpretative process. He thus excludes the individuality and agentic capacity of the dog, ending his thought process with an open question.

Such a representation of the human–animal interaction raises the question of animal consciousness. With regard to Derrida’s notorious encounter with his cat, Haraway points out his oversight: “a simple obligation of companion species” which manifests in his case as a lack of curiosity about “what the cat might actually be doing, feeling, thinking, or perhaps making available to him in looking back at him” (20). Drawing on this observation, Coetzee’s representation of Simón’s encounter with Bolívar advances Derrida’s thinking by raising the question of the animal’s possible thought process and affective state of being at the moment of encounter. Simón exercises sympathetic identification, an imperative in forging a relationship between companion species. Thus, he attributes agency and plenitude of being to the animal,

acknowledging the dog's sentience. As we will see, Bolívar's "icy amber eyes [which] stare back at him" register Simón's appeal to guard David, responding to his plea (Coetzee, *CJ* 311). Hence, the type of communication between a human and an animal that the exchange suggests is non-linguistic and embodied.

Featuring in all three novels, Bolívar is the most prominent animal in the trilogy. We make his acquaintance indirectly thanks to David noticing him on the tennis courts of La Residencia, where the boy and Simón find Inés, David's future mother. Although Simón initially fails to acknowledge the dog's presence, the boy helps him identify Inés from the other residents in La Residencia with reference to the dog: he whispers to Simón to "[t]ell him [the porter] about the dog" (Coetzee, *CJ* 84). This detail is significant because it sets the stage for a relational mode of understanding human-animal interaction. Inés is identified with the help of her dog and vice versa. In other words, what distinguishes Inés's subjectivity is the dog Bolívar.³ As Katarzyna Nowak-McNeice argues in "Belonging to the Human and Non-human Animals in J. M. Coetzee's Recent Novels" (2018), such a representation reconfigures the relation between humans and animals as entangled rather than in binary terms (1). As the narrative progresses, Bolívar develops new loyalties and attachments to Simón and David, thus reconfiguring his relationship to Inés.

Prior to his encounter with Bolívar, Simón, our mediating consciousness, is more invested in the abstract idea of the animal.⁴ To him, at least initially, the human

³ This is also the case *Age of Iron* where Vercueil is almost always followed around by the puppy. When Mrs Curren tells Florence about Vercueil, she also mentions the dog who accompanies him (Coetzee, *AI* 37). Similarly, though not as directly, Lucy in *Disgrace* is distinguished by the dogs she cares for.

⁴ In "The Old Woman and the Cats" (2013) Elizabeth Costello's son, John, shares this attitude to animals, whom he considers "[b]enign but distant" beings (13). In comparison to Costello's son, in whom we can barely distinguish the faint traces of a change in his understanding of animals, David Lurie in *Disgrace* experiences a profound ethical renewal as a consequences of opening up to alternative modes of being in the world. Initially indifferent to individual animal life, and quite unsympathetic with others around him, animals become one of the two (the other being art) areas of

being is “the pinnacle of creation”, though he also believes that the human is first an “animalcule” (Coetzee, *CJ* 129, 109). Nevertheless, as David’s guardian, he carries out with diligence and care his duty to cultivate in the boy a sensibility towards animal life. Shortly after their arrival in Novilla, Simón wants to take David to the zoo “to see the animals”, though the initiative falls through and instead they join Álvaro to watch football (Coetzee, *CJ* 28). In another instance when there is a commotion among the stevedores, Simón tries to divert David’s attention to the nearby seals at the breakwater. Looking at animals offers tranquillity and a source of learning about the social hierarchy of seals, with “[t]he big one with his nose in the air” who is the male, and “the smaller ones, [who] are his wives” (Coetzee, *CJ* 55). The encounter with Bruno, the dog of the passer-by whom Simón stops on the street to ask for directions to a place to eat, and the animal’s “snif[fing] the boy’s shoes, then his crotch” produces no reaction in Simón (Coetzee, *CJ* 42). Despite his good intentions to teach David about animal life, Simón is initially less interested in the singularity of another mode of being and more in the idea that animals as a whole are part of life and should be acknowledged as such.

Unsurprisingly, the way in which Simón initially relates to animals is largely based on scepticism (a characteristic attitude of Coetzee’s protagonists), assumptions, preconceptions, and personal fears. In a comic way, the text also encourages such a reading. On Simón’s first visit to the flat where David now lives with his mother and the dog, he immediately learns from the boy that “Bolívar is an Assación”, a comic mispronunciation of Alsatian that combines the Spanish “assassino” and the English “assassin” (Coetzee, *CJ* 107). There is a stark contrast between David’s remark and

ethical growth for Lurie, particularly due to the three-footed dog Driepoot whom he befriends and gives up at the end of the novel in a scene of what Attwell beautifully calls “literary sublimity” (231).

Inés's, when she reassures Simón that "Bolívar is the gentlest dog in the world" (Coetzee, *CJ* 107). Though the exchange produces a comic effect, Coetzee uses the opportunity to raise the question between the feral and domesticated nature of the dog. As we will see, this recurs throughout the trilogy, and also comes up in relation to David. Simón relies on received knowledge that "Alsations don't have a good reputation around children", adopting a moralising attitude vis-à-vis the presence of Bolívar around the child without having engaged with the dog himself (Coetzee, *CJ* 107).

By contrast, David seems to be oblivious to the danger that the dog poses. The boy's immediate attachment to Bolívar influences Simón's own perception of the dog. His love for and desire to understand the boy lead him to go against his preconceived ideas about Alsations, instead adopting what he assumes is the boy's perspective on the dog. In spite of his initial distrust for the animal, which is further comically highlighted through David's remark that "Alsations are the best dogs. When they catch a thief they never let go", Simón shows an openness to learning about and engaging with an alternative mode of being (Coetzee, *CJ* 110). For the first time, Simón looks carefully at "Bolívar the Alsatian [who] slinks across the court and settles down in the shade. Bolívar is a male with huge shoulders and a black ruff. In looks he is not far removed from a wolf" (Coetzee, *CJ* 110). In his famous essay "Why Look at Animals?" (2009), John Berger writes that when humans look at animals, they look across ignorance and fear (14). In Simón's case, fear comes from the animal's unknowability (being a different mode of being) and unpredictability (the link to the wolf), mixed with an abstract understanding of animals and anxiety about the danger the dog poses to David. Nevertheless, Coetzee's representation of Simón's relationship to the dog is more complex than being simply based on fear. Through

what can only be called a willed act of the imagination, Simón shows desire to change his ideas about the dog by first looking carefully at the animal.

This openness to Bolívar is tested in a direct confrontation with the dog. Freshly separated from the child, Simón longs to speak to him, and so he follows the boy, Inés, and Bolívar on their walk, premeditating an encounter with the trio. When he calls out Inés's name, she "stops and turns. The dog turns too, cocking its ears, tugging at its leash" (Coetzee, *CJ* 121). A few exchanges pass between Simón and Inés, then "[a] long silence. He would like to come closer, but the dog has not relaxed its vigilant glare" (Coetzee, *CJ* 121). Apart from the ordinary human experience of being frightened by a fierce dog, something else happens there. Through his body language, Bolívar communicates danger, and, more importantly, a presence that lays a moral claim on Simón, demanding to be acknowledged not only as an autonomous being but also as David's new guardian. Language becomes futile, with Bolívar stifling Simón's capacity for thought. This serves to expose the ethical and affective nature of the human–animal exchange. As Derrida points out in "The Animal That Therefore I Am", standing before his cat, "everything can happen to me [as a human]" (12). Standing before Bolívar, Simón must face his own fears and insecurities about the dog, who looks at him, like Derrida's cat, "from deep within a life called animal" (Derrida 14). The dog destabilises Simón's self-certainty and belief in human exceptionalism, altering his anthropocentric worldview – his initial idea of the human as "the pinnacle of creation" – in favour of a renewed ethical understanding of animals (Coetzee, *CJ* 129).

Not only does Simón register the animal's gaze, with all the excess of meaning it carries, but after the encounter he also begins to see a familiarity he shares with the animal. In the same essay, John Berger describes the visual encounter between humans

and animals as each party scrutinising the other from across an “abyss of non-comprehension” (13). In the case of humans, this abyss can often be bridged by language. The chasm contains the possibility of surprise: of surprising and being surprised by the other (14). The uncertainty regarding what can happen during the exchange between Simón and Bolívar also contains the element of surprise to which Berger refers. This is further emphasised by the composition of the scene, which takes place “in the wildest part of the parklands, where a wooden footbridge crosses a stream choked with rushes” (Coetzee, *CJ* 121). Yet the phenomenon of being aware of being looked at by an animal and of returning that look is, according to Berger, reserved only for humans, who recognise the look of the animal as familiar (13). In Coetzee’s representation of the encounter, the animal is also aware of being looked at by a human and of returning that look, engaging in a form of non-verbal dialogue.

Simón’s changing thoughts in relation to Bolívar are further challenged by other characters in the narrative. Elena, Simón’s neighbour and the mother of one of David’s friends, takes up a firm position against the idea of keeping Bolívar as a pet: “[e]verywhere Inés goes, the dog goes. It gives me the shivers. It is like a coiled spring. One of those days it is going to attack someone” (Coetzee, *CJ* 123). In addition, when kept indoors, an animal is “unhygienic”, particularly since he is not just a normal dog but “a great big wolfhound” (Coetzee, *CJ* 116). Her view of Bolívar overrides an understanding of the dog as a sentient, thinking being and becomes obstructed by the danger the dog poses. This viewpoint is maintained throughout the trilogy by other characters such as a young doctor in the hospital where David spends his final days who refers to Bolívar as “this dangerous animal”, while Dr Ribeiro, David’s doctor, describes Bolívar as “that savage dog of yours” (Coetzee, *DJ* 125-6). The children who attend David’s seventh birthday “recoil in alarm” on seeing the dog emerge from

“his lair”, while David reassures them that “he only bites bad people” (Coetzee, *SJ* 210). Here Coetzee uses the opportunity to raise the question of the role of the dog in the social by bringing in several perspectives on the human relation to animals. Against Elena’s firm (if not radical) opinion, and influenced by David’s attachment to Bolívar, Simón reconsiders his own views, showing a willingness to understand the animal, despite the danger it embodies.⁵ He explains that “[i]t’s not a vicious dog, Elena, just a bit unpredictable. Unpredictable but faithful” (Coetzee, *CJ* 123-4). Hence, what contributes to the familiarity Simón unconsciously detects in Bolívar during the encounter on the bridge is the loyalty that has come up before in Simón’s understanding of Bolívar’s relationship to David – a trait that is no longer reserved only for humans but is manifest in animals as well. His observation thus marks the beginning of a recognition of the singularity of the animal.

If Simón has begun to accept Bolívar, then the converse is also true.⁶ Bolívar allows Simón to enter his premises (the apartment) after a proper rite of passage in which he “approaches him [Simón] magisterially and sniffs his crotch” (Coetzee, *CJ* 213). The comic bathos here subverts attempts to read the human–animal connection as profoundly meaningful. In fact, throughout the trilogy, Coetzee plays with this doubleness between a metaphorical and literal meaning of the human–animal encounter, refusing to champion one over the other and risk becoming dogmatic. The exchange draws attention to the physicality of the encounter with an animal or what Haraway calls the ordinariness of “beings-in-encounter” (5). Yet even this amusing

⁵ In *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event* (2004), Derek Attridge argues that the ethical force of Coetzee’s novels resides in the protagonists allowing the other to change them, while also acknowledging the otherness of the other (104).

⁶ When placing the names “Simón” and “Bolívar” alongside one another, one may think of the nineteenth-century South American leader Simón Bolívar, also referred to as “El Libertador”. While the connection between Coetzee’s two characters and the historical figure of Simón Bolívar is persuasive, what is more relevant is the relationship of co-dependence established between them in the trilogy.

greeting ritual is significant since, according to Haraway, it is “a kind of embodied communication, which takes place in entwined, semiotic, overlapping, somatic patterning over time” (25). This type of “embodied communication is more like a dance than a word. The flow of entangled meaning bodies [...] is communication about relationship, the relationship itself, and the means of reshaping relationship and so its enactors” (Haraway 25). Since Simón shows acceptance rather than hostility towards the animal, his status changes in the eyes of Bolívar from object to subject, and so Simón engages in a “responsive relationship” with Bolívar (Haraway 25). As Simón enters the door of the apartment, he also enters a space of what Haraway calls “becoming with” the animal (19). The concept refers to the idea that the self is the result of “intra- and interaction” between “species of all kinds”, that subjectivity is mutually constituting (4). Drawing on this idea, Bolívar is responsible for how Simón evolves as a character and what affinities he develops.

What also confirms the shared subjectivity between human and animal is the episode that opens *Schooldays* in which Coetzee transposes into fiction the idea about the ethical impulse being rooted in the moral being of a living being. The pair Simón–Bolívar are represented as more alike than different in their response to vulnerability. On seeing the boy’s frantic splashing, meant to shoo away the ducks who are under siege by the children throwing rocks at them,

[o]ut of nowhere the great dog appears and races past her [Inés], straight as an arrow. In a matter of moments he has leapt into the dam and is at David’s side. Gripping his shirt in his teeth, he hauls the thrashing, protesting child to the bank. (Coetzee, *SJ* 6-7)

The passage clearly captures the dog's pre-rational ethical impulse to save the boy from an apparent drowning.⁷ In her response to *The Lives of Animals*, anthropologist, psychologist, and primatologist Barbara Smuts writes that "treating members of other species as persons, as beings with potential far beyond our normal expectations, will bring out the best in them" (120). Smuts's idea is reminiscent of Berger's notion of being surprised by the other. In her understanding, "person" implies "any animal, human or nonhuman, who has the capacity to participate in personal relationships, with one another, with humans, or both" (108). By now, Simón has come to accept Bolívar, to consider him "part of the family. We go nowhere without him" (Coetzee, *SJ* 3). But more importantly, Simón has entrusted the dog with the boy's guardianship; he has "giv[en] up control over [Bolívar] and how [the dog] relates to [him]", a loss of control that, Smuts points out, most of us fear (118). Judging by the dog's response after having rescued David, "slump[ing] down, his ears cocked, his eyes on her, waiting for a sign", the same holds true for Inés, Bolívar's owner (Coetzee, *SJ* 6-7). Therefore Inés and Simón's openness brings out the best in Bolívar, whose behaviour indicates that he has registered, understood, and responded to Simón's appeal to guard the boy without the need to be given instructions.

The scene also foregrounds the relationship between love and guardianship. Whether the dog responds out of love or loyalty remains unclear. This uncertainty is particularly underscored by Coetzee's use of irony in the episode by having David protest against being saved, wailing and beating the dog with his small fists while crying "I hate you, Bolívar! [...] I didn't ask Bolívar to come. Bolívar is stupid. He is

⁷ This brings us back to Coetzee's thoughts on the limited capacity of a rational ethics to discursively shape the ethical impulse without inquiring into its deeper origins. Without wanting to dip into the notorious "ancient quarrel" between philosophy and literature, it is worth noting that Coetzee's representation of the human-animal encounter offers an embodied dimension to the moral impulse.

a stupid dog” (Coetzee, *SJ* 7). Simón, as always, makes a conscious effort to speak to David in terms he understands, explaining that “you must not say you hate Bolívar. You love Bolívar, we all know that, and Bolívar loves you” (Coetzee, *SJ* 7). In another instance, he tells David that he should sit next to Bolívar to “let him warm you. Let him give you some of his heat” (Coetzee, *SJ* 128). This suggests an effort to locate the source of the ethical impulse in the complex relationship between love and guardianship, which is also central to Simón’s relationship to David.

Bolívar’s devotion to the boy extends to Simón as well. After David has been rescued against his will by Bolívar, he demands that the wounded duck also be saved. Reluctantly, Simón sets to the task, wading into the water, when “[w]ith barely a splash the dog appears at his side. ‘Go away, Bolívar,’ he murmurs. ‘I don’t need to be saved’” (Coetzee, *SJ* 7). Because Simón is too clumsy and slow to save the bird, “[i]t is Bolívar who does the job for him. Sailing past him like a ghost, with only his head showing above the water, he tracks the wounded bird, closes his jaw like a vice on the trailing wing, and hauls him toward the bank” (Coetzee, *SJ* 8). The scene foregrounds the ethical foundation of the animal which, as Coetzee states, requires no forethought. Regardless of species, the dog registers the vulnerability of another living being and responds instinctively, pre-rationally. Drawing on psychologist and evolutionary anthropologist Michael Tomasello’s *Origins of Human Communication* (2010), the moment highlights the intimate symbiosis of a human and a dog over time and within the individual lives of each human and dog (42). In Coetzee’s description of the human–animal encounter, the emphasis is on collaboration, a joining of forces to rescue another living being.⁸ Instead of favouring human exceptionalism by having

⁸ Coetzee’s literary representation of human–dog interaction is in accordance with the findings of a recent study led by Hannah Salomon, a social cognition researcher looking at the cognitive effects of domestication on dogs. In an interview on her research, she explains that “[d]ogs are born with this

Simón, a human, be the hero who saves the wounded duck, the scene emphasises the joint effort or teamwork of the human and the animal. Through this representation of the human–animal connection, Coetzee shows us a glimpse of humanity as what Haraway refers to as a “web of interspecies dependencies” (11).

The entanglement between a human and a dog suggests the possibility of a form of dialogue between them. From the beginning of the narrative, Simón is in constant “conversation” with Bolívar, whose own nonverbal language of gestures and postures he starts to understand. When one of David’s guests wants to pat Bolívar, Simón explains that the dog “isn’t in a friendly mood” because “he is used to sleeping in the afternoon. He is very much a creature of habit” (Coetzee, *SJ* 210). Looking carefully at the animal, Simón notices that Bolívar has “completed the move into the twilight of a dog’s life. He has grown a paunch; sometimes, as he settles down to sleep, he lets loose a sad little sigh” (Coetzee, *SJ* 104). In another instance, Coetzee humorously portrays the embodied nature of the animal when Bolívar “heaves himself to his feet, letting loose a malodorous fart” (Coetzee, *DJ* 3). This is a playful yet ironic parallel to the double nature of humans who “partake of the ideal but we also make poo” (Coetzee, *CJ* 157). Bolívar’s transition into the “latter phase of [their] life, the phase of decline” overlaps with Simón’s, facilitating a closer connection between them through a shared state of being (Coetzee, *SJ* 80). To a certain extent, senescence is part of the doubleness of Simón and Bolívar.

The idea that one can connect with an animal through a state of being features in Coetzee’s earlier works such as *Elizabeth Costello* and “The Old Woman and the Cats”. In the short story, Elizabeth Costello feels connected to a cat giving birth on the

innate ability to understand that we're communicating with them and we're trying to cooperate with them” (n.p.). View the full article on the website: <https://today.duke.edu/2020/07/you-can-snuggle-wolf-pups-all-you-want-they-still-wont-get-you-quite-your-dog>.

premise of shared motherhood: “*I too am a mother* [Elizabeth wants to reassure the cat] [...] But of course she would not understand. Would not want to understand” (Coetzee 22). Later she recalls the appeal which the cat made to her as “prior to and more primitive than the ethical”, triggering a decision to side with the cats that “came in a flash. It did not require any calculation, any weighing of pluses against minuses”, that is to say, any rational thought (Coetzee 22). In *Elizabeth Costello*, the eponymous hero has an encounter with an albatross and its chick on Macquarie Island. Before she distinguishes the albatross in the distance, the bird is already looking at her “steadily and, so it seems to her, with amusement while the fledgling shows its hostility by open[ing] its beak, giv[ing] a long, soundless cry of warning” (56). The thoughts triggered by the encounter are described as “[b]efore the fall, she thinks. *This is how it must have been before the fall. I could miss the boat, stay here. Ask God to take care of me*” (Coetzee, *EC* 56; emphasis in original). The nature of Costello’s encounter with the cat and the albatross borders on the miraculous, possibly alluding to a Wordsworthian transcendental realm where human and animal souls harmoniously co-exist. As if shedding skins, Coetzee strips away the linguistic epidermis to illuminate a rawness of being that fundamentally connects humans to animals.

Simón’s attachment to Bolívar intensifies to the extent that the dog’s model of fatherhood becomes a potential replica for his own. “As for him, what place is left for him in the boy’s life? Perhaps he should follow the example of Bolívar [...] [which is] idle, selfish, and dangerous. Perhaps the boy will respect him then” (Coetzee, *SJ* 104). Simón’s perception of the dog’s guardianship is obviously distorted here yet what is significant is that he opens himself to learning from another mode of being, which he cannot fully understand. The train of thoughts shows that “[t]o be one [a human being] is always to become with many [other nonhuman beings]” (Haraway 4). Simón and

Bolívar thus are mutually constitutive existences. This relationship is reflected in Simón's explanation that, despite Bolívar not having a dog family, "[w]e are Bolívar's family. We look after Bolívar and Bolívar looks after us" (Coetzee, *SJ* 82). A relationship of interdependence is established between them, yet it is one which does not overwrite but instead preserves the subjectivity of each member.

Coetzee's representation of human–animal relation as capable of maintaining the individuality of each subjectivity is reinforced when the dog Pablo takes centre stage at the end of the trilogy. Pablo is introduced following the disappearance of Bolívar, an event concomitant with David's death. The dog seems to be the replica or the double of "the real Bolívar", only "years younger" (Coetzee, *DJ* 142, 144). His physical appearance is not dissimilar to Bolívar's: he is a "huge dog of tawny coloration" with "Bolívar's eyes and Bolívar's air of quiet menace too" (Coetzee, *DJ* 144). As in the case of Bolívar, in Pablo, Simón detects the trace of a direct lineage to the wolf. Recounting her first encounter with her dog, Barbara Smuts in her response to *The Lives of Animals* writes that she "experienced her [dog] as a wild animal", partly because she "closely resembles a jet-black timber wolf" (115). Drawing on this observation, both Pablo and Bolívar embody the tension between an animal's feral and domesticated nature. This idea is reinforced given that the reason why Pablo is abandoned at the veterinary clinic is due to fear that he "might molest [the newborn] baby while her [the mother's] back was turned", the explanation being that "dogs get jealous, as I am sure you know" (Coetzee, *DJ* 144). (As we will see, this is an allusion to Bolívar's dealing with Jeremiah.) In this way, Coetzee draws attention to the fact that, rather than project one's own humanity onto an animal or a pet, one must engage in an exchange with the animal on its own terms, acknowledging its essentially wild nature.

The moment of Simón's encounter with Pablo foregrounds the agency and autonomy of the dog. As with Simón's encounter with Bolívar on the bridge, Coetzee here uses defamiliarisation to represent the human–animal exchange. “He [Simón] stands before Pablo whom no one wants, inspecting him. For a moment the yellow eyes pass over him, and a shiver runs down his spine. Then the eyes slide off and the gaze goes blank again” (Coetzee, *DJ* 144). Once again, the animal actively looks at the human and Simón registers the animal's sentience somatically. Nevertheless, nothing is made of this encounter, which remains untranslated affectively, rationally, and linguistically. But it is its untranslatability that contributes to its power and makes the exchange a “miraculous” one. The fact that Coetzee resists rendering the effects of the encounter discursively indicates an awareness that language cannot do justice to experiences in which the opponent “gives little or no weight to reasoning” (Coetzee, “On Appetite” 119-120). The resistance to translating the encounter into words offers the reader an invitation to experience Pablo's gaze with the body, rather than the mind.

Yet Coetzee further challenges the limits of rationality through Simón's irrational behaviour. In the aftermath of the death of David and the disappearance of Bolívar, and experiencing grief and the fear of disappointing Inés once again by failing to save Bolívar just as he failed to save David, Simón manically prints five hundred handbills. He distributes these bills across the city, and then writes a list of all the veterinarians he plans to visit. The reason for his compulsive behaviour is a desire to keep “at bay the hole that has opened up in the texture of his being” (Coetzee, *DJ* 142). So distressed is Simón that he shows a willingness to abandon logical reasoning in favour of any explanation that might justify adopting Pablo. “What do we know about dogs?”, he asks Inés, a question that, despite its naivety, is provocative in its essence (Coetzee, *DJ* 145). In this way Coetzee implicitly challenges the philosophical

tradition on the question of the animal, and, to a certain extent, echoes his own thoughts on the human relationship to animals.

Moreover, Coetzee also uses Simón's distraught state to raise a larger question concerning animal reincarnation and predestination, possibly alluding to the Wordsworthian worldview once again: "[m]aybe when dogs die they wake up in the same world, this world, again and again. Maybe that is a dog's destiny" and "fate should lead [him] to a cage holding a dog who could easily be Bolívar as Bolívar was ten years ago" (Coetzee, *DJ* 145). Simón even interprets the encounter with Pablo as a godsend: "You [Inés] will be able to tell at once whether he is Bolívar re-embodied or just another dog" (Coetzee, *DJ* 145). All these remarks are uncharacteristic of Simón's logical, composed self. They are the effect of an affective state too intense to be explained rationally. However, in the end Simón comes to this realisation when he thinks that "[t]here is something crazy – he can see it all too clearly – in his quest for Bolívar [...] What is wrong with him?" (Coetzee, *DJ* 146).⁹ What matters is Coetzee's representation of an intense experience of loss, which the dog's disappearance triggers, that transcends reason and refuses to be captured accurately in language.

Despite the dog's disappearance, Simón is still in conversation with the lingering memory of Bolívar in the sense that the dog still occupies Simón's thoughts despite having disappeared. The fact that the dog vanishes from Simón and Inés's life,

⁹ Simon's distress is similar the one of Costello who identifies with animals but is at a loss to understand why or to know how she can persuade other people of her point of view. Rather than convince the others by rational argument, she proposes an alternative: "I urge you to walk, flank to flank, beside the beast that is prodded down the chute to his executioner" (Coetzee, *EC* 111). A similar train of thought can be found in *Diary* where Señor C reflects on what an animal goes through in the final moments before death: "But how can an animal be in a calm state of mind after being goaded off a ship onto the back of a truck and driven through teeming streets to a strange place reeking of blood and death? The animal is confused and desperate" (65).

particularly given that the animal is “*all that is left holding our little family together*”, triggers a process of self-reflection (Coetzee, *DJ* 41; emphasis in original).

He cannot claim to have loved Bolívar. He was not even fond of him. But then, love was never an appropriate feeling to have for Bolívar. Bolívar demanded something quite different: to be left alone in his being. He, Simón, respected that demand. In return the dog left him alone in his being, and perhaps left Inés alone too. (Coetzee, *DJ* 146)

The passage calls for a shift in how humans engage with animals. It reflects on the forms of attachment to nonhuman beings, prioritising justice over love. Simón’s words echo Elizabeth Costello’s own in “The Glass Abattoir” where she states that “I am not an animal lover” and

[a]nimals don’t need my love and I don’t need theirs. Human love is obscure enough. How does human love choose its objects? I have no idea. Why is it so riddled with ambivalence? I am blank. How much more closed off to us must be the feelings of animals! No, I have no interest in love, I care only about justice. (n.p.)¹⁰

This sense of justice manifests in Simón’s relationship to Bolívar in the form of an acknowledgment and respect for an alternative mode of being. Simón observes that Bolívar is David’s and, implicitly, their dog “in the sense that we speak of someone who guards us as “our” guardian though we have no power over him or her or it” (Coetzee, *SJ* 180-1).

The idea of justice to animals is expanded to include the right to life. Earlier in *Schooldays*, Simón touches on this idea when he tells David that “a duck’s idea of

¹⁰ View the full reading one the website: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5Ms65oo2wI&t=578s>.

being saved may be different from your idea of being saved. It may include being left in peace by human beings” (Coetzee, *SJ* 7).¹¹ As Attwell shows us, in the manuscript of *Disgrace*, Coetzee considered a similar position for Lucy, who observes that “[t]he decision on their fate is one in which they can have no part” (qtd. in Attwell 220). While Simón had not yet developed a philosophy around the idea of the animal, the passage quoted above indicates that the co-existence with Bolívar profoundly changes Simón’s worldview.

David is a character with a peculiar relationship to animals. In the course of the narrative, he changes his relationship to food. He moves from a love for sausages, which he “chews vigorously”, exclaiming that they “are the best food”, to a self-taught vegetarian diet: “I’m not eating chicken meat anymore” (Coetzee, *CJ* 200, *DJ* 51).¹² His vegetarianism is contagious, influencing the children at the orphanage. These youngsters organise a riot whose aim, among other things, is the freeing of animals in cages: “[i]n one of the pet shops they broke open the cages and set the animals loose – dogs, cats, rabbits, snakes, tortoises. Set the birds loose too. Left only the goldfish” (Coetzee, *DJ* 175). The effect is funny, if not ironic: a Messiah of sorts announcing an animal liberation. Furthermore, when Simón gifts David two sparrows, Rinci and Dinci, the boy asks for them to be set free (Coetzee, *DJ* 94). Yet underlying the comic dimension is a more serious one: Coetzee challenges the idea of animal cruelty through

¹¹ In “The Embodied Soul: Animal Being in the Work of J. M. Coetzee”, Louis Tremaine astutely observes that until the publication of *Disgrace*, there was a correlation between animals, suffering, and death in Coetzee’s body of writing, and protagonists tended to wait for a sign from the other to save them. However, beginning with *Disgrace*, David Lurie acknowledges that salvation comes from within: one can only save oneself. Rather than being transcendental, salvation involves a turn inward that acknowledges one’s animal being and the body-soul one shares with other animals.

¹² The idea of the refusal to eat and/or kill animals is an idea that Coetzee also raises in *The Lives of Animals*.

the figure of David, a child. Given the innocence associated with children, Coetzee is looking for a way into a purer ontological debate in the trilogy.¹³ That David decides to opt for moral hygiene adds force to his understanding of and relationship to animals.

David's animal philosophy is fitting for the story Coetzee imagines as a world where there is significantly less violence against animals being done. Accordingly, the seeds of the boy's vegetarianism are sown by several characters. Simón's thoughts on consubstantiation and ethical hygiene profoundly shape the boy, who on hearing that pigs sometimes eat their own excrement, asks "[i]s there poo in my sausages?". He follows this by "get[ting] up, scrap[ing] the food from his plate into the dog's bowl" (Coetzee, *CJ* 203-204). The moment is significant because it is among the few instances when David does not challenge what Simón says but listens to him. Ana Magdalena's menagerie also plays an important role in the boy's formation in that it cultivates in him and the other children at the Academy an awareness of and respect for animal life. (Ana Magdalena is an animal lover herself, as suggested by the photograph Simón finds of her holding a cat and smiling at the camera.) The farm owned by the three sisters, Alma, Consuelo (echoing Elizabeth Costello), and Valentina, who fund David's education and whom he and Simón occasionally visit is also meant to "be a refuge for wildlife" (Coetzee, *SJ* 37). In a sense, Coetzee "builds" small sanctuaries for animals in his fictional landscape with the aim of promoting a new relationship between humans and animals.

David embodies Coetzee's exploration of a new relationship to animals. The child is neither fearful nor sentimental about animals but engages with them on their own terms. For instance, "[t]hough he is tiny compared with El Rey, he is quite

¹³ In *Disgrace*, Coetzee is also exploring the question of animal suffering as a way into larger, non-politicised debates about cruelty as such. In the trilogy, however, he is interested in a new animal pedagogy.

unafraid. Standing on tiptoe, he proffers handfuls of hay, which the huge beast bends down lazily to accept” (Coetzee, *CJ* 26). With Bolívar he easily adopts caring responsibilities, giving him food and taking him on walks together with Inés (Coetzee, *CJ* 110). What is more, David shows an openness to learning from the behaviour of the dog (arguably influencing Simón’s own willingness to learn from the dog’s way of being). Bolívar’s life story of having left his dog family in order to be independent, as recounted by Simón, provides a source of inspiration for the boy, who decides to take his own first step to independence by becoming a boarder at the Academy of Dance. David also feels a particular connection to the dove Blanco who, for a short amount of time, is his best friend. With regard to friendship, Coetzee writes that it is “rarely governed by reason. One does not choose one’s friends according to rules. Becoming friends is like falling in love: one follows one’s heart” (Coetzee, “Notes” 90). The ease with which the boy befriends animals is in line with Robert B. Pippin’s idea that David embodies the regime of passion. Such a relationship to creatureliness challenges the idea of human exceptionalism, paradoxically clashing with his implied association with a Jesus-like, and thus exceptional and divine, figure.

The example of David’s inexplicable connection with the horse El Rey is relevant in this sense.¹⁴ After a day of work, Simón finds the boy behind the grain store, “[s]quatting beside the [lifeless] body of El Rey, stroking her head, waving the flies away” (Coetzee, *CJ* 234).

¹⁴ Bev Shaw, the veterinarian in *Disgrace*, also has a special affinity with animals, who, she believes, “can smell what you are thinking” (Coetzee, *D* 81). She communicates with them not through words, but through thought-feelings, thus undermining the logocentric worldview in favour of alternative modes of communication. To David Lurie, she is “not a veterinarian but a priestess, full of New Age mumbo jumbo” (Coetzee, *D* 84). Yet her relationship to animals profoundly changes Lurie’s understanding of nonhuman beings. In this respect, he is not unlike the inveterately sceptical Simón, who sees the Academy as a cult, with its own “mumbo-jumbo about the stars” yet who eventually learns how to dance (Coetzee, *SJ* 103).

Poor, poor El Rey!' he [Simón] murmurs. Then he notices the blood that has congealed in the horse's ear, and the dark bullet hole above it, and shuts up.

'It's all right,' says the boy. 'He is going to be well again in three days.'

'Is that what the horse doctor told you?'

The boy shakes his head. 'El Rey.'

Did El Rey tell you that you that himself – three days?'

The boy nods. (Coetzee, *CJ* 235)

David's response to the horse's death is peculiar: he does not seem to understand that the mare is dead, only that her soul has departed from the physical realm. In his view, largely influenced by Simón's existential philosophy (the story of Marciano's soul departing to a new life is telling), life and death are a continuum alongside which human and animal souls travel.

This way of thinking about life and death resonates with Elizabeth Costello's views of heaven as a place where the souls of children and animals await reincarnation: "[a]t the borders of being – this is how I imagine it – there are all these small souls, cat souls, mouse souls, bird souls, souls of unborn children, crowded together, pleading to be let in, pleading to be incarnated" (Coetzee, "OWC", 23).¹⁵ The roots of this type of transcendentalism can perhaps be traced back to Wordsworth, as previously noted, the intimations Ode. In the poem, life on earth is conceived as a forgetting of the afterlife.¹⁶ Being closer to the heavenly realm facilitates children's connection to and communication with the souls of animals. The extent of Wordsworth's influence on Coetzee is evinced when, in "On Appetite, the Right to

¹⁵ Given that the publication of *The Childhood of Jesus* in 2013 and the short story "The Old Woman and the Cats" coincide, Coetzee was possibly working on the short story as a side project to writing the novel.

¹⁶ The relevant lines in Wordsworth's poem are: "Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting: / The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star, / Hath had elsewhere its setting, / And cometh from afar: / Not in entire forgetfulness, / And not in utter nakedness, / But trailing clouds of glory do we come" (525).

Life, and Rational Ethics”, Coetzee writes that “I would be tempted to go along with Wordsworth and say that our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting, that what Wordsworth calls our moral being is more deeply founded within us than rationality itself” (121). Though influenced by Wordsworth’s vision of life and death, Coetzee uses it in order to make the case for animals by situating them (and their souls) alongside the souls of children who await reincarnation. Doing so allows him to gesture to the possibility that children and animals are closer to a numinous realm and therefore share a more profound connection based on a rawness of being.

In fact, the trilogy implies that, if humans are divine creatures, so are animals. The reference to the three days it will take El Rey to be well again clearly alludes to the resurrection of Christ, enforced by the name of the mare, which translates from the Spanish as “the king”.¹⁷ Indeed, there are echoes and allusions to biblical sayings and passages but not a direct naming of Jesus throughout the story. In “Dogs, Horses, and Red Herrings: The Animal in J. M. Coetzee’s *The Childhood of Jesus*” (2016), Eleni Philippou argues that Coetzee explores the dualism between the corporeal and the spiritual through the animal. Examining David’s relationship to El Rey, she points out that it serves as an example of “the animal speaking to the transcendental spiritual realm” (Philippou 225). Hence, Coetzee challenges our understanding of animals by adding an embodied dimension to their divine status through the emphasis on mortality.

Nevertheless, David’s response to El Rey’s death remains peculiar because he refuses to accept that the mare is gone. On the one hand, the profoundly emotional reaction is understandable given the boy’s young age. With tears in his eyes, he “bends

¹⁷ Another possible allusion in this scene is to Jesus’s resurrection of Lazarus in the New Testament, only here David ultimately fails to resurrect El Rey.

and presses his mouth to the horse's vast nostril", attempting to resurrect her by breathing life into her: "I want him to live! He's my friend" (Coetzee, *CJ* 235-236). The moment is heart-breaking, particularly since it is a recurrent theme that all the animals David grows attached to (El Rey, both Jeremiahs, Blanco, and Rufo) are eventually removed from the story, as if denying the boy the chance to nurture affection for and be shown affection by another living being. Philippou argues that, apart from undermining the hierarchy between human and animal, it is David's powerful emotional reaction to the death of the mare that offers a glimpse of the boy's true divinity (225). In other words, in his ability to feel intensely the departure of the animal lies David's divinity – an embodied divinity.

On the other hand, such a reaction hints at the fact that the boy refuses to accept the facticity of life. To digress slightly from Daniel Heller-Roazen's understanding of the concept, echolalia is usually understood as verbal or involving verbal echoes and repetitions, and is often associated with autism or the autistic spectrum. This version of echolalia plays a role in Coetzee's complex representation of David. The example of El Rey's death and the boy wanting to resurrect her with the breath of life as well as his telepathic communication with the mare can be interpreted as an indication of an inability or perhaps a quixotic refusal to accept reality as it is.¹⁸ Following the death of El Rey, David asks for a small horse for his birthday "that can sleep in my room with me [...] a baby horse", not understanding that it will "grow into a big horse" (Coetzee, *CJ* 258). With this horse, he wants to rescue people (Coetzee, *CJ* 259). The premise for wanting a pet horse is modelled around Inés's keeping of Bolívar indoors,

¹⁸ In fact there are numerous instances when the boy's mode of reasoning defies the laws of physics, mathematics, and rationality more generally, such as when he thinks water flows upwards, oxen drink olive oil, animals experience reversed aging, intercourse leads to death, and counting is random, to name only a few.

Bolívar who, the boy complains, “doesn’t love me any more” (Coetzee, *SJ* 34). David wants a friend, a companion, a playmate, just as Don Quixote, the boy’s hero, has Rocinante. Indeed, there is a resemblance between the name and function of Rocinante and El Rey: the Spanish “rocín” refers to a workhorse and El Rey is also a carthorse – with whom he is united in the common good of rescuing those in need.¹⁹ Having deeply absorbed Cervantes’s story (though in the trilogy, Simón thinks that the author of *Don Quixote* is Benengeli), the bond between Don Quixote and his steed clearly matters to David who wants to replicate it in real life. He, too, wants to be a hero who saves others with the help of his horse.

David’s relationship to a lamb also reinforces the idea that the child cannot fully grasp the laws of nature. As a student of the Academy of Dance, he grows fond of one of the pets of the Academy’s menagerie. Jeremiah the lamb is “[h]is favourite among the animals” (Coetzee, *SJ* 102). David feels attached to the animal, possibly due to a shared state of being *huerfanos*, orphans – like David, Jeremiah is also motherless. (Similar examples of Simón’s connection to Bolívar based on their old age and Elizabeth Costello’s bond with the mother cat on the basis of motherhood have come up before.) On one occasion, David takes Simón to the menagerie to show him Jeremiah, explaining that “Alyosha forgot to give him milk and now he has grown small” (Coetzee, *SJ* 238). David’s reasoning here defies logic altogether and comes close to fabulation. Whether the remark is made on the basis of his rather autistic

¹⁹ This is one of the instances when there is a striking overlap between Coetzee’s story and Cervantes’s novel. If *Robinson Crusoe* was the urtext of Coetzee’s earlier fiction, then *Don Quixote* is the urtext of the late novels. In fact *Schooldays* announces in the epigraph that it is a sequel to *Don Quixote*, though not a very good one. However, in the case of the trilogy, that is not to be confused with a reading of the Jesus fiction as a “slow-moving allegory” and “an imitation of *Don Quixote*” as Rebecca L. Walkowitz argues about *The Childhood of Jesus* in *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature* (2017) (3, 5).

behaviour or of an overflowing imagination is impossible to ascertain, suffice is to say that David embodies the tension between them.

While David's relationship to El Rey and Jeremiah foreground the boy's special affinity with animals, it is Bolívar that the boy holds in high regard. Over the course of the narrative, the boy oscillates between a mature understanding of the dog as an independent creature, and a desire to change Bolívar's animal nature. So fond is David of the dog that he refers to him as "king of the dogs" (Coetzee, *SJ* 112). Here the pun dog-god is suggestive of David's relationship to the dog. Such reverence for Bolívar echoes Diogenes of Sinope's idolatry of dogs in Ancient Greece.²⁰ The Greek philosopher and main figure of the Cynics introduces himself to Alexander the Great as "Diogenes the Dog", explaining that "I fawn on those who give me anything, I yelp at those who refuse, and I set my teeth in rascals" (Laertius 63). To a certain extent, David resembles Diogenes not only in his witticism and prankster-like behaviour, but also in his worshipping Bolívar. While Diogenes advocates embracing one's own animal nature, David relates to animals with less forethought and more emphasis on being-in-the-world. As Arroyo describes him, the boy "wants to be in the world, to experience this being-alive that is so new and exciting" (Coetzee, *SJ* 98). In his relation to animals, it is this being-aliveness that fundamentally connects him to them. He does not rely on rational, logical modes of thinking, despite being rather brilliant at discursive argument and questioning. Instead, he enters into dialogue with animals in an embodied way. This mode of communication is in keeping with Cynicism's emphasis on terse forms of speech, which undermines a logocentric worldview.

²⁰ For an in-depth engagement with the influence of Cynicism on Coetzee's fiction see Arthur Rose's *Literary Cynics: Borges, Beckett, Coetzee* (2017). For a specific analysis of Cynicism see Kai Wiegandt's "J. M. Coetzee's "Dog-Man" and the Cynicism of *Disgrace*" (2013). The image of David Lurie, sitting behind the animal clinic, in his make-shift home, playing the banjo, eating out of tin cans, and with the dog next to him also evokes Diogenes's frugal lifestyle.

Hence, David's mode of relating to animals reveals an *Eigentlichkeit*, an authenticity of being.

As the trilogy suggests, there is an on-going dialogue between the boy and the dog. Each participates in the exchange in an idiosyncratic way, despite remaining two sources of otherness for Simón and the reader. David's fondness for Bolívar is reciprocated by the animal through loyalty. As mentioned earlier, the dog has been guarding David before Simón had given his unspoken instruction. David acknowledges this fact when he informs the young doctor in hospital that "[h]e is not a dangerous animal [...] He is my guardian. He is guarding me" (Coetzee, *DJ* 125). When Simón tells him about the psychiatric hospital where Dmitri is sent to, which has "guards with guard dogs" surrounding it, David replies by saying that "I'll take Bolívar along. He will kill the guard dogs" (Coetzee, *SJ* 164). It is a remark that stresses David's blind faith in the dog while also showing, once again, that the boy is inadvertently given to fantasy. Bolívar reciprocates by showing his faithfulness in another way. On one of Inés and Simón's visits to hospital to see the boy, Bolívar, "settled under David's bed, makes no move" to leave (Coetzee, *DJ* 81). As if sensing the boy's impending death, Bolívar stays by his side, keeping watch over him, and thus embodying a guardian angel of sorts.

Coetzee's representation of the relationship between David and other animals, but more particularly Bolívar, wants us to understand that their connection often goes beyond the familiar, being almost otherworldly. This is how their relationship is captured in language by Simón, our mediating consciousness:

With David it was a different story. In a sense Bolívar was a normal dog, overindulged perhaps, lazy perhaps, in his late years somewhat gluttonous perhaps, a dog who did a lot of sleeping, who in some accountings could be

said to have slept his life away. But in another sense Bolívar never slept, not when David was around, or; if he slept, slept with one eye open, one ear cocked, watching over him, keeping him from harm. If Bolívar had a lord and master, David was he. (Coetzee, *DJ* 146)

Bolívar's devotion to David, as described here, touches on the divine, particularly in the last sentence, which alludes to Jesus's words "[y]e call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for *so* I am" (John 13:13; emphasis in original). (As if reinforcing the analogy to a Jesus-like figure, Dmitri also refers to David as his "young master" (Coetzee, *DJ* 124).) Ultimately, he is not an effective one, failing to protect the boy from the inevitability of death.

Through the representation of David–Bolívar, Coetzee makes a point of stressing the limits of anthropomorphism. The most suggestive example in this sense is when David attempts to teach Bolívar to make moral choices. He demands that Jeremiah be brought to him in hospital by Alyosha. Although it has been four years since David last saw Jeremiah, he is convinced that it is the same lamb who "did not grow up. He is still there [...] Jeremiah is there. I know" (Coetzee, *DJ* 90-91). How the boy knows remains a mystery, yet it highlights his intuitive way of understanding the world. When Jeremiah enters the story this time, he comes bearing the burden of allegory. Bolívar sees him and immediately "emerges [from his lair] and bears down on the unsuspecting lamb" (Coetzee, *DJ* 95). Even if Simón tries to hold Bolívar, "the huge dog struggles to free himself" (Coetzee, *DJ* 95-96). A tension starts to build as the reader is made aware, once again, of Bolívar's animal instincts. This is what occurs between David, Bolívar, and Jeremiah:

'Bolívar!' The voice is David's. He sits up in bed, his arm raised, his finger pointing. 'Come!'

In a single easy bound the dog leaps onto the bed and settles there, his eyes locked on David's. Silence falls in the room.

'Give Jeremiah to me!'

[...]

For a long while they face each other: the boy cradling the lamb, the dog, panting lightly, still waiting his chance. (Coetzee, *DJ* 96)

The allusion here is to the biblical idea of the wolf lying down with the lamb. When Dmitri asks him what he is doing, the boy replies: "I am teaching Bolívar to be good [...] 'Bolívar will listen to me.' He holds out the lamb toward the dog. [...] Bolívar does not stir, his eyes fixed on the boy's" (Coetzee, *DJ* 96). Pippin astutely points out that "David assumes the role of savior, assuming he can make the lion, in this case Bolívar, and the lamb lie down together" (113). This assumption shows the limits of David's knowledge of the dog. He is told by Dmitri, who this time represents the voice of reason, that "the dog is cousin to the wolf [...] You will never teach Bolívar to be good to little lambs. It is his nature to hunt them down and tear their throats out" (Coetzee, *DJ* 96). Nevertheless, the boy remains oblivious to the real danger the dog poses, and this is also part of his uniqueness. As Pippin observes, "the story of this lamb crosses the line of irony into the grotesquely comic" when the lamb meets its death (113): "the cage is lying on one side and nothing is left of the lamb save its head and a bloody tangle of hide and limbs on the once clean floor" (Coetzee, *DJ* 97). If the lamb and the lion were to lie down, a state of paradise might be reached. However, the trilogy shows that that is not possible.

Through the fictive imagining of human–animal communication, Coetzee is inviting us to think about this relationship. He emphasises the provisionality of language in the exchanges between Simón and Bolívar, with the animal prompting

human thoughts, which only articulate its moral being discursively. Instead of idealising the relationship between humans and animals, the trilogy foregrounds an animal's animality, its embodied being, and its essentially untameable nature. In doing so, it highlights the tendency to project one's own humanity (and implicitly language and epistemology) onto an animal, despite it being a fundamentally different mode of being. Yet the trilogy also offers us a solution in that it provides us with an alternative engagement with nonhuman beings. The works achieve this through the figure of David, who announces a new relational mode of being with animals. His special affinity to and fondness for nonhuman beings paired with his being young enable Coetzee to open up a debate about a purer ontology that reframes the human–animal relation according to the perspective of a child. In doing so, Coetzee tacitly invites his readers to look at and engage with animals with a child-like worldview.

In their imagining of a world in which humans and animals engage in a form of exchange, the Jesus novels come close to Plato's myth of Cronos, developed in *Statesman*. This mythological Golden Age refers to a long-forgotten time in human history in which humans and animals peacefully co-existed. Interestingly, humans and animals were not born from the womb but from the earth. This meant that they lived in a state of perpetual orphanhood, without the memory of their past selves. More than that, they could communicate with each other, gaining deeper insight into their respective natures. In his analysis of the Platonic myth, David Farrell Krell remarks that it was as if "[w]e went to school together", gradually learning to co-exist and understand each other, thus forging the base of a community which relied on friendship (29). In addition to sharing Plato's vision of a world in which memory has been wiped clean, Coetzee's trilogy also underlines the mutual learning process between humans and animals. This is captured in the words of Simón who thinks "[h]e,

Simón, is learning. First he went to school with a child, now he is going to school with a dog. A life of learning. He ought to be thankful” (Coetzee, *DJ* 147). Coetzee thus avoids the human–nonhuman dualism and, more prominently in the trilogy, envisions a world of relations between different forms of life and modes of being.

One of the most important ideas regarding the representation of the human–animal exchange is that language, understood as a referential system, becomes secondary. In the communication between humans and animals, Coetzee challenges the idea of human language, stripping it of its referentiality, and leaving behind only an echo of what was once a language. This allows him to shed light on new affective and ethical vocabularies which strengthen our connection to animals. In keeping with Daniel Heller-Roazen’s idea, language in the Jesus trilogy becomes an echolalic phenomenon.

Chapter 3: Music

In general I would say that his work lacks ambition ... Nowhere do you get a feeling of a writer deforming his medium in order to say what has never been said before, which is to me the mark of great writing.

(Coetzee, *Summertime*)

there is only the music. Arms extended, eyes closed, he shuffles in a slow circle. Over the horizon the first star begins to rise.

(Coetzee, *The Schooldays of Jesus*)

At the age of fifteen, while roaming around in his back garden in Cape Town with nothing to do, Coetzee heard music from the house next door. Later, he would identify it as Johann Sebastian Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*. In "What is a Classic?", he recalls the revelatory moment of encounter with the German composer's music, describing it as "a moment of revelation [...] of the greatest significance" in his life "after which everything changed": "for the first time I was undergoing the impact of *the classic*" (10; emphasis in original). Nearly four decades after the encounter, Coetzee interrogates the experience from a personal and cultural standpoint. He seeks to identify whether Bach's music contains a particular quality which survives through time. More pointedly, he wonders whether that moment marked his choosing the European cultural tradition over South African culture, which he suspected was approaching a dead end. In trying to define the classic, the conclusion he arrives at is an aesthetic one: the classic is what is always tested, confronted, renewed; it is the aesthetic that is constantly reproduced through craft. The definition disentangles itself from the Kantian aesthetic tradition in that it resists transcendental explanations,

relying instead on empirical, even sociological solutions, in a desire not to isolate himself entirely from materialist forms of thought. Coetzee's answer to the question "What is a Classic?", which is both artistic and empirical, had undoubtedly been fuelled by his latent anxieties about the intellectual climate in South Africa. What animates his insistence on preserving the aesthetic is the belief in its inherent power to change how one perceives the world. The young Coetzee himself perceives this power when, "[a]s long as the music lasted, I was frozen, I dared not breathe. I was being spoken to by the music as music had never spoken to me before" (9). Hence the necessity to keep the classic alive in order to guarantee the possibility of accessing an alternative order of experience unavailable in ordinary language.

Some of the force of Coetzee's aesthetic experience has been transposed into fiction. For example, in *Foe*, music is linked to self-expression. Susan Barton thinks that "if there were any language accessible to Friday, it would be the language of music" (Coetzee, *Foe* 96). In *Age of Iron*, the music of Bach, particularly the first fugue from Book One, allows Mrs Curren to transcend difference and imagine an intimate connection with Vercueil, who represents the figure of the other.¹ *Disgrace* engages with music as creative process, formalised as an opera on Byron that David Lurie tries to compose.² A failure of communication between father and son in *Summertime* is symbolically indicated by the difference in musical preference, with the fictional John identifying with the music of Bach while his father identifies with Italian opera. Moreover, *Summertime* undermines the connection between music and

¹ After having played Bach for Vercueil "as well as I could" Mrs Curren wonders where the pure spirit that manifests during the performance "find[s] itself now? In the echoes of my fumbling performance receding through the ether? In my heart, where the music still dances? Has it made its way into the heart too of the man in the sagging trousers eavesdropping at the window? Have our two hearts, our organs of love, been tied for this brief while by a cord of sound?" (Coetzee, *AI* 23-4).

² For a further discussion on the influence of Byron and the Romantic tradition, which features as a sub-plot in *Disgrace*, and its connection to the new South Africa see Kai Easton's "Coetzee's *Disgrace*: Byron in Italy and the Eastern Cape c. 1820".

eroticism, adding a layer of irony to John Coetzee's belief in love-making as a gateway into accessing the world of feeling encoded in the music of Schubert. The young John Coetzee in *Youth* experiences an intense emotional reaction on hearing the soundtrack of Satyajit Ray's *Apu* series in which "he encounters something that is not Bach, though there are intimations of it: a joyous yielding of the reasoning, comprehending mind to the dance of the fingers" (Coetzee 93).³ The fact that Bach's music allows us to begin to imagine a transcendental realm is hinted at in *Diary of a Bad Year*. In that novel, Señor C thinks that "the best proof we have that life is good, and that there may perhaps be a God after all" is the music of Bach which "comes as a gift" (Coetzee 221). These works are put in dialogue with art and artistic media while also engaging intertextually with classic texts.

The body of critical work around Coetzee's oeuvre has addressed the subject of music in individual novels, yet there has not been a comprehensive account that brings his works together as a whole. For instance, Hermann Wittenberg, a scholar who has published extensively on intermediality in Coetzee's works, argues that the three-layered narrative structure of *Diary of a Bad Year* invites a contrapuntal reading technique, originally developed by Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), and typically used in classical music, particularly by Bach. Gillian Dooley, in the fifth chapter of *J. M. Coetzee and the Power of the Narrative* (2010), provides a helpful and systematic study of references to music in Coetzee's body of writing. However, in the book she provides less critical depth than in her essay "'The Origins of Speech Lie in Song': Music as Language in Coetzee's *Age of Iron*" (2020), in which she proposes, presumably following Wittenberg's lead, that the first part of *Age of Iron*

³ Although Ray's work is not classical, it draws on the Indian classical tradition. The improvisatory mode of the Indian classical tradition differs from the European tradition in which Bach was composing.

replicates the structure of Bach's music, particularly his contrapuntal technique. Next I turn to *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading* (2004), in which Derek Attridge discusses *Disgrace*'s portrayals of music and animals. He argues that they represent two strands that are not ways out of the political climate of South Africa but instead produce "an experience, beyond rationality and measured productivity, of their fundamental value" (177). Kathryn Lachman explores the critical role of opera in "Opera and the Limits of Representation in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*" (2014), arguing for the limits of narrative form emphasised through the representation of music. Among the most recent publications that engage with Coetzee's arts is "Other Arts and Adaptations" (2020) in which Michelle Kelly links Coetzee's interest in the arts to his scepticism for language and his desire to explore forms of expressivity which exceed the literary form.

These critical approaches draw a correlation between the representation of music and the limits of language and/or rationality – a position which resonates strongly with my reading of Coetzee's trilogy. Instead of positioning myself in an oppositional space, I want to build on the work of these scholars, while providing a more systematic reading of how music is represented in the trilogy and what its aesthetic and ethical effects are. I link ideas of music in the Jesus novels to other parts of the oeuvre, thus grounding my observations in a more rigorous and methodical reading. The chapter's epigraphs therefore establish two reference points for understanding how Coetzee's fiction develops from a radical scepticism about the power of fiction to capture the seemingly intangibles of life, as indicated in the first quotation, to a radical willingness to embrace contingency, captured in the second quotation.

The Jesus trilogy represents the most sustained engagement – carried out over the course of all three novels – with the performing arts of music and, as will be shown in the next chapter, dance. In these novels, I argue that Coetzee experiments with the power of music to produce aesthetic experience which tests the limits of language specifically. Music transcends the expressive powers of ordinary language and becomes a mode of communication and of being; it introduces a new way of thinking and feeling about the situation that the novels are developing. Coetzee’s fictionalisation of musical experience invites us, through language, to imagine planes of feeling and perception that transcend it. On this paradox some of the trilogy’s successes depend.

Music is a germane topic in all the Jesus novels. The town of Novilla is a place where one hears “strange birdsong” and encounters citizens who privately tutor children in music, free of charge, for the sake of its intrinsic value and nobility (Coetzee, *CJ* 6).⁴ The music that one hears on the radio in Novilla is not powerful or gripping; it is “even-tempered”, soft, and at most “graceful” (Coetzee, *CJ* 76, 77). This is not music capable of effecting a profound change in the listener, or at least not in Simón, the focaliser. Novilla is also a place which lacks the spice of life both literally (“He has yet to find a shop that sells spices” and metaphorically (moderation in all aspects of life, including diet, feelings, passions, is the norm (Coetzee, *CJ* 71)). Music in Novilla is similar to other aspects of life there: it “lacks weight”, is “[a]nodina”, “too placid”, too bland (Coetzee, *CJ* 77, 76). Nevertheless, the land of Novilla is where the seeds of David’s musical education are conceived with the help of Elena who

⁴ The view expressed in the trilogy is in some way similar to Señor C’s, who rejects a Cartesian understanding of birdsong as “pre-programmed cries uttered by birds to advertise their presence to the opposite sex” and leans towards a Rousseauesque belief that “[e]ach bird-cry is a full-hearted release of the self into the air, accompanied by such joy as we can barely comprehend” (Coetzee, *DBY* 132). The trilogy adopts neither an anti-Cartesian nor a Rousseauesque view. Birdsong is simply “strange” (Coetzee, *CJ* 6).

offers him violin and singing lessons. “I do it for the music”, she explains (Coetzee, *CJ* 64). Thus, in addition to an emphasis on what Pippin calls the regime of reason, *Childhood* introduces a life philosophy that prioritises the aesthetic but also the ethical: “how one lives. How one is to live” (Coetzee, *CJ* 64).

Schooldays picks up the thread which began in *Childhood* of the importance of music and of aesthetic education more generally. The small family has moved to Estrella, a city that has spices and in which the “storms of passion” lacking in Novilla find expression (Coetzee, *CJ* 75). As Pippin notes, in Estrella there is a brewing atmosphere of “intense sexual and violent passion” which culminates in Dmitri’s murderous *crime passionnel* of Ana Magdalena (Pippin 67). However, passion is not simply harmful but also beneficial, particularly in its aesthetic manifestations. At the heart of the novel there is an Academy of Dance run by the mysterious señor Juan Sebastián Arroyo and his wife, Ana Magdalena, who, as will shortly be indicated, are the fictionalised version of the Bachs. The aim of the Academy is the “training of the soul through music and dance” “in the direction of the good. Of obedience to the good” (Coetzee, *SJ* 42, 44). Music and dance thus take centre stage in *Schooldays*. Unlike in Novilla, music in Estrella contains “flourishes”, is powerful, “complex”, gripping, and, as we will see, even life-changing. At least, this is true for Simón if not for David, too, who becomes the pupil of the Arroyos (Coetzee, *SJ* 70). If *Childhood* sets up the stage for an aesthetic pedagogy that primarily relies on music and dance, then *Schooldays* grounds it more firmly by offering aesthetic education as an alternative epistemology to rational education.

The dominant role of dance recedes in *Death* though the emphasis on music remains and, moreover, gains prominence. The Academy of Dance becomes “purely an academy of music. An academy of pure music”, where the now widowed señor

Arroyo teaches music theory and composition (Coetzee, *SJ* 188). Though we are still in Estrella, four years later, the intensity of the music has diminished. While it preserves its complexity, it also contains a “slow and stately and sad” quality (Coetzee, *DJ* 7). Indeed, this is music that is “quiet, ruminative, is not easy to follow” (Coetzee, *DJ* 171). As in the previous two novels, the music is in harmony with the general mood of the story, which maintains a sombre quality leading up to and in the aftermath of David’s death due to a mysterious illness. The philosophy of the Academy also develops in the last two novels. In *Schooldays*, music–dance is viewed as “its own way of apprehending the universe” (Coetzee, *SJ* 243). In *Death*, the philosophy emphasises music, “which [according to Simón] invokes the higher mathematics and treats the music made by human hands as at best a faint echo of the music of the spheres” (Coetzee, *DJ* 29). *Death* thus elevates music as an art form to a state of perfection that goes beyond an ordinary experience of life.

To explore the transformative powers of music to help one imagine other planes of reality, Coetzee makes use of classical music. The first artistic performance by señor Arroyo and his pupils at the welcome event of the Academy captures some of the aesthetic and ethical power of music while also giving us a sense of how music works in these novels and what effects it has on the listener. The music that Simón hears is made by “the muted tones of a pipe organ”, followed by “a set of flourishes” (Coetzee, *SJ* 70). His interest is not in the dance performance which takes place on stage, but in the music. That Simón is able to recognise the “upper notes of the organ” which are “tinny”, and “the lower notes” that are “without resonance” indicates that he has had musical training before his arrival to the new country (Coetzee, *SJ* 70). In order to appreciate it, he “closes his eyes, and concentrates on the music”, symbolically shutting the doors of perception but leaving room for auditory perception

(Coetzee, *SJ* 70). Music thus becomes a private, intimate experience that occurs within.

In addition to the soundscape that the representation of music provides in this scene, the description also involves aesthetic elucidation, that is, the description of the effects of music on the listener. “[T]he music itself takes possession of him [Simón]. Calm descends; he can feel something within him – his soul? – take up the rhythm of the music and move in time to it. He falls into a mild trance” (Coetzee, *SJ* 70). The description suggests that music happens within the self as much as outside the self: Simón listens to Arroyo’s music while simultaneously listening to what goes on within himself. Drawing on this example, music is articulated with identity, and the experience of music has an existential dimension in that it implies the possibility of Simón better understanding who he is. (Later he will try to achieve clearer self-understanding by stating that “[t]hings change around me but I am unchanging” (Coetzee, *SJ* 102).) Under the spell of music he experiences an altered state of mind and of being, suggested by music “tak[ing] possession of him” (Coetzee, *SJ* 70). The descending state of calmness is suggestive of the fact that it comes from elsewhere, possibly from a transcendental realm, as is suggested in the next sentence by “soul” – although this term is not without ironic overtones. Music thus puts Simón in dialogue with himself – a dialogue that, as we will see, will be on-going throughout the novels – but also helps him perceive another plane of reality.

The act of listening to music and being transformed by it, though singular in nature, can be a collective experience. After the artistic performance Simón perceives a collective feeling of pleasure and delight among the audience. There is “a radiance to her [Ana Magdalena] which – he is quite prepared to believe – has been drawn out by the dance, or the music, or the dance and music together” (Coetzee, *SJ* 71). Some

of that feeling emanates from Ana Magdalena and the audience to Simón who “feels a certain radiance in himself” too (Coetzee, *SJ* 71). Music allows him to experience a profound sense of connectedness to the others in the audience. More generally, the example represents a small-scale experiment that aims to explore the aesthetic effects of music on the human condition.

In *Diary of a Bad Year*, Señor C experiences a “large, swelling emotion that the music was written to elicit” while listening to the fifth symphony of Sibelius (45). This leaves him wondering what it would have been like to be in the audience at the first performance of the Finnish composer a century ago and “feel that swell overtake one” (Coetzee, *DBY* 45). His train of thought indicates the ability of music to transcend private borders and produce a collective aesthetic experience. The answer to the question reveals an inherent ethical value in (classical) music: “one would have felt proud, proud that *one of us* could put together such sounds, proud that out of nothing we human beings can make such stuff” (Coetzee, *DBY* 45; emphasis in original).⁵ The experience of listening to music, particularly classical music, can be ennobling, capable of restoring one’s faith in humanity, as indicated by Señor C’s words “*one of us* [human beings]”. In fact, he states that music is the highest art form, “the best that [...] human beings are capable of” (Coetzee, *DBY* 45). The germ of Señor C’s idea is carried over into the example from the trilogy, which further explores the ethical and aesthetic value of classical music.

Apart from music’s affective dimension, the trilogy also frames music as a mode of knowing in itself. If at first Simón dismisses the dance performance, being unable to understand it, once he opens himself to the music, allowing it to take

⁵ Here, Coetzee overlooks, perhaps deliberately, the possible association of this communal imaginary in music with nationalistic and imperial feeling.

“possession of him” and move his “soul” “in time to it”, he begins to understand dance differently (Coetzee, *SJ* 70). When he opens his eyes, he detects “a logic that dictates their [the pupils’] passage, a logic that he cannot quite grasp, though he feels on the edge of doing so” (Coetzee, *SJ* 70). Music, as illustrated here, represents an intuitive mode of knowing which leads Simón to acquire greater insight into the meaning of the dance and enables him to hone a different mode of perception that begins to change his internal landscape, despite protestations about the philosophy dealing with “transcendental stuff” that seems “crazy” (Coetzee, *SJ* 75). Music challenges Simón’s rational understanding of experience and confronts him with an alternative epistemological structure to help him explain human experience.

The limits of literary language are tested when Coetzee uses musical ekphrasis in the representation of music. The concept is coined by Siglind Bruhn in *Musical Ekphrasis: Composers Responding to Poetry and Painting* (2000) to refer to “the transformation of a message – in content and form, imagery and suggested symbolic signification – from one medium into another” (xvi).⁶ The way in which Bruhn’s concept works in the trilogy is when Arroyo encodes in his music the particular set of ideas expressed by Ana Magdalena in Spanish – the difference between noble and instrumental numbers. The music changes its rhythm and tonality based on the feeling señor Arroyo wants to evoke. Accordingly, to suggest the complexity of the numbers Two and Three, señor Arroyo plays “a set of flourishes”, then varies between “complex” and “simple” rhythms that are in harmony with the dance of the pupils (Coetzee, *SJ* 70). By contrast, to convey the instrumentality of “ant” numbers Arroyo

⁶ Bruhn traces the etymology of “ekphrasis” back to antiquity when it was used mainly “as a rhetorical device capable of rendering something clearly and evocatively”, followed by an expanded definition in late antiquity which extended the definition to include “the literary practice of verbally representing sculptures and paintings” (xviii).

plays “a march, emphasizing its mechanical rhythm” (Coetzee, *SJ* 71). The music then “abandons its staccato rhythm and becomes simply one massive, inharmonious chord after another” and ends when “the steady rhythm of the march reasserts itself” (Coetzee, *SJ* 71). Coetzee adapts the conventional definition of ekphrasis, which usually refers to the recreation of a visual work of art into narrative, to the terms of the trilogy. In other words, he uses literary language to recreate a musical experience which, in turn, recreates mathematics. The restlessness of his experimentation with different artistic media (intermediality) stresses the limits of narrative form in the striving to grasp another plane of reality.

But who is the composer behind the organ whose music triggers such a powerful affective reaction in the listeners? Juan Sebastián Arroyo, whose Spanish name translates in English as “brook” or “stream” and in German as “Bach”, is the fictionalised version of the seventeenth-century German Baroque composer Johann Sebastian Bach. That is not to say that the fictional and the historical Bach are identical in the trilogy, but that the fictional version, as we will see, bears resemblance to the real Bach in many respects. Señor Arroyo is a rather obscure figure in Estrella where he is “little honoured” because “Estrella is a sleepy provincial city with an exiguous cultural life” (Coetzee, *DJ* 29). Despite being a “true musician” in Simón’s view, Arroyo is “consigned to the role of schoolteacher” (Coetzee *SJ* 126). Together with his wife, Ana Magdalena, señor Arroyo runs an Academy of Dance that promotes alternative, aesthetic education, as opposed to the rational education found in normal schools in Estrella.

The allusion to Bach does not end there, however. In fact, Ana Magdalena, Arroyo’s second wife, is also the fictionalised version of Bach’s second wife, Anna Magdalena Bach. The fictionalised Ana Magdalena resembles the historical one in

name but also in being the second wife of the musician who helps him raise his children, Joaquín and Damian. The image of the “tall” and “graceful” Ana Magdalena in the nude, “with a cluster of naked children gambolling around her” brings to mind the historical Anna Magdalena Bach and the thirteen children she cared for together with her husband (Coetzee, *SJ* 95). In contrast to the historical Ana Magdalena Bach, the fictional Ana Magdalena Arroyo is neither a musician nor a “person of intellect” (Coetzee, *SJ* 201). Instead, she is an enthusiast of Arroyo’s philosophy, which she adopts “holus-bolus” and “applies it to her dance classes” (Coetzee, *SJ* 201). Alongside her dance lessons, she is also in charge of “practical matters” at the Academy (Coetzee, *SJ* 43). Both Arroyo and his wife are thus a less than subtle allusion to the Bachs whose role in the story will be crucial in foregrounding music as an alternative epistemology.

Coetzee’s reverence for Bach is famously documented in the Classic essay referred to at the beginning of this chapter, and references to his greatness as a musician are scattered across other fictional works from the oeuvre. A suggestive example of the unique quality of Bach’s music is in *Age of Iron* where Mrs Curren imagines heaven “as a hotel lobby with a high ceiling and the Art of Fugue coming softly over the public-address system [...] Listening to the heavenly unending music, waiting for nothing, paging idly through the store of memories” (Coetzee, *AI* 25).⁷ The example is emblematic of how Coetzee thinks of Bach; it implies that there is a quality in the music that makes it strive towards another plane of reality. In the seventeenth century, this striving was directed towards a spiritual, divine realm, and Bach’s

⁷ In another relevant passage, the description captures a note of immortality contained in the music of Bach: “Then at last I went to Bach, and played clumsily, over and over again, the first fugue from Book One. The sound was muddy, the lines blurred, but every now and again, for a few bars, the real thing emerged, the real music, the music that does not die, confident, serene” (Coetzee, *AI* 24).

devotion to religion is well known together with the fact that his music celebrated the glory of God.⁸ In the trilogy, however, Arroyo's music preserves that striving towards another realm, only here it is towards a realm of ideal forms.

The trace of Coetzee's reverence for Bach is brought into the trilogy when shortly after Arroyo's performance at the Academy Simón thinks his job handing out flyers in a way helps the Arroyos by promoting their Academy and, implicitly, their philosophy (Coetzee, *SJ* 66). Simón's devotion to señor Arroyo, particularly after the death of Ana Magdalena, is resolute in spite of the fact that he fails to comprehend the philosophy of the Academy, which he deems "mumbo-jumbo about the stars" (Coetzee, *SJ* 103). Furthermore, Simón offers his service to Arroyo in exchange for David continuing to be a pupil at the Academy. Simón's devotion comes from a mix between respect for señor Arroyo as a pedagogue, and admiration for his excellent musical skill.

The text initially constructs señor Arroyo as an elusive figure whose presence one perceives in the music he plays. Simón even refers to him at one point as "the invisible Arroyo" (Coetzee, *SJ* 74). Alternatively, Dmitri's characterisation of señor Arroyo depicts him as the stereotypical artist: "A great man, a true idealist who lives only for his music. [...] Unfortunately he does not always have his feet on the ground [...] Head in the clouds" (Coetzee, *SJ* 54). (Though with less intensity, the prioritisation of music over other aspects of life is also an approach shared by Elena, David's first music teacher in Novilla, who lives for the music and is interested in ethical rather than practical questions.) Furthermore, Dmitri describes Señor Arroyo as "an idealist, as I told you. His mind is elsewhere, in the celestial sphere where the

⁸ For a historical contextualisation of Bach see Schweitzer, Albert. *J. S. Bach*, vol. 1, translated by Ernest Newman. New York, The Macmillan Company, 1955.

numbers spin” (Coetzee, *SJ* 56). (This reference to other spheres of reality is important and we will return to it in due course.) On numerous occasions, Simón’s exchanges with Arroyo are carried out in the “language” of music. That señor Arroyo is often portrayed as being present through his music rather than his physical presence announces that his preferred mode of expression and communication is not language but music.

Nevertheless, the text then subverts the elusiveness of Arroyo through comic bathos. In the build-up to Simón’s encounter with señor Arroyo, the text carefully preserves an aura of mystery around the figure of Arroyo. The reader’s expectations are then subverted when the grandness of the in-person encounter is ironised, and Simón and Arroyo meet in the nude on the shore of Lake Calderón:

Señor Arroyo, master of music and director of the Academy of Dance: this is not how he expected to meet him, in the nude. A large man, not corpulent, not exactly, but no longer young: his flesh, at throat and breast and belly, has begun to sag. His complexion, the whole complexion of his body, even of his bald skull, is a uniform brick red, as if the sun were his natural element. (Coetzee, *SJ* 94)

The encounter is comically represented, creating a stark contrast between Arroyo’s virtuosity as a musician which inspires awe and the depiction in his most vulnerable state, that is, the state of being naked. Coetzee demystifies the reader’s perception of Arroyo by drawing attention to his embodiedness. “His [Arroyo’s] voice is low and easy” and he “regards him [Simón] with what seems an amused curl of the lip” (Coetzee, *SJ* 94); “[e]ven his eyelids have a baked hue. And then the blue eyes, paler than his wife’s” (Coetzee, *SJ* 95). His demeanour, with the amused curl of the lip, the rather corpulent body, and the ageing appearance are reminiscent of E. G.

Hausmann's portrait of Johann Sebastian Bach. Though Simón and señor Arroyo meet in the nude, the encounter is nevertheless powerful, with Simón needing to "collect himself" for a moment (Coetzee, *SJ* 95). The scene reconstructs Coetzee's own encounter with Bach, which similarly leaves him "frozen" while he listens to Bach's music, only here Coetzee imagines an unmediated in-person encounter with the artist himself whose authority is preserved.

Some of that authority is carried over into Arroyo's music. In the aftermath of the news of Ana Magdalena's disappearance, Simón races to the Academy to see what has happened. Once again, Simón's encounter is not with Arroyo himself but with his music, more specifically "organ music, a swift bravura passage played over and over again" (Coetzee, *SJ* 125). The music accompanies the unfolding of events that culminate with the disturbing scene in which David discovers Ana Magdalena's lifeless body. The swift quality of the bravura which Arroyo plays, a style that requires agility and dexterity, is in tune with the quickness with which the events unfold. The switch between different artistic media (language and music) adds complexity and depth to the narrative, while also offering the events a particular acoustic. Despite the emotionally charged moments, Simón is able to distinguish the formal complexity of the music: "The quick, brilliant passage he had heard is now being woven together with a heavier passage in the bass that seems obscurely related to it" (Coetzee, *SJ* 125). Simón appreciates the formal structure of the music, although he projects his own biases onto the music: "There is no sorrow in the music, no pensiveness, nothing to suggest that the musician has been abandoned by his beautiful young wife" (Coetzee, *SJ* 125). The representation of music in this scene grants it a particular authority as an autonomous creative medium. This is in slight contradiction with the idea that music serves an instrumental function elaborated by Señor C in *Diary of a Bad Year*. For

Señor C, “[m]usic expresses feeling, that is to say, gives shape and habitation to feeling, not in space but in time” (Coetzee, *DBY* 130). In this scene, however, music is not an entirely “pure” means of self-expression but also an autonomous one. Music has a life of its own, independent of Simón’s projections.

Despite the emotional upheaval caused by the events and the “exasperated” state of mind that Simón is in, he is still able to follow the structure of the music, and the “ingenious way in which the man [Arroyo] interweaves motifs, the harmonic surprises, the logic of his resolutions. A true musician, no doubt about that, consigned to the role of schoolteacher” (Coetzee, *SJ* 126). The close attention to musical form suggests a mathematical precision to its structure reminiscent of the historical Bach of whom German musicologist Christoph Wolff, an authority in Bach studies, writes that he was “a master of the organ who [...] remained in his greatness unique” (149). Bach’s ability to create musical pieces is the result of his having absorbed the rules of composition to such a high degree that he was able to manipulate them in order to produce new pieces. This, in turn, was due to the fact that he was familiar with most of Western’s music composition methods, which he neatly catalogued during his lifetime.⁹ Bach’s inventiveness and the mathematical quality of his music come across in the trilogy in the clear transitions between motifs and resolutions. While resolutions in music refer to the movement from dissonant (not harmonious) to consonant (harmonious) sounds and are typically used to ease the tension that accumulates in a musical piece, in the trilogy, they deflect the tension that the narrative events build. The music contains a harmonious quality, indicated by the “harmonic surprises”, that

⁹ For a further discussion of Bach see John Eliot Gardiner, *Music in the Castle of Heaven: A Portrait of Johann Sebastian Bach*.

renders it as a mode of (self-) expression that transcends the limits of what ordinary language can communicate.

If the previous example offers only a sense of the formal complexity of señor Arroyo's music, a more elaborate description of the affective power of his compositions comes later when, on hearing rumours that señor Arroyo wants to reopen the Academy, Simón pays him a visit to talk to him regarding David's future (Coetzee, *SJ* 196). Instead of being greeted by Arroyo himself, he is greeted by Arroyo's music. Once again, Coetzee revisits the encounter with Bach's music, the fictionalisation of which is meant as an exploration in literary terms of the effects of his music on the listener. "Faintly he can hear the tinkle of a piano. The music breaks off, starts again, breaks off again" (Coetzee, *SJ* 188). "He closes his eyes, tries to calm himself, to let the music find its way in" (Coetzee, *SJ* 193). The encounter with music is personal, though Simón's thought process is nevertheless influenced by Alyosha's words "*If we listen with attention the soul will begin to dance within us*" (Coetzee, *SJ* 194; emphasis in original). It soon becomes clear from the "pauses [that] last too long" and "the music itself [which] seems sometimes to lose its way" that señor Arroyo is "not practicing but composing" which leads Simón to "listen[s] with a different kind of attention" (Coetzee, *SJ* 193-4). In "Other Arts and Adaptations", Kelly astutely observes that the representation of visual and performing arts in Coetzee's work is often done from the perspective of the listener rather than the composer (196). The trilogy follows this trend, stressing the importance of the aesthetic and ethical experience of listening to music.

Unlike the Jesus novels, *Disgrace* is a different fictional experiment which explores the creative process from the perspective of the artist. For David Lurie, the protagonist, who composes a piece on Lord Byron, "[s]natches are already imprinted

on his mind of the lovers in duet, the vocal lines, soprano and tenor, coiling wordlessly around and past each other like serpents. Melody without climax” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 121-122). But then there is a beautiful passage that captures the creative process more fully:

astonishingly, in dribs and drabs, the music comes. Sometimes the contour of a phrase occurs to him before he has a hint of what the words themselves will be; sometimes the words call forth cadence; sometimes the shade of a melody, having hovered for days on the edge of hearing, unfolds and blessedly reveals itself (Coetzee, *D* 183).

Music comes to him intuitively, as if from elsewhere. His presence in the opera is “in the music itself, in the flat, tinny slap of the banjo, the voice that strains to soar away from the ludicrous instrument but is continually reined back [...] So this is art, he thinks, and this is how it does its work! How strange! How fascinating!” (Coetzee, *D* 184-185). Similarly to Lurie, the trilogy implies that señor Arroyo is invested in the music. His compositions also lead to a form of revelation only here the text underlines the revelation produced in the listener, not the composer.

This is how the effects of Arroyo’s music on Simón are captured in the trilogy: The music is too variable in its rhythm, too complicated in its logic for a ponderous being like him to follow, but it brings to mind the dance of one of those little birds that hover and dart, their wings beating too fast to see. The question is, where is the soul? When will the soul emerge from its hiding place and open its wings? (Coetzee, *SJ* 194).

The example allows us to see two forces being played out in the music of Arroyo which are reminiscent of what Coetzee identifies in the music of Bach, as discussed in the Classic essay. On the one hand, a material force that comes from the great craft

which goes into the composition of the musical piece. On the other hand, there is a particular quality in the music itself that enables Simón to transcend the ordinary experience of listening to music and imagine planes of reality yet unthought of. In other words, it opens new mental and affective interiorities which transcend those rendered in ordinary language.

The formal complexity of Arroyo's music, as expressed in the first sentence of the passage, bears a striking resemblance to how Coetzee describes the music of Bach in an interview with Peter Sacks from 2001.¹⁰ In Bach, Coetzee explains, there is always a "mysterious moment in the improvisation that he produces [...] at which he leaves you behind. He leaves your powers to follow him, to imitate him, to do what he is doing, behind" (Coetzee n.p.). Señor Arroyo's music elicits a similar reaction in Simón whose rational faculties stifle before the perfection of the music. When asked by Sacks if one's state of consciousness can ever pursue that improvisatory moment, Coetzee replies that "[s]elf-consciousness is crippling at that moment. It really is best to cultivate a kind of ignorance or deafness to self-consciousness" (Coetzee n.p.). Simón seems to follow this thought process, distancing himself from the rationality required to appreciate the mathematical beauty of the music in favour of visual thinking. This raises the question of the limits of language as a system of reference to render the complexity of the effects of music on the listener. As Kelly notes, the representation of works of art in Coetzee's fiction are often complemented by "descriptions of the aesthetic, emotional, and ethical responses that they elicit" (187). That is the case here. The inability to grasp consciously the architectonic quality of the music pushes Simón to enter new affective and ethical states of being that manifest

¹⁰ View the full interview on the website: <https://podcast.lannan.org/2010/06/28/j-m-coetzee-with-peter-sacks-conversation-8-november-2001-video/>.

in his entertaining of the possibility of the existence of what is commonly referred to as the soul.

The representation of music in this passage shifts from an engagement with the form of music to its inner effects. Simón experiences what Stephen Benson, writing on the representation of music in literary works, calls an “intimate self-revelation” (5). The nature of this revelation is mainly ethical as the initial scepticism around the idea of the soul is abandoned and Simón ventures into an introspective journey: “[h]e is not on close terms with his soul. What he knows about the soul in general, what he has read, is that it flits away when confronted with a mirror and therefore cannot be seen by the one who owns it, the one whom it owns” (Coetzee, *SJ* 194). The revelation comes when

he tries not to think, to do nothing that might alarm the timid soul within. He gives himself to the music, allowing it to enter and wash through him. And the music, as if aware of what is up, loses its stop-start character, begins to flow. At the very rim of consciousness the soul, which is indeed like a little bird, emerges and shakes its wings and begins its dance. (Coetzee, *SJ* 194)

The passage raises the question of the ethical value of form. Music works as an emotional catalyst, transforming the nature of knowledge from theoretical (what Simón has read about the soul in books) to embodied (what he experiences while listening to music). Patricia Sánchez is rather quick to observe that in that moment Simón “frees himself from rationality and questions the limits of his own self”, concluding that “hence his soul begins to dance” (121). However, Simón does not free himself of rationality altogether, but seeks another mode of thinking that allows him to better understand the formal complexity and power of Arroyo’s music. Though the layer of irony attached to the use of the word “soul” disappears, Simón’s soul does not

literally begin to dance. Instead, music helps him imagine alternative ways of thinking about music that conceptualise its meaning visually, in the image of the bird. Sánchez is right to point out that in that moment Simón learns that “reason, in its unadulterated form, is not enough to understand the world” (122). The aesthetic power of music, which is personified here, resides in its ability to help reach the “very rim of consciousness” in order to access a deeper subjectivity (Coetzee, *SJ* 194).

The ethical dimension of Arroyo’s music stems from its formal perfection. If until now the text has given us snippets of the formal complexity of Arroyo’s music, then the second event organised by the Academy in memory of David highlights the mathematical precision with which señor Arroyo composes music. A transition is made initially from a “gentle melody” that Arroyo improvises to “the music grow[ing] more complex” as his two sons begin to dance the numbers while “[o]beying two different rhythms” (Coetzee, *DJ* 170). More pointedly, señor Arroyo seems to use the compositional technique of counterpoint, which Bach was famous for, when “[a]bove the rhythms of [the dance of numbers] Three and Five there emerges on the organ a rhythm that crosses both (Coetzee, *DJ* 171). Here, three rhythms complement each other while remaining independent. “At first he, Simón, cannot identify it. Too much is going on in this music, he thinks to himself, too much for the mind to follow” (Coetzee, *DJ* 171). Once again, Simón’s powers to follow the formal complexity of señor Arroyo’s music are left behind. The text captures that stifling moment when self-consciousness is abandoned temporarily before the music, which in tune with the dance, “begins to simplify too. First the rhythm of Five drops out, then the rhythm of Three. The music grows softer, ceases” (Coetzee, *DJ* 171). Drawing on the representation of music in this example, the structure of Arroyo’s music follows the

principles of exposition, complication, and resolution which Bach's music also does (Coetzee, "What is a Classic?" 10).

The example offers insight into the musical structure of señor Arroyo's compositions to which Coetzee regularly returns. His fascination with the architectonic quality of Bach's music comes across clearly in *Diary of a Bad Year* when Señor C remarks that "[c]haracteristically, Bach shows how in almost any musical germ, no matter how simple, there lie possibilities for development" (138).¹¹ Indeed, in the same interview with Peter Sacks, Coetzee expresses his admiration for Bach's methodical approach to music composition when he says that "I like to think of myself as the person who sits beside Bach at the keyboard rather than the one who listens to Beethoven" (Coetzee n.p.). It is this formal complexity achieved through rigour and discipline that fascinates Coetzee in Bach, and that is, to some extent, rendered in the trilogy.¹² The narrative distance between author and creation diminishes when Señor C raises the rhetorical question of "Why is it to Bach and Bach alone that I have this longing to speak? Why not Schubert? [...] Why not Cervantes?" (Coetzee, *DBY* 221). The trilogy seems to explore that question in more detail through the fictionalisation of Bach and the desire to capture in language the formal perfection of Bach's music.

There is an almost religious belief in the power of music to change one's life that is characteristic of señor Arroyo. (Conversely, Ana Magdalena places more emphasis on dance.) In that respect, he resembles the German composer, whose

¹¹ The simple melody of the 3rd movement of Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 5 is a good example in this sense as the entire piece is created around a simple melody whose structure varies in complexity and rhythm as the music progresses.

¹² Bach modestly admits the perseverance and hard work that went into music making when he states that "I have had to work hard; anyone who will work equally hard will be able to do as much" (qtd. in Schweitzer, Albert. *J. S. Bach*, vol. 1, p. 154).

reverence for music as a way of getting closer to God is well known. A firm belief in music is what brings the character of señor Arroyo closer to the figure of the fictionalised Francis Bacon, whose unwavering faith in the power of language to represent reality accurately is illustrated in the postscript to *Elizabeth Costello*, as explored in Chapter 1. Both Simón and Elizabeth Costello turn to their respective figures of authority out of desperation and longing for certainty and meaning. Simón imagines writing a letter to Arroyo telling him about David's salvation plan and, more importantly, about his own condition: "I find myself at sea [...] drifting further and further from solid land. [...] Despite strenuous efforts of the intellect, I cannot believe in the numbers, the higher numbers [...] Your faith in them has helped you (I surmise) to get through these difficult times" (Coetzee, *SJ* 207-8). Like señor Arroyo, who strongly believes in music and its ability to transcend one's immediate reality, Simón also wants to believe truly in something that is capable of washing away his scepticism and (self-) doubt. Just as Simón turns to señor Arroyo to find meaning, Coetzee seems to be turning to the figure of Bach in the trilogy whose music is imagined as capable of giving us the impression that life is meaningful. The way in which Bach's music, and by implication, Arroyo's, achieves this is through the perfection of form which characterises his musical pieces.

The striving towards a realm of ideal forms is the aim of the Arroyos' school. This is not a regular school, but "an academy devoted to the training of the soul through music and dance" towards a transcendental realm in which things are themselves (Coetzee, *SJ* 43, 44). The Academy brings to mind Pythagoras's school in Croton, whose purpose was to direct the souls of its pupils towards the good through

music and dance.¹³ Pythagoras believed that “certain rhythms and melodies had a healing effect on the human character and emotions: it restores the soul’s strength to its original balance” while “[d]ancing was also used as a therapy” (De Vogel 164-164 qtd. in Sánchez 116). Pythagoras’s school introduced a mystical tradition around music whose traces are present in the trilogy as well. However, the mysticism is discouraged by the narrative perspective offered by Simón who finds the philosophy “a bit crazy”, dismissing it, as we have seen, as “mumbo-jumbo about the stars” (Coetzee, *SJ* 75, 103). Part of what contributes to the mysticism of these novels is the implication of the existence of another realm of ideal forms where numbers reside and which music, particularly Arroyo’s music, can help to grasp.

Numbers play a crucial role in the philosophy of the Academy. In “The Name of the Number: Transfinite Mathematics in *The Childhood of Jesus*” (2017) Baylee Brits has remarked that *Childhood* is “the most substantial engagement with numeracy” (131). Numbers are part of the realm of ideal forms which the trilogy constructs and Arroyo’s music is a way of accessing that realm. These are not instrumental, “ant” numbers used in counting or lower arithmetic but “real”, “noble” numbers, numbers in themselves (Coetzee, *SJ* 69). They “ *dwell among the stars*” and music and dance can bring them “down from where they reside” (Coetzee, *SJ* 68; emphasis in original). The philosophy behind the Academy strives to understand numbers qualitatively whereby *unos, dos, tres* are not merely the names of numbers used to count but “transcendental words” which carry the weight of another plane of reality (Coetzee, *SJ* 67-68). That other realm is what, ultimately, the Arroyos want to access and embody through their educational philosophy and teachings. They want to

¹³ In my engagement with Pythagoras henceforth I only focus on those aspects of his philosophy which concern music and mathematics.

develop “a way of seeing through chant to what lies behind and beyond it, namely the realm of the numbers themselves – the noble numbers and their auxiliaries [...] numbers born out of the unions of noble numbers” (Coetzee, *SJ* 68). Music and dance therefore allow the pupils of the Academy to be “in accord with the great underlying movement of the universe” (Coetzee, *SJ* 68).

Nevertheless, it is the ideas of Rudolf Steiner which crucially inform how the trilogy develops the philosophy of the Academy and its mystical understanding of numbers. Steiner’s Lecture VIII, “Materialism and the Task of Anthroposophy”, delivered in 1921 in Dornach, considers the ontology of numbers, which it links to the idea of weight and measurement, in light of a more universal endeavour to understand the development of “human soul life”.¹⁴ Steiner uses the philosophy of the Pythagorean school as a starting point for thinking about numbers in an ontological sense.¹⁵ For Steiner, the Pythagorean school is a gateway into “primordial times” when numbers were conceptualised qualitatively (numbers in themselves) rather than quantitatively (instrumental numbers). Steiner hypothesises that in ancient times people “sensed” numbers such as one, two or three, which represented concepts in themselves. For instance, “[i]n the number 3, one sensed a significantly different element from that in the number 2. Not only was it the addition of one unit; rather, one sensed something integrated in the 3, something where three things relate to one another” (Steiner, “Materialism” n.p.). This way of thinking which emphasises the interiority of each number has been supplanted by “our customary abstract thinking about numbers” (Steiner, “Materialism” n.p.). Drawing on Steiner’s ideas, the link to

¹⁴ See full text here: <https://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA204/English/AP1987/19210423p01.html>.

¹⁵ Steiner does not define what he understands by ‘Pythagorean school’ but he seems to consider Pythagoras as one of the founders of mathematical thinking and a mystic. For more on Pythagoreanism see The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pythagoreanism/>.

the philosophy of the Academy is evident in the way the philosophy develops its number mysticism, particularly the idea of numbers containing transcendental meaning. Each number has a particular dance and requires a particular kind of music. Moreover, emphasis is placed on the prime numbers from two to seven, which each demands an idiosyncratic tune and movement.

A straightforward link to Steiner is nevertheless quickly undercut by Inés's explanation that "[w]hen I was a teacher we had señor C the postman who whistles and el G the cat who purrs and el T the train who hoots. Each letter had its own personality and its own sound" (Coetzee, *SJ* 75). What Ana Magdalena is doing, Inés goes on to explain is "giving the numbers personalities [...] *Unos, dos, tres*. Making them come alive. That is how you teach small children. It's not religion" (Coetzee, *SJ* 75). The two different perspectives offer complexity and depth to how the trilogy constructs its numbers metaphysics.

While Steiner's ideas undoubtedly shape the number philosophy, one need not lose sight of the fact that Bach was also regarded as a number mystic. In "The Limits of Reason in J. M. Coetzee's *The Schooldays of Jesus*" (2019), Patricia Alvarez Sánchez draws attention to the fact that Bach was "a follower of numerology" and possibly a believer in "the mystical values of numbers; he, among other Baroque composers, used numbers instead of letters and incorporated them as well to convey hidden messages in his musical works" (115). Given that Señor Arroyo preserves that reverence for music and numbers, Sánchez argues that he embodies "a passion for spirituality" though it is a passion for music and numbers rather than spirituality which characterises Arroyo (115). Symbolically, he abandons the clock-repair business where he worked with his friend Javier Moreno in order to pursue his own vision of numbers (Coetzee, *SJ* 233). (David shares that resistance to reducing numbers to their

instrumental function, which manifests not only in developing his own number philosophy but also in his refusal to wear a watch he was gifted for his tenth birthday because “it fixes the number in a circular order” (Coetzee, *DJ* 8.) Simón’s words capture Arroyo’s metaphysics of numbers and their relationship to music when he states that the philosophy of the Academy “invokes the higher mathematics and treats the music made by human hands as at best a faint echo of the music of the spheres” (Coetzee, *DJ* 29). Dmitri also refers to Arroyo as “an idealist” whose “mind is elsewhere, in the celestial sphere where the numbers spin” (Coetzee, *SJ* 56). Although the resemblance between señor Arroyo and the historical Bach is strong, Coetzee substitutes the German composer’s faith in God with faith in numbers and music. Coetzee’s “Bach” is therefore more similar to the sixth-century BCE mathematician Pythagoras in that he sees a relationship between music, numbers, and the spheres.¹⁶

The power of señor Arroyo’s music to make room for another space that the mind can inhabit is evident in the effects it has on Simón. Despite his constant questioning and his taking an astrology class to elucidate the mystery behind “how stars, numbers, and music are connected”, Simón fails to understand (Coetzee, *SJ* 183). Nevertheless, he continues to listen to the music, which consists of “a suite of dances for flute and violin”, in the privacy of his home (Coetzee, *DJ* 7). Every so often, “when he is in the right mood, during his solitary dancing of an evening, there sometimes

¹⁶ In *Music: A Mathematical Offering* (2008) Dave Benson sheds light on the figure of Pythagoras who discovered that “when two similar strings under the same tension are sounded together, they give a pleasant sound if the lengths of the strings are in the ratio of two small integers” (138). According to Benton, “[t]his was the first known example of a law of nature ruled by the arithmetic of integers” (138). In other words, Pythagoras believed that numbers and mathematics more generally were a guide to the interpretation of the universe, which also included music. Consequently, this influenced the intellectual development of Pythagoreans, Pythagoras’s followers, who promoted the idea of education as a quadrivium (four divisions) which included arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. If mathematical laws explained the laws of nature, then “[t]hey expected that the motions of the planets would be governed by the arithmetic of ratios of small integers in a similar way” (Benson 138). The phrase “the music of the spheres” encapsulates this belief and refers to the sound made by the rotating motion of the planets.

comes to him a vision, momentary, transient [...] of silvery spheres too many to count rotating about each other with an unearthly hum, in unending space” (Coetzee, *DJ* 8). Music transposes Simón imaginatively from his immediate reality to another plane of existence. The art form enables him to experience states of being which allow him to see new dimensions of reality (visions) and hear the “music of the spheres”. The trilogy does not adopt this perspective entirely but remains inquisitive of such an experience. Simón maintains a rational, sceptical mindset:

He dances, he has visions, yet he does not think of himself as a convert to the cult of number. For his visions he has a reasoned explanation, one that satisfies him most of the time: the lulling of the rhythm of the dance, the hypnotic chant of the flute, induce a state of trance in which fragments are sucked up from the bed of memory and whirled before the inner eye. (Coetzee, *DJ* 8-9)

In spite of Simón’s scepticism, the experience of listening to Arroyo’s music nevertheless produces an ethical change in him which manifests in an openness to the existence of possible alternative dimensions of experience.

The Pythagorean idea of the spheres turning and producing music is not an entirely new development in Coetzee’s work, as observed by Sánchez, but has been there as early as *Age of Iron*. The passage describing Mrs Curren’s experience of listening to music on the radio deserves being quoted in full:

Fading in, fading out, I heard last night [...] anthems of all the nations, celestial music, music that left us years ago and now comes back from the stars transfigured, gentle, as evidence that all that is given forth will at length return. A closed universe, curved like an egg, enclosing us.

There I lay in the dark, listening to the music of the stars and the crackling and humming that accompanied it like the dust of meteors, smiling,

my heart filled with gratitude for this good news from afar. The one border they cannot close, I thought: the border upward, between the Republic of South Africa and the empire of the sky. (Coetzee, *AI* 23)

The representation of music, with its harmonious sounds and its soothing effects on the listener, draws on Pythagoras's idea of the music of the spheres. The music Mrs Curren listens to is not classical but electronic, possibly Stockhausen (Coetzee, *AI* 23). Music here opens a space that exists outside the burden of history whose unbearable weight Mrs Curren feels pressing down on her. The effects of Bach's music on Coetzee, and its ability to transport him outside the cultural cul-de-sac he felt South Africa was approaching, resonate with the passage above particularly in the impression of a hermetically sealed universe. In the trilogy Coetzee thus revisits a moment in his early fiction which he interrogates anew.

There is an intertext that helps flesh out *el sistema Arroyo* more fully and that is Rafael Alberti's poem "Los Ángeles Colegiales" (The Grammar School Angels). The last line of the poem, "[l]as estrellas errantes, niños que ignoran la aritmética", is mentioned in the trilogy by señor Arroyo in a conversation with Simón about the philosophy behind the Academy (Coetzee, *SJ* 97). Alberti's poem challenges rational education, captured in the allusion to the rigidity of the grammar school in the title, in order to open the possibility of an alternative epistemology. The comparison with angels stresses the innocence, purity, and creative potential of children whose minds are not yet shaped by formal education, as exemplified in the reference to writing ("why our fingers were of India ink") and mathematics ("a circumference doesn't have to be round" and "something straight, if it wants, can be curved | or broken") (Alberti, "Grammar School" 125). The last line ends with the profound idea that children are

“wandering stars”, suggestive of them being micro-universes that contain the potentiality of a different epistemology (Alberti, “Grammar School” 125).

David is the trilogy’s response to what this alternative epistemology might look like. His relationship to numbers and his view of mathematics initially seem irrational, as Sánchez points out (113). “I know all the numbers”, David informs Simón, “I know 134 and I know 7 and I know – he draws a deep breath – 4623551 and I know 888 and I know 92” (Coetzee, *CJ* 177). However, when he must tell Simón what the last number is David has difficulty remembering it: “[y]ou are making me forget! Why do you make me forget?” (Coetzee, *CJ* 179). The Neoplatonic influence is noticeable in the idea that one is born with previous knowledge which is remembered through the process of learning. Steiner adds more nuance to this idea, proposing that “the whole of arithmetic is in us” and that “[w]ithin ourselves, each number has its own definite quality” (Lecture VIII). This is the case for David, who distinguishes between the personality of each number, hence his dislike for ordering numbers in ascending or descending order. His counting is equally puzzling: “‘I think that is Number 11’ – he stabs a finger up at the sky – ‘and that is Number 50 and that is Number 33333’” (Coetzee, *CJ* 210). Baylee Brits argues that David’s numeral cognition – the fact that he cannot comprehend “sequence, probability or linearity” – contributes to his divinity (131). Rather than choosing to see mathematics in an irrational way or focusing strictly on the singular nature of each number as a result of his nominalist understanding of the world, David’s thinking on mathematics contains the buds of a new epistemology which approaches numbers conceptually, qualitatively rather than instrumentally, quantitatively. His method of counting does not require the repetitive act of addition because numbers are not part of an ordered set. David is therefore similar to one of the children that Alberti’s poem refers to: one that ignores

the rules of traditional arithmetic and wants instead to experience the perfection of numbers in themselves.

To contrast the peculiarity of David's relationship to numbers, the trilogy brings in more traditional approaches to mathematics. These are embodied in two of David's teachers, señor Leon and señor Robles, who try to teach him "discipline and hard work", though without success (Coetzee, *CJ* 241). In their rationalist approach to education, they represent the authoritative pedagogues that enforce law, order, and discipline onto pupils and against whom Alberti's poem cautiously warns. When David rebels against being fitted into their ideological straitjacket by adopting what Baylee Brits refers to as "contrary numerical cognition", he is quickly dismissed on the basis of a cognitive disorder (140). Señor Leon diagnoses David with "[a] specific deficit linked to symbolic activities. To working with words and numbers. He cannot read. He cannot write. He cannot count"; "[h]e can recite all kinds of numbers, yes, but not in the right order" (Coetzee, *CJ* 243). Señor Robles, a retired engineer and a deeply committed rationalist, strives to instil "the elements of mathematics" in David's mind but ultimately fails (Coetzee, *SJ* 26). Both señor Robles and señor Leon stand for what Sánchez refers to as "authoritarian education system" (113).¹⁷ Each teacher attempts to limit David's worldview to fit their own rationalist understanding of the world which regards reason as the sole key to interpreting the universe.

David disputes the logic of his teachers by bringing in an existential dimension to mathematics whereby numbers possess singular identities. Contrary to señor Leon's view that "each number is the name of a property shared by certain sets of objects in the world", David conceptualises numbers "as if the numbers were islands floating in

¹⁷ Sánchez argues that *Schooldays* draws on Robert Musil's *The Confusions of Young Törless* (1906) to raise the question of the effects of a rationalist education as well as to dispute the nature of mathematics as a reliable system.

a great black sea of nothingness” (Coetzee, *SJ* 28, *CJ* 295). In order to bring down the numbers from the realm where they reside, the boy does not use conventional ways of counting, asserting that “I can already count”, and that “I know all the numbers” (Coetzee, *SJ* 28, 30). Instead, it is as if “he were each time being asked to close his eyes and launch himself across the void (Coetzee, *CJ* 295). The act of summoning the numbers relies on an act of faith or better yet on an assumption that the numbers already exist in another realm. Thus, through the figure of David the trilogy enquires into the nature of mathematics. That mathematics cannot explain fully the nature of reality is an idea demonstrated by the twentieth-century Austro-Hungarian logician Kurt Gödel, who sought to uncover the logical paradoxes in mathematics and show the limitations of mathematical proofs. His incompleteness theorem focuses on whole numbers and postulates that mathematics cannot create perfectly complete systems because it relies on axioms. These axioms are defined by mathematicians before Gödel as undeniable, true statements about numbers, which, according to the Austro-Hungarian logician, were ultimately based on assumptions.¹⁸ Peter Johnston’s PhD thesis “‘Presences of the Infinite’: J. M. Coetzee and Mathematics” (2013) shows that Gödel has had an impact on Coetzee’s thinking despite not being referred to explicitly in the published work.¹⁹ He revisits Gödel’s theorem in the trilogy in order to open up a space untouched by mathematical thinking and to emphasise that mathematics is an approximation of a perfection that lies beyond ordinary experience.

This is further illustrated in the dispute between Arroyo and the figure of Metros, which the philosopher Javier Moreno elaborates on in his lecture on “Man the

¹⁸ For a further discussion of Gödel’s theory see Douglas R. Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid*.

¹⁹ For a better understanding of the influence of mathematics in Coetzee’s oeuvre see Peter Johnston’s excellent PhD thesis.

Measure of All Things”. The way in which the narrative constructs the figure of the philosopher Moreno talking before an audience on the question of measurement resembles the philosopher Rudolf Steiner giving a lecture in Dornach on, among other topics, measurement in the essay referred to earlier, “Materialism and the Task of Anthroposophy” (1921). Steiner argues that there is no absolute measurement since the figures of the object being measured “refer to something completely arbitrary that was at one time assumed” (Steiner, “Materialism” n.p.). When we measure, Steiner argues, “[w]e are not dealing with a property of the thing itself” (Steiner, “Materialism” n.p.). In other words, measurement is not concerned with things in themselves but with their measurement, and in that sense, Steiner’s ideas echo those of the fictional philosopher. According to Moreno, Metros was a rather obscure figure whose presence nevertheless “looms large over the modern world” mainly due to his having introduced a new epistemology into the world which concerned itself with quantifying reality (Coetzee, *SJ* 235). At this point, the trilogy complicates a straightforward association between Metros and the idea of measurement by introducing two possible interpretations of Metros’ wisdom: that “there is nothing in the universe which cannot be measured” and “that measurement is always relative to the measurer” (Coetzee, *SJ* 235). Hence, Coetzee appropriates and complicates Steiner’s ideas, undermining a direct association between the philosophical stance of the trilogy and that of Steiner.

Nevertheless, taking into consideration Gödel’s incompleteness theorem, the position assumed by Moreno that measurement governs the universe becomes less definitive, allowing the coming into view of an alternative epistemology. In the response to Moreno’s talk, señor Arroyo summarises the legacy of Metros as follows:

the arrival of Metros marked a turning point in human history: the moment when we collectively gave up the old way of apprehending the world, the unthinking, animal way, when we abandoned as futile the quest to know things in themselves, and began instead to see the world through its metra. By concentrating our gaze upon fluctuations in the metra we enabled ourselves to discover new laws, laws that even the heavenly bodies have to obey. (Coetzee, *SJ* 242)

That Metros's presence constituted "a turning point" in humanity's intellectual history implies the possibility of another mode of being, an "old way of apprehending the world", which precedes it. Arroyo's response, echoing Steiner, is, in a sense, anti-Pythagorean in that it rejects an interpretation of the universe solely through mathematical laws.

The presence of the Academy in the trilogy represents an endeavour to retrieve an alternative epistemology, one in which things are themselves, through aesthetic education. That the Academy is run by señor Arroyo, the fictionalised version of Bach, is significant because it shows that music contains a striving towards transcendence. In its approach to music, the Academy leans towards perfection (of forms) rather than emotion. The scene which closes *Schooldays*, and from which the second epigraph is taken, is probably the most vivid example of the power of music to help us imagine perfection. Initially, Arroyo plays "a simple tune, a child's tune", then he "inverts the tune, varies it, elaborates: while the pulse remains steady, the little aria begins to reveal a new structure, point by point, like a crystal growing in the air. Bliss washes over him; he wishes he could sit down and listen properly" (Coetzee, *SJ* 259-60). The description brings out the architectonic quality of the music, its playful inventiveness and formal perfection. The aria señor Arroyo plays is possibly the aria in Bach's

Goldberg Variations.²⁰ Then comes the moment when Arroyo's music opens new horizons for Simón:

It is cool in the studio; he is conscious of the high space above his head. Mercedes recedes; there is only the music. Arms extended, eyes closed, he shuffles in a slow circle. Over the horizon the first star begins to rise. (Coetzee, *SJ* 260)

Simón's scepticism about the philosophy of the Academy is abandoned in this final paragraph of *Schooldays* in which the music of Arroyo transports him to an imagined place that resembles an alternative plane of reality. The reference to the high space above his head is in keeping with Mrs Curren's description of heaven as "a hotel lobby with a high ceiling" where the music of Bach is being played (Coetzee, *AI* 25). The feeling of bliss, or perfect happiness, contains something of the perfection of the music – a striving towards perfection achieved through the formal beauty of music.

In constructing the Arroyos and their school Coetzee draws on aspects of the historical Bachs, though in a larger sense than simply biographical. He does not situate the Bachs in the history of German music, linking them directly with the Baroque style, despite the German composer's rootedness in the musical tradition of his time (Schweitzer 1). Instead he introduces the Arroyos, particularly señor Arroyo, in order to begin to grasp, through music, a realm of perfect forms that is not immediately available in ordinary language. The architectonic quality of Bach's music – its mathematical beauty and formal inventiveness – helps Coetzee think about the question of formal perfection as a transformative and ethical principle. The trilogy

²⁰ See *The Keyboard Music of J.S. Bach* (1992) by David Schulenberg. When Bach's Goldberg Variations were published in 1741, they were titled "Clavier Übung bestehend in einer Aria mit verschiedenen Veränderungen" ("Keyboard exercise, consisting of one aria with diverse variations") (Schulenberg 486).

therefore constructs music as an epistemology in itself that allows the subject to access new forms of knowing and of perception. To put it in señor Arroyo's own words, "[i]n my stumbling way, señora, I try to reveal what has been hidden" (Coetzee, *DJ* 172). Music is a way to imagine a realm of ideal forms through its power to make the invisible planes of reality become visible. If music helps us imagine a realm of perfection, dance, as we will see in the next chapter, allows us to embody that perfection.

Chapter 4: Dance

What magical powers does dancing have?

(Coetzee, *Schooldays*; emphasis in original)

From some buried memory the words *pillar of grace* emerge, surprising him [...]. As if the earth has lost its downward power, the boy seems to shed all bodily weight, to become pure light.

(Coetzee, *Schooldays*; emphasis in original)

In the interview with Attwell that opens the section on “Autobiography and Confession” in *Doubling the Point*, Coetzee reflects on his fictional writing in which he identifies a recurring theme. He notes that “[i]f I look back over my own fiction, I see a simple (simple-minded?) standard erected. That standard is the body” (Coetzee, *DP* 248).¹ Coetzee’s turn to the body is the result of a fierce reaction to rationality which he sees being played out in the socio-political context of apartheid South Africa. Novels such as *In the Heart of the Country* (1974), *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), and *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983) are deeply concerned with the power structures within which the body is inscribed.² The weight of history that presses down on the body in the early works is lifted in later novels, notably *Elizabeth Costello* (2003) and *Slow Man* (2005), although an interest in its vulnerability is maintained

¹ Coetzee’s reflections continue with “[w]hatever else, the body is not “that which is not,” and the proof that it *is* is the pain it feels. The body with its pain becomes a counter to the endless trials of doubt”, and a few lines later he adds that “it is not that one *grants* the authority of the suffering body: the suffering body *takes* this authority: that is its power. To use other words: its power is undeniable” (248; emphasis in original).

² The constant preoccupation with and representation of bodily vulnerability in the early works challenges and sensitises readerly expectations by encouraging a form of sympathetic identification with the characters. More generally, as Alice Hall argues in *Literature and Disability* (2016), the fact that Coetzee is an able-bodied author writing about disability also points to his effort to embody a different consciousness and try to “communicate over a divide” despite the outcome of the attempt (172).

throughout the oeuvre. Rather than a political engagement with the body, the recently published Jesus fictions exhibit an ontological turn in their dealing with the topic, thus shaping a continuity between the early, middle, and late works, with the body as nodal point. This is an existential move in the oeuvre, all the more significant since the body becomes a space for creativity explored through the empowering and celebratory art of dance.

In the previous chapter, the focus was on music as an aesthetic medium that transcends the expressive powers of ordinary language. I showed that Coetzee links the representation of music with the idea of perfection whose affective and ethical effects allow imaginative access to new planes of feeling and modes of perception. If music opens a realm of perfect forms, then dance offers the possibility of embodying that realm. In this chapter I therefore want to focus specifically on the representation of dance as a way of honouring the body and celebrating its ephemerality. Dance brings the realm of perfection down to earth and allows it to manifest in the body of the dancer whose expressivity becomes a language in itself that is capable of bringing about affective and ethical change. Coetzee's literary engagement with dance not only creates a dialogue between the two art forms but also allows us to see another deeply modernist influence in his writing.

Dance as a theme has featured in some of Coetzee's works, most notably *Foe* and *Summertime*, and there has been a somewhat limited critical conversation developing around the topic. In "The Spiritual Liberation of Music, Dance, and Ritual: Verbal- versus Non-verbal Communication in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*" (2015), Nigel Foxcroft reads Friday's non-verbal communication – his dance, music, and odd rituals – as a "spiritually liberating" mode of self-expression that ultimately challenges the limits of language (11). In a more recent study from 2020, Michelle Kelly also revisits

Foe in order to argue that Friday's dancing, and his use of Foe's robes and wig as costume, represent the performance of the authorial role that uses not textualisation but the body to tell a story. More generally, however, Kelly maintains that dance as a performing art has the power of "transcending the mediation and abstraction of language in [its] emotional immediacy" (197). In a similar vein, Derek Attridge in his recently published "Reason and Its Others in Coetzee's Jesus Novels" (2021) contends that music and dance are "the most fully endorsed alternative to a rational approach to the world and to human life", although he carefully avoids situating dance in complete opposition to reason or simplistically equating it with passion (414). In the lengthiest critical engagement with the subject, Robert Pippin's excellent book on the Jesus novels, *Metaphysical Exile* (2021), places dance not in opposition to reason and rationality but as capable of transcending dualist forms of thought through the pre-discursive and pre-rational ways in which it brings abstractions into the world. In this chapter, I draw on the work of these scholars, building on their ideas, but also extending the scope by providing a rigorous, systematic study of the literary representation of dance in Coetzee's oeuvre. In my reading of the Jesus fictions, I bring out the importance of European modernist influence on Coetzee's thinking about dance, and I unveil the crucial impact of Robert Walser, specifically his novel *Jakob von Gunten* (1909), which illuminates and informs Coetzee's *Schooldays*, in order to unpack the significance of dance for the trilogy as a whole.

What is the source of Coetzee's fascination with Walser? As we saw in the introduction, the influence of Walser on Coetzee has significantly shaped the latter's style. The passion and force with which Walser writes, his abandoning of formal and intellectual inhibitions, the manipulation of language with the aim, as Walser himself writes in a late piece that "it might contain an unknown vitality which would be a joy

to awaken”, to gain better insight into a fuller way of life, one that is deeply rooted in the here and now, and in the life of the body rather than the mind, are some of the things that might appeal to Coetzee in Walser (qtd. in Sam Jones “An Introduction to Robert Walser” n.p.).³ More significantly in the case of *Jakob von Gunten* is Walser’s idiosyncratic modernism, which consists of a constellation of ideas conveyed through a distinctively playful and self-reflexive prose style, “with its lucid syntactic layout, its casual juxtapositions of the elevated with the banal, and its eerily convincing logic of paradox”, and how Walser’s own life is, according to Coetzee, “wondrously transmuted” in fiction (Coetzee, “The Genius of Robert Walser” n.p.). Walser’s rather “uneventful” yet “harrowing” life takes place during a time in Central Europe when modernism reaches a high point, and it is to this specific period and place that Coetzee tunes in, drawn by the liberating sense of its inventive possibilities, whether intellectual, formal, linguistic, that he also sees being played out in Walser’s writing (Coetzee, “The Genius of Robert Walser” n.p.). I therefore want to trace Coetzee’s debts to Walser, specifically the way in which he uses Walser’s text to think about dance and creativity more generally in the Jesus novels.

A closer look at the structure of *Schooldays* reveals that it rewrites *Jakob von Gunten* in terms of plot. The existence of an Institute in *Jakob* with an alternative approach to education is surprisingly similar to the Academy of Dance in *Schooldays*, which I will look at in due course. Walser’s novel, written as a series of undated diary entries by the protagonist, Jakob von Gunten, follows his schooldays at an Institute for boys that is run by the siblings Herr and Fräulein Benjamenta. At the Institute, the pupils must “wear uniforms” which make them look “like unfree people” (Walser 4).

³ View the full article on the website: <https://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/an-introduction-to-robert-walser>.

The education that one receives here is “an education in humility” since this is a school for servants (which echoes Walser’s own enrolment in such a school in his youth) (Coetzee “The Genius”). There is only one book, *What Is the Aim of the Benjamenta’s Boys’ School?*, one of whose rules (and in fact the only one that is mentioned specifically in the text) is that “[g]ood behavior is a garden full of flowers” (Walser 88). Because of a shortage of teachers, who seem to be either gone or asleep, and Herr Benjamenta being mostly “absent in thought” or immersed in his newspapers and refusing to “mix with society on the worldly stage”, the instruction is mainly done by Fräulein Benjamenta whom Jakob “revere[s]” and compares to “an angel”, an association strengthened by her “flowing white robes” (Walser 33). Like Ana Magdalena, Fräulein is “very self-controlled” and an imposing figure that demands respect from her pupils – at least at the beginning before she falls in love with Jakob and dies of unrequited love (Walser 51). Jakob is eccentric and roguish, having his way with his teachers by using manipulative tactics which eventually prove successful. Following the death of his sister, Herr Benjamenta closes the Institute and invites Jakob to join him in his travels around the world which the young boy accepts.

What draws Coetzee to Walser’s Institute is an interest in the effects of extreme forms of rationality on one’s subjectivity and the alternative that *Jakob* offers. The Institute maintains a hard-line approach to education: “[t]here is only one single class, and that is always repeated: “How Should a Boy Behave?” Basically, all our instruction is centered on this question” (Walser 5). One of the maxims of the Institute, “A little, but thoroughly”, encapsulates the school’s approach to the dissemination and interest in knowledge (Walser 64). As far as the teaching method is concerned, it consists of “impressing patience and obedience” upon the pupils and “learn[ing] rules by heart” (Walser 5). This approach to education avoids “stuff[ing] [pupils] with

sciences” to focus instead on a simplistic method of “train[ing] and shap[ing]” students through theoretical and practical instruction “to learn exactly the character of our own soul and body” (Walser 65). The body is here ironically portrayed as a space for deep wisdom, but also one that should be dominated completely through self-discipline. For instance, pupils are not allowed to laugh, wink or make noise, but must be in control of their bodies at all times, and if they struggle, a janitor ensures that these rules are obeyed. The pupils are also inculcated with the thought that they are “tiny, insignificant creatures” for whom the law “commands” and the discipline “compels”: “that is the big thing, not us pupils” (Walser 14, 65-66). In the face of such radically rational education, the text nevertheless provides an outlet for Jakob’s creative energies in the form of the diary which he keeps. This turn to creativity as a solution to extreme forms of rationality interests Coetzee who in the trilogy explores the topic by turning to the creative potential of dance.

The trilogy’s *Academia de la Danza* maintains some of the structural elements of Walser’s Institute. The Academy is run by the Arroyos, Juan Sebastián, the musician “whose head is up in the clouds most of the time”, and Ana Magdalena, the “strict” and “demanding” dance instructress to whom the pupils are “devoted” (Coetzee, *SJ* 118, 189). Although not explicitly stated, the Academy seems to be a school for boys given the fact that no reference is made to any female student either in *Schooldays* or *Death*. Uniforms are compulsory, yet they consist of “lighter, more comfortable clothes” to allow the body to be free (Coetzee, *SJ* 43). That is why the students wear togas during dance performances. On their feet they wear dancing slippers in the colours gold and silver, since these colours are “noble metals” in comparison to “[i]ron and copper and lead” which are “slave metals” (Coetzee, *SJ* 53). Books are not necessary because “[f]irst comes the dance. All else is secondary”

(Coetzee, *SJ* 44). All classes take place in one room with a floor “laid down especially for dancing, out of planks cut from cedar trees that grow high in the mountains, by carpenters, true craftsmen, who made it as smooth as is humanly possible” (Coetzee, *SJ* 45). While Walser’s Institute encourages the acquisition of practical skills, such as pupils having to “sweep and clean the classroom and the office early in the morning” (Walser 28), this emphasis is transferred to Dr Julio Fabricante’s school in *Death* where the pupils are taught “the rudiments of reading and writing and figuring before being trained as carpenters or plumbers or pastry-chefs” (Coetzee, *DJ* 29). Loose clothes, special dancing slippers, and togas liberate the body that Walser’s school incarcerates while pointing to the influence of modernist aesthetics, a point I shall return to in due course. Coetzee thus ironically handles Walser’s Institute, which is too regulated and rule bound, and responds to Walser with a creative alternative in the form of the Academy.

Indeed, the Academy is the opposite of the Institute in terms of its educational philosophy. This is “not a regular school or a substitute for a regular school. It is an academy devoted to the training of the soul through music and dance” “in the direction of the good” (Coetzee, *SJ* 43, 44). At the Academy, pupils learn to call down the numbers from the sky in dance. The idea is “[t]o bring the numbers down from where they reside, to allow them to manifest themselves in our midst, to give them body”; therefore, “while we dance, by their grace, they live among us” (Coetzee, *SJ* 68). That is why the Academy is dedicated to “bringing them [the souls of the pupils] in accord with the great underlying movement of the universe, or, as we prefer to say, the dance of the universe” (Coetzee, *SJ* 68). Instead of suppressing the desire for individuality and self-expression by following the “the law of the ant” – which is the aim of the

Institute – and given that “[a]nts are by nature law-abiding creatures”, dance empowers the pupils by allowing them to express themselves freely (Coetzee, *SJ* 69).

Such a strong emphasis on dance contrasts with how it features in *Jakob* where it has a minor role to play in that it is part of a twofold instruction that consists of theory and practice. The latter is “a kind of perpetually repeated gymnastics or dancing” the purpose of which is “to learn exactly the character of our own soul and body” (Walser 65). Through physical education “more blessings and more genuine knowledge are to be found in a very simple, as it were stupid, exercise than in the learning of a variety of ideas and meanings” (Walser 65). Walser’s text foregrounds what Coetzee identifies as the logic of paradox, referred to earlier, between the simplicity (which verges on stupidity) of the body in space and the body as a space for deep wisdom. The Walser text and Coetzee’s novels reinforce one another in their emphasis on the body as a space for learning, an endeavour that challenges rational forms of knowing. However, the former loses touch with the creative potential of the body while the trilogy, not without irony, proposes the reaching of a deeper ontology through the body.

Dancing the numbers in the sky, guiding souls in the direction of the good, connecting to other realms, and getting in touch with the rhythm of the universe are ideas that strongly resonate with the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) which seems to be another source of creative inspiration for Coetzee in developing the philosophy behind the Academy. Steiner was an Austrian spiritualist, philosopher, and educationist, and the founder of Anthroposophy, a spiritual science founded on the Romantic idea that human beings can reach a spiritual realm through an altered state of consciousness. This theory was the result of his belief that humans were at one time more spiritually “awake” but that attachment to material possessions diminished one’s

transcendental receptivity. The spiritual potential being innate, Steiner sought to renew human spirituality, and formalised his efforts by founding Goetheanum, a school of spiritual science from which the Waldorf School later derived. The aim of the Waldorf school is “the cultivation of initiative, of will” in the child (Steiner, n.p.).⁴ One of the main principles underpinning the Waldorf pedagogical method is that education must target the whole child: body, mind, and soul. Among the disciplines that enable such an education are music, dance, art, and stories. Instead of learning information by heart, as in Walser’s novel, children are taught to experience information physically, through the body, and spiritually, through the soul. When learning the letters, for example, the pupils are taught to experience each letter through the body, that is, through movement. Steiner pursues an inherently modern educational agenda, which stresses an embodied form of learning, to which Coetzee responds.

The reason why Coetzee is drawn to Steiner and the Waldorf education in particular might be explained by turning briefly to his life experience. As J. C. Kannemeyer’s biography, *J. M. Coetzee: A Life in Writing* (2012), shows, Coetzee’s mother Vera had quite developed ideas about education, especially at kindergarten and elementary level. Nevertheless, her pedagogical methods were deemed “bizarre” and were quite unpopular among those who knew her in Voëlfontein (Kannemeyer 53). In *Life of Writing*, Attwell argues that “Vera’s influence on Coetzee’s authorship is profound but by no means straightforward” (166). One of the ways in which this influence manifested was when John Coetzee opted for an alternative form of education for his children when, following his return to South Africa from the US, he and his first wife, Philippa, enrolled their son Nicolas in a Waldorf School in Cape

⁴ View the full lecture on the website:

<https://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA279/English/RSP1967/19230826p01.html>.

Town (254).⁵ In light of these ideas, what sense do we make of the biographical evidence here? ⁶ Instead of implying that raw biographical detail is the key to Coetzee's interest in Steiner's educational doctrine, I want to suggest that in the trilogy Coetzee is allowing himself the liberty to explore ideas that have idiosyncratic biographical resonances, including Bach, mathematics, number mysticism, and Waldorf education. This exploration helps explain part of the oddity of the material, which deals extensively with second-order questions, characteristic of late style.

To return to the fictional world of the novels, Steiner's influence on the trilogy is distinctly philosophical. The preferred mode of teaching and learning at the Academy is individuated: pupils learn through dance, music, and stories. Inés recognises the method from when she was a teacher. In Coetzee's own innovation, which has links to mathematics and his experiments with number mysticism, pupils learn to dance numbers, not letters. That these numbers need to be called down from a higher realm and that children can access that plane of reality comes from Steiner. The Romantic belief at the Academy is that the child "still bears impresses of a former life, shadow recollections which he lacks words to express. He lacks words because, along with the world we have lost, we have lost a language fit to evoke it" (Coetzee, *SJ* 67). Children are the ones "in whom these archaic memories, memories of a prior existence, are far from extinguished" (Coetzee, *SJ* 243-4). Dance thus offers a way of accessing that realm because "[i]n the dance old memories come to the surface, archaic

⁵ The manuscripts also reveal that Coetzee was familiar with Steiner's educational philosophy at least since the writing of *Life and Times of Michael K* (Attwell 137).

⁶ My take on reading biographically aligns itself with Attwell's argument, presented in *Life of Writing*, where he argues that the biographical detail does not limit "the truth of the work" to an author's biography but helps the reader "to understand how the self is written into the work and then written out, leaving its imprint as a shadowy presence" (27). For a thought-provoking take on Coetzee's relationship to autobiography see David Attwell's interview with Coetzee, "All Autobiography is *Autre*-biography".

memories, knowledge we lost” (Coetzee, *SJ* 244).⁷ In relation to dance and music being “its own way of apprehending the universe”, Pippin links dance with the question of intelligibility via the association between dance and ideas in general, and ideas of art in particular (Coetzee, *SJ* 243).⁸ He goes on to argue that dance as an aesthetic mode of knowing challenges the “universal” mode of intelligibility, which manifests as scientific law. Pippin’s argument reinforces Steiner’s influence in the trilogy.

Coetzee fictionally experiments with Steiner’s approach to learning by framing dance as a mode of communication. The first performance at the Academy gives bodily expression to the ideas which lie behind its philosophy as expressed in ordinary language by Ana Magdalena. In her speech she elaborates on the aims of the Academy, clearly stating that it is the individuality, not the obedience and servitude, of the pupils that the school wants to harness. As in the chapter on music, Coetzee uses ekphrasis to express an idea, that of the child’s uniqueness, which is conveyed through ordinary language, in dance, specifically the dance of numbers Two and Three. “[W]earing golden slippers and a white toga that leaves one shoulder bare”, the first dancer performs his act:

Arms raised above his head, he gazes into the distance. [...] Then, in time to the music, he begins his dance. The dance consists in gliding from point to point on the stage, sometimes slowly, sometimes swiftly, coming to a near halt

⁷ Here Steiner’s romantic philosophy overlaps with the Romantic poet William Wordsworth, whose influence on Coetzee has been crucial, and who in “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood” (1807) writes that children have privileged access to another plane of reality from which they descend “trailing clouds of glory” but with which they are still in touch. Despite the overlap of ideas, the focus in this chapter is on the modernist, not Romantic, influence on Coetzee’s representation of dance.

⁸ In my review of Pippin’s *Metaphysical Exile*, I discuss these ideas in more detail. See Diana Mudura, “Metaphysical Exile: On J. M. Coetzee’s Jesus Fiction”.

at each point but never actually halting. The pattern of the dance, the relation of each point to the next, is obscure; the movements of the boy are graceful but without variety. (Coetzee, *SJ* 70)

The boy is soon accompanied by a second dancer who also “occupies himself in gliding from one invisible point to another. Now and then their two paths cross, but there never seems any danger that they will collide; (Coetzee, *SJ* 70). Though abstract, there is “a logic that dictates their passage, a logic that he [Simón] cannot quite grasp though he feels on the edge of doing so” (Coetzee, *SJ* 70). When the dance is over, “the two dancers attain their end points and return to their static poses” (Coetzee, *SJ* 70). The literary representation of dance in this example reveals one of the underlying principles of the Academy which is that the body can express in dance what ordinary language can express in words. Steiner refers to this as “visible speech”, another term for the art of Eurythmy that aims to give an outward expression to the human soul. Crucially for Steiner, Eurythmy is “music translated into movement, and is not dancing in any sense of the word” but an “ensouled and spiritualised form of gymnastics” (Steiner n.p.). Following the opening and spread of the Waldorf Schools, Steiner implemented the art of Eurythmy as part of the curriculum due to a conviction that “visible speech and music is accepted and absorbed by them [pupils] in just as natural a way as they absorb spoken language or song in their very early years” (Steiner n.p.). In the Jesus fictions, however, Coetzee makes no distinction between dance and Eurythmy, but focuses on the creative and ontological possibilities inherent in dance, and implicitly the body, to express affectively and visually what ordinary language cannot.

The account of the pupils’ dance, with its emphasis on cross-rhythms, gliding movements, and the arms held high, is surprisingly similar to the exercises performed

in Eurhythmics. The discipline's originator was the Swiss musician, composer, and music teacher, Émile Jacques-Dalcroze (1865-1950), whose influence on the development of modernist dance is enormous. In a desire to revitalise conventional modes of teaching harmony, Jacques-Dalcroze developed a new way of engaging with and understanding music that would involve the whole body. This also came as a reaction against the balletic tradition, with its highly regulated bodily vocabulary and the formalities of the European court. His creative endeavours came to be known as Eurhythmics, a movement art that wanted the metaphorical and physical liberation of the body from previous regimented readings. In *Literature, Dance, and Modernism* (2003), dance scholar Susan Jones explains that Eurhythmics belonged to a wider spectrum of *Ausdruckstanz*, expressionist dance which comprised "physical activities such as physical health programmes of exercises, Greek dance, nude dancing, and non-balletic methods of dance teaching and performance" (70). She goes on to point out that this art of movement targeted the physical and spiritual side of the dancer, and was "a kind of corporeal music of its own" that encoded musical rhythms into bodily forms of expression (70). In terms of its physical representation, Eurhythmics incorporates "an unrefined movement vocabulary, where the dynamics include unrestricted leaping, reaching for asymmetrical attitudes and off-balance gestures and poses that undermine the notion of a centred, rational equilibrium of the human figure" (Jones 71). (This notion of asymmetry is crucial, and I will return to it in due course). The liberation of the body and the emphasis on the celebration of its expressivity and idiosyncrasies are undoubtedly of interest to Coetzee whose literary representation of the body and dance via the ideas of Steiner and Jacques-Dalcroze anchor him in the modernist dance tradition, allowing him to explore the body in space as a kind of language.

More specifically, in the performance that follows the dance of the numbers Two and Three, Coetzee explores how ideas can be transmitted aesthetically through the medium of dance. This is how the ant dance is described:

Taking big steps rightward and leftward, backward and forward, the ants re-form themselves from a column of eight into a matrix of four rows in two columns. They hold their positions for four measures, marching on the spot; then they re-form themselves into a new matrix of two rows in four columns. They hold that position, marching; then they transform themselves into a single row, eight long. They hold their positions, marching; then they transform themselves into a single row, eight long. They hold their positions, marching; then suddenly they break ranks and [...] flit across the stage with their arms held out like wings [...] Then the steady rhythm of the march reasserts itself and swiftly the ants reassemble in their original column of eight. (Coetzee, *SJ* 71)

The ant dance begins with a strong emphasis on rule-following, order, and precision.⁹ That structure then breaks down to allow room for creativity and is then resumed when symmetry reasserts itself. On the one hand, the dance is meant to suggest the idea of obedience, servitude, humility, and to reflect the instrumental function of numbers, which obey the laws of subtractions and addition – ideas which are the antithesis of the aims of the Academy.¹⁰ On the other hand, the dance contains an implied allegory: a story of creativity. While the first part of the dance foregrounds rationality, the

⁹ The emphasis on symmetry, geometry, and mathematics also resonates with Rudolf Laban and Oskar Schlemmer, two figures associated with twentieth-century expressionist dance, who explored “the geometric and mathematical relations of the body in action” by manipulating the techniques of traditional ballet in new ways (Jones 6).

¹⁰ The controlled movements and marching echo Nietzsche’s ideas in *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (Thus Spoke Zarathustra) (1883) which Alain Badiou explores in “Dance as a Metaphor for Thought” (1998). For Nietzsche, the opposite of dance is the German soldier which he associates with “[o]bedience and long legs” and whose essence manifests in “the military parade, the aligned and hammering body, the servile sonorous body. The body of beaten cadence” (qtd. in Badiou 59).

second part shows its consequences, which manifest in the break with formal strictures (realism) and insists on the authority of the subject (voice).

That dance has the power to reach a deeper ontology reflects a modernist understanding of the topic. The idea behind the performance that complements Moreno's talk on the legacy of Metros, is "[t]o allow you to see how the world was before the arrival of Metros", who introduced a new mental knowledge into the world (Coetzee, *SJ* 244). In dance the pupils tell the story of a forgotten world and ontology – an idea that also echoes Steiner's philosophy. Rather than provide a detailed description of the dance itself, the account calls attention to movement, rhythm, and emotion. The dancers commence "[s]imultaneously, in counterpoint" from opposite parts of the stage and conclude "at the same moment, on the same beat, in mid-stage" (Coetzee, *SJ* 244-245). While he watches the performance, Simón's agitation recedes, and he is able "to relax and take pleasure in the easy, fluent movements" of the dancers on stage (Coetzee, *SJ* 244). The role of dance in this example is as a mode of intelligibility whereby bodily movements offer insight into the "obscure" philosophy of the Academy. Simón "begins to see, in the dimmest of ways, why the one dance is appropriate to Two and the other to Three" therefore having glimpses of "what Arroyo means by dancing the numbers, calling the numbers down (Coetzee, *SJ* 244). The dance encapsulates a forgotten world and worldview which can nevertheless be experienced somatically: "[w]ith Two and Three he could feel some force within his body – the tide of his blood or whatever he wants to call it – move in accord with the boys' limbs" (Coetzee, *SJ* 245). But with the dance of number Five, "there is no such feeling. There is some pattern to the dance – that he can faintly apprehend – but his body is too stupid, too stolid to find it and follow it" (Coetzee, *SJ* 245). Such an

account suggests that dance is an external as much as an internal experience capable of triggering powerful emotion in both dancer and viewer.

A further example that corroborates Coetzee's literary representation of dance as strongly articulated with movement is the performance of Arroyo's two sons in honour of David's memory. Once again, a modernist aesthetics asserts itself on the stage when "[t]he two Arroyo boys emerge in their tights and dancing slippers" (Coetzee, *DJ* 170). They perform the dance of numbers Three and Five, respectively, "[o]beying two different rhythms, they circle each other" (Coetzee, *DJ* 170). Though one of the dances is the same as the one at the opening speech of the Academy, the movements and their meaning considerably differ. They are circular movements, suggestive of the fact that David's life has come full circle, and are complemented by "elegant sweeps" as the two dancers "circl[e] each other but extending their radius until the centre of the stage is left bare" (Coetzee, *DJ* 171). This empty space created on stage resonates with Simón's desperate efforts to keep "at bay the hole that has opened up in the texture of being" in the aftermath of David's demise (Coetzee, *DJ* 142). As the music "grows softer, ceases", the dance ends with a moment of recollection as "[t]he two boys are still, their heads bowed. The lights dim, the stage is dark, the dance is over" (Coetzee, *DJ* 171). Untouched by the filter of ordinary language, the performance conveys powerful emotion through rhythm and movement, and the body becomes a kind of language through which to tell the story of David.¹¹

Such a representation of the body that celebrates its independence and expressivity reinforces its association with a modernist dance aesthetics which is also

¹¹ Presumably, Coetzee is here drawing on the influence of Isadora Duncan, an emblematic figure of modernist dance, whose performances were highly improvisational and emotional. Though without classical training as a ballerina, Duncan was a free-spirit who in her dances sought "to rediscover the beautiful, rhythmical motions of the human body" (n.p.). In addition, she also danced barefoot and wore togas and free-flowing clothes to allow the body to be free. View the full article on the website: <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/dancer-isadora-duncan-is-killed-in-car-accident>.

part of the philosophy of the Academy. Here pupils dance “not in a graceless, carnal, or disorderly way, but body and soul together, so as to bring the numbers to life” (Coetzee, *SJ* 68). This understanding shifts the emphasis away from the aesthetics of the body onto its ethical potential. Señor Arroyo provides further clarification when he explains that marionettes are “beautiful figures of movement” because they can

float and glide as human beings cannot. They can trace patterns of great complexity in the air. But they cannot dance. They have no soul. It is the soul that brings grace to the dance, the soul that follows the rhythm, each step instinct with the next step and the next. (Coetzee, *SJ* 97)

The account incorporates both literary and theoretical perspectives on the body and dance; it gestures to Walser’s idea of an ensouled gymnastics, to Steiner’s romantic view on the existence of the soul, and to Jacques-Dalcroze’s bodily understanding of rhythm.

Further literary light can be thrown on the idiosyncrasies of the passage and the text as a whole by drawing on Coetzee’s reading of Heinrich von Kleist’s “Über das Marionettentheatre” (On the Marionette Theatre) (1810).¹² There is another mention of puppets when David decides to join the Academy of Dance and the Three Sisters gift him a family of marionettes as a symbol of “the best dancers of all” (Pippin 74). Written in the form of a fictional story, Kleist’s text is framed as a conversation about the nature of dance and its relationship to self-consciousness. Pippin points out that the reference to Kleist’s text is formally relevant for the trilogy which is also “a

¹² Kleist has informed much of Coetzee’s thinking on dance and the allusion to the German writer is not entirely new but has been there in earlier works. Most notably, *Summertime* ironises John Coetzee’s inability to dance, comparing him to a wooden puppet – a point I shall return to later in this chapter. *Slow Man* also alludes to Kleist’s ideas on dance in the scene in which the participants with prostheses in the rehabilitation class, which Paul Rayment joins, are taught to reprogram their body’s memories using dance (Coetzee 60). Here I am using Thomas G. Miller’s translation of Heinrich von Kleist’s “On the Marionette Theatre” (1972).

fictional account of a philosophical conversation” (87). The discussion in Kleist’s story involves an unnamed narrator and a famous dancer, Herr C., who enjoys watching the marionette theatre because of the puppets’ “exceedingly graceful” movements which make them superior to human beings thanks to their ability to achieve perfection in dance through their lack of a soul and of self-consciousness, which produce “disorder in the natural harmony of men” (Kleist 22, 24). Order, grace, and harmony in dance can only occur when the soul of the dancer is in line with his centre of gravity. In the case of marionettes, the centre consists of a straight line which connects the puppet with the soul of the puppeteer, so, in a sense, it is the soul of the puppet master which dances through the marionette.

The way in which Coetzee responds to Kleist in the trilogy is twofold. On the one hand, he keeps the idea of self-consciousness, a definitory trait of his protagonists, including Simón. Pippin elucidates that this idea of self-awareness and scepticism about experience is “a staple of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century German romantic thought” (Pippin 76). On the other hand, Coetzee breaks from the hegemony of classical ballet whose underlying principles seem to underpin the philosophy of dance in “On the Marionette Theatre”, with its emphasis on perfection, symmetry, and the antigravitational pull. Instead, Coetzee is more comfortable with the modernist literary space from which he branches out into what was happening in dance at the time. The references in the trilogy to experimental, modernist forms of dance, which accentuate the body’s rhythms, movements, and emotional potential enable Coetzee to liberate the body from regimented modes of self-expression and to explore new ways in which it can express itself.¹³

¹³ In ballet, “the torso is ‘held’ in a braced position” whereas that shifts in modern dance to “the lower abdomen and upper torso” (Jones 6).

In comparison to the trilogy where there is a sense of completion, elegance, and the feeling of being comfortable in the body that is associated with dance, *Summertime* is a kind of pre-text to these novels. Here, Coetzee revisits Kleist's ideas of dance, though a sense of awkwardness is preserved around how he represents the relationship with one's body. The text makes an explicit reference to Kleist in the words of Adriana Nascimento, the Brazilian dance teacher for whom John Coetzee had "a brief infatuation", when she characterises him as having "no feeling for dance, no aptitude" because "[h]e was not at ease in his body" (Coetzee, *S* 173, 183).

This man was disembodied. He was divorced from his body. To him, the body was like one of those wooden puppets that you move with strings. You pull this string and the left arm moves, you pull that string and the right leg moves. And the real self sits up above, where you cannot see him, like the puppet-master pulling the strings. (Coetzee, *S* 198)

Coetzee ironises himself in this passage, highlighting John's stubborn tendency to rationalisation and the awkwardness of his movements which are not uncommon in Simón, who "thinks of himself as a sane, rational person who offers the boy a sane, rational elucidation of why things are the way they are", and describes himself as "the blind one, the danceless one" (Coetzee, *SJ* 207, 257). So profound is Adriana's outrage regarding John's inability to dance that she suggests naming John's biography *The Wooden Man* (Coetzee, *S* 200). While dance is taken on its own terms in the trilogy, in *Summertime* it is used as a pretext to get closer to Adriana.

Coetzee's self-irony continues when Adriana offers embodiment or the embodied condition as a counter to John's strong sense of rationalisation and his inability to divert his attention to the life of the body. Adriana expresses modernist ideas about the body when she shares her philosophy of dance with Mr Vincent, John

Coetzee's biographer. The body communicates in movement what language communicates in words: "in my profession, rather than just listen to words, we like to watch the way people move, the way they carry themselves. That is our way to get to the truth, and it is not a bad way" (Coetzee, *S* 198). There is a privileging of somatic knowledge over mental knowledge which indicates faith in one's body and its expressivity. Adriana further explains that

[d]ance is incarnation. In dance it is not the puppet-master in the head that leads and the body that follows, it is the body itself that leads, the body with its soul, its body-soul. Because the body knows! It knows! When the body feels the rhythm inside it, it does not need to think. That is how we are if we are human. That is why the wooden puppet cannot dance. The wood has no soul. The wood cannot feel the rhythm. (Coetzee, *S* 198-9)

The account endorses Kleist's idea about dance only being possible in the absence of self-consciousness. (In Kleist's story Pippin detects an underlying irony whereby all the examples that allegedly foreground the absence of self-consciousness as a necessary step to achieve grace are in fact the opposite of what they claim to be.) However, the passage also reverses Kleist's idea about the soulless marionettes being the best dancers so as to bring out the full potential of the human body and honour it. There is a clash here between nineteenth-century Romantic ideas and modernist early twentieth-century ideas about the body that Coetzee sets up in order to explore new bodily vocabularies.

One example that shows Coetzee's playful treatment of the ideas around the body that he is exploring is the comical episode at Lake Calderón. Part of the education the pupils receive at the Academy consists of becoming comfortable with the body in its natural state, that is the state of being naked. The children are taken on a trip to a

beach where “men and women, adults and children, [are] all in the nude”, and where they can observe sea life (Coetzee, *SJ* 92). This is where Simón meets señor Arroyo for the first time and sees Ana Magdalena in the nude. Pippin reads this episode as part of a Rousseau-esque desire to return to a lost paradise from which human beings have been expelled. He goes on to argue that the nakedness also orbits around the theory of dance that the text constructs. Nevertheless, I want to approach this scene differently, as being part of the modernist aesthetics that Coetzee is developing in the trilogy whose links are with *Nacktkultur*, a category of body culture which originated in Germany and spread across Europe, and one of whose principles was the “‘uncovering’ true identity through physical expression” (Jones 76). The subsequent intellectual movements that arose from *Nacktkultur* “presented the ‘unveiled body’ as a sign of modernism, a manifestation of ‘being’ itself, rather than a reaction against it” (Jones 77).¹⁴ The emphasis on the naked body and its importance in education indicates that Coetzee wants to reach a deeper ontology.

The character of David allows Coetzee to explore a kind of ontological nakedness. David seeks a way of being that strips life and language of its abstraction in order “to experience this being-alive that is so new and exciting” (Coetzee, *SJ* 98). Perhaps the clearest example in this sense is when dance becomes a mode of self-expression in itself. Asked to answer the question of what he thinks passion is, “[t]he boy steps in the middle of the floor and without preamble, in his socks, begins to dance” (Coetzee, *SJ* 136). He performs the same dance of number Three that one of

¹⁴ Nudity as a phenomenon and its complex manifestations has been associated, in a highly reductive manner, with some aspects found in eugenics. These narrow attitudes vis-à-vis the body are not to be associated with how Coetzee engages with the idea of nakedness. He is not manifesting narrow attitudes but establishes dance and body language as a language of communication which bears universal undertones. *Foe* takes up this idea in the final chapter that brings the novel to a close (though without providing closure) when an unnamed narrator dives into the wreck to discover that this is the home of Friday, a place where bodies are their own signs.

the Arroyo boys did at the opening of the Academy, but David does it “better, with more grace and authority and conviction, even though the other boy was the son of the master of the dance (Coetzee, *SJ* 136). The dance consists of David tracing “his complex hieroglyph”, while Simón and the sisters “watch in silence, absorbed” (Coetzee, *SJ* 136). David ends his dance by standing “erect and still before them with his eyes closed and a rapt little smile on his lips” then “plac[ing] three fingers of his right hand over his mouth” (Coetzee, *SJ* 137). As framed here, dance extends the limits of what can be expressed by the subject and how it can be rendered. Ordinary language is substituted by body language and, by implication, mental knowledge is substituted by somatic knowledge. The latter resists being encoded in language. As Alma, one of the sisters, remarks after the dance is over, “[t]here is nothing to explain” (Coetzee, *SJ* 138). Attempts to verbally fix the meaning of dance remain futile and so do Simón’s efforts to decipher David’s dancing. Hence, dance contributes to David’s otherworldliness.

David’s singularity is the result of an unwavering faith in dance. He refuses to dance for Simón “because you don’t believe in it” (Coetzee, *SJ* 103). Later, the boy also accuses Simón of not recognising him for who he is, unlike señor Arroyo who “knows who I am” (Coetzee, *SJ* 187). According to Pippin, the question of belief lies at the heart of *Schooldays* and the answer that the trilogy gives to this question is dance, which is “the central thematic pivot of the novel” and provides “the key to the novel [*Schooldays*]” (Pippin, “Book of Friends” 147).¹⁵ Pippin goes on to argue that dance represents “an aesthetic mode of intelligibility” “so bodily and sensual that it is

¹⁵ In “I am a Dancer” (1991), the famous modernist dancer Martha Graham maintains that in addition to perfecting the craft of dance, training in dance requires cultivating one’s being for which grace is needed. Her understanding of grace is not transcendental but a kind of grace “resulting from faith – faith in life, in love, in people, in the art of dancing” (121).

a pre-literary form, pre-discursive even” (Pippin, “What is the Question” 150-1). Such a mode of knowing remains foreign to Simón, though, paradoxically, he is also the one who tells David that “[p]assion can’t be explained, it can only be experienced. More exactly, it has to be experienced from the inside before it can be understood from the outside” (Coetzee, *SJ* 20). Dance thus contrasts with Simón’s scepticism, which, Pippin contends, undermines the belief that dance is “the living embodiment of abstraction” despite him coming to this realisation at the end of *Schooldays* (“What is the Question” 154).

In what is perhaps the most elaborate description of David’s dancing in the trilogy, Coetzee captures the power of dance to turn abstract concepts into concrete ones. David’s dance of number Seven closes the performance in honour of Moreno’s talk about Metros and his legacy.

Without a word the boy slips off his shoes [...] in silence he begins his dance [...]. From some buried memory the words *pillar of grace* emerge, surprising him [Simón] [...]. As if the earth has lost its downward power, the boy seems to shed all bodily weight, to become pure light. The logic of the dance eludes him entirely, yet he knows that what is unfolding before him is extraordinary. [...] Eyes shut, mouth open, rapt, David floats through the steps with such fluid grace that time stands still (Coetzee, *SJ* 245-6; emphasis in original)

If the philosophy of the Academy seemed ironic and subject to incredulity, then that irony and scepticism are discarded in this scene in which Coetzee shows us the power of dance to honour the body.¹⁶ The linguistic texture of the writing foregrounds the

¹⁶ In *Doubling the Point*, Coetzee discusses passion and the possibilities of passion being represented or translated discursively. He gives the example of Magda who is a character who has passion, though who could easily be dismissed as mad by the reader. Coetzee gives the example of Nijinsky’s passion which spilled into his writing: “When a real passion of feeling is let loose in discursive prose, you feel that you are reading the utterances of a madman (think of Vaslav Nizhinsky’s diaries)” (Coetzee, *DP* 60).

experience of embodiment, which goes beyond conscious, rational experience, in order to capture the capacity of the body to free itself, and the image of David dancing is associated with freedom or a desire for freedom. In her book, Jones maintains that the attention to “the embeddedness of physical movement in the very material of language itself” is the result of the influence of modernist dance on literature (7); it is this awareness of one’s body that Coetzee explores in the trilogy via dance.

The passage also writes back to Kleist’s essay. David’s dance defies the laws of gravity which in Kleist could only be achieved by marionettes, who possess the virtue of being “immune to gravity’s force” (Kleist 24). Instead, the boy resists the gravitational pull by “float[ing]” with “fluid grace” (Coetzee, *SJ* 246). In the piece by Kleist, grace is reserved only “in that human bodily structure that has no consciousness at all – or has infinite consciousness [by which he understands God]” (Kleist 26). Contrary to Kleist, David embodies a form of grace (and this is alluded to in the text when David is described as having “physical grace” (Coetzee, *SJ* 83)) despite the fact that, as Derek Attridge points out, his dancing defies the “rules of reason” and “laws of nature” (16). This is neither because he lacks consciousness in the moment of dancing, nor because he possesses infinite consciousness (though the biblical overtones cast on David might encourage such a reading), but because grace comes as a result of the dignity and belief in the expressivity of the body.¹⁷ David’s dance liberates him, and this freeing is also symbolically indicated by the barefoot dancing. But the most striking difference to Kleist is that in the trilogy the human being can attain perfection in dance.

¹⁷ In the same essay, “I am a Dancer”, Martha Graham speaks of an honouring of the body that takes place in dancing (120).

Such a portrayal of dance as reaching perfection disregards the aesthetic role of the body. The shift in representation is the result of an effort to extricate the body from desire that has featured in many of Coetzee's fictions, including *Childhood*. The extrication also has not happened in *Disgrace* where David Lurie uses dance to seduce his student, Melanie Isaacs. The film of Norman McLaren's *Pas de Deux* (1968) which Lurie shows Melanie marks the first moment when Coetzee tunes into the modernist form of dance, and experiments with its literary representation. This is a shift that has not been there in early works, such as *Foe*, where, as Foxcroft points out in his essay on non-verbal communication in *Foe*, Friday's dances root him specifically in Brazilian dance culture, specifically the Capoeira and Candomblé. Moreover, in this novel, Friday's dancing is also articulated with sexuality as suggested by the reference to Friday's flowing robes which could reveal "the nakedness underneath" to Susan Barton during his dancing (Coetzee, *F* 118). The influence of Brazilian dance is, as we have seen, taken up in *Summertime* once again, with Adriana having specialised in *balet folclórico* (Coetzee, *S* 182; emphasis in original).

Even *Childhood*, a preliminary to *Schooldays* in terms of its dealing with the relationship between the body and desire, develops an aesthetic theory largely influenced by Romantic ideas of beauty expressed by Simón. In his view, sexual attraction for the beautiful body is the highest form of admiration one can offer a woman; it is "the only tribute that I, my physical self, know how to pay to the woman's beauty. I call it a tribute because I feel it to be an offering, not an insult" (Coetzee, *CJ* 39).¹⁸ Unlike in early work, male opinions are challenged later in the oeuvre and

¹⁸ In this respect, there is a resemblance between Simón and David Lurie, a post-Romantic thinker, who seems to share the view that "a woman's beauty does not belong to her alone. It is part of the bounty she brings into the world. She has a duty to share it" (Coetzee, *D* 16). The emphasis on the inner world of feeling characteristic of Romantic thought is relevant here. In similar terms, Paul Rayment in *Slow Man* describes his desire for Marijana, his professional carer, as being "in the grip of

particularly in the trilogy where there is a strongly dialogic engagement with the body that balances opinions on both sides of the spectrum. For example, Ana from *Centro de Reubicación Novilla* challenges Simón's views with the aim of disentangling beauty from desire. She explains that "[t]he more beautiful you find me, the more urgent becomes your appetite" (Coetzee, *CJ* 38). Instead, "[i]f you found me to be an incarnation of the good", "you would not want to perform such an act upon me" therefore "[i]s the beautiful inferior to the good?" (Coetzee, *CJ* 40). Ana's ideas speak for the general atmosphere in Novilla, where the governing principle guiding intersubjective relations relies on friendship rather than passion and desire. As Derek Attridge points out in "Reason and Its Others in Coetzee's Jesus Novels" (2021), for Novillans the naked body is regarded "simply as an educational resource" (407). The Life Drawing and Modelling classes at the Institute offer the possibility of learning about the body "as body" (Coetzee, *CJ* 146).

A further example of a female character challenging Simón's opinion is Elena, his neighbour and short-term companion, who feels "benevolence", "[w]armth and goodwill" for the opposite sex (Coetzee, *SJ* 66). These are feelings which all remain "a bit abstract" for Simón, who is not interested in the abstract meaning of the body but craves "something more tangible", the thing itself, the physical body of a woman (Coetzee, *CJ* 66-7).¹⁹ He nevertheless attempts to distance himself from his own ideas, suggestively captured in the rationalistic language which belies the efforts to suppress the physical impulse that he feels towards Elena: "[q]uietly, discreetly, they do the

a force beyond me" (Coetzee 125; emphasis in original). Given the dialogic emphasis of the trilogy, the point of view is less male than in previously mentioned novels.

¹⁹ The fictional world of Novilla seems to have achieved, to a certain extent, the utopia of the afterlife that

Paul Rayment in *Slow Man* thinks of whereby desire between men and women will diminish and "all shall love all with a pure love, as God loves, only not as fiercely, as consumingly" (Coetzee 33).

business of sex” (Coetzee, *CJ* 71).²⁰ However, Elena’s aloofness speaks for the general attitude in relation to how the body and passion are thought of in Novilla, a society which has seemingly purged desire from its midst or, at least, has compartmentalised a relatively abstract idea of the body and physical urgings. For those citizens who still experience passion, “sexual relief” can be found by seeing a personal therapist at Salón Confort which Simón visits, confessing that “I am starved of beauty [...] Feminine beauty. Somewhat starved. I crave beauty, which in my experience awakens awe and also gratitude – gratitude at one’s great good fortune to be holding in one’s arms a beautiful woman” – a plea which nevertheless remains unanswered (Coetzee, *CJ* 164).

In light of these ideas, *Schooldays* takes a step forward in its dealing with the representation of the body that has not been taken in earlier works. The way in which Coetzee represents David’s dance divorces the body from its sexual connotations, placing it in an ethical space. Simón observes that “the being who dances before them is neither child nor man, boy nor girl, he would even say neither body nor spirit” (Coetzee, *SJ* 246). If, as Kelly argues, dance transcends the mediation of language thanks to its emotional closeness, then dance also allows the body to transcend its aesthetic dimension (Kelly 197). As represented here, David’s body is desexualised and de-eroticised, making its ethical dimension more significant. This depiction bears the traces of the influence of modernist ideas about the body. For example, Steiner fervently criticised a dancer’s self-consciousness about his or her own beauty, stating that “[t]he moment a Eurythmist becomes conscious of possessing a charming face, in

²⁰ The way in which sex is referred to in this scene brings to mind the opening sentence of *Disgrace* which reads “For a man of his age, fifty-two, divorced, he has, to his mind, solved the problem of sex rather well” (Coetzee 1). In a short talk on J. M. Coetzee at Oxford, Peter McDonald analyses the use of language in *Disgrace*, focusing specifically on the novel’s first sentence quoted above. In Lurie’s rather problematic statement, McDonald detects the traces of rationalistic language typical of René Descartes in the 17th century. For a full version of this talk see the website: <https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/jm-coetzee>.

that moment something is introduced into Eurythmy which is completely foreign to its nature” (Steiner n.p.).²¹ Modernist dance is less concerned with admiring the beautiful body performing highly technical poses, such as in the balletic tradition, and more with the body as moving in its own distinctive way. What takes place during David’s dancing illustrates a freeing of the body, a liberation from traditional aesthetic norms, and a rethinking of the body in terms of its ethical force. In other words, the body becomes a new space for imagining.

For Simón, dancing is an ethical commitment whose aim is to learn to understand the boy. This is all the more significant given his inability to understand dance and his scepticism about the philosophy of the Academy, which he considers “harmless nonsense” that is “hard to take seriously” (Coetzee, *SJ* 99). His disbelief in the dance is sensed by David who refuses to dance for him out of fear that “you will make fun of him” (Coetzee, *SJ* 62). Simón’s inability to feel rhythm through his body is referred to in terms of a lack: “*You dance for these women [the Three Sisters] yet you won’t dance for me [...] What do they have that I don’t?*” (Coetzee, *SJ* 137; emphasis in original). By contrast, señor Arroyo describes David as “*integral*. He is integral in a way that other children are not. Nothing can be taken away from him. Nothing can be added” (Coetzee, *SJ* 199; emphasis in original). Yet Simón is determined to find ways of connecting with the boy and possibly with his own self too, even if that implies confronting himself with a form of alterity or adopting an aesthetic mode of knowing.

²¹ One of the ways in which this idea plays out in the trilogy is in detail of Ana Magdalena’s in-existent eyebrows – “[s]he has no eyebrows. Her eyebrows have been plucked out or shaved off; or perhaps they have never grown” – which prevents Simón from experiencing sexual attraction for her despite her statuesque beauty (Coetzee, *SJ* 44).

Through Simón, Coetzee experiments with the limits of literary representation to capture the essence of dance. The conversation between Simón and Mercedes explicitly refers to this issue. A dancer herself, though a less eccentric one in comparison to Ana Magdalena, Mercedes explains that there is a paradox “within which we dancers are trapped” and that is the inability to explain dance: “[i]f your son were to explain his dance he would not be able to dance any more” (Coetzee, *SJ* 191). (That said, she also dismisses David’s “number-dancing”, pointing out that “[u]ntil you learn to do what human beings do you can’t be a full human being” (Coetzee, *SJ* 234).) To overcome the desire to understand dance, Simón must learn to dance because “[i]t will cure you of your obtuseness. Or put a stop to your questioning” (Coetzee, *SJ* 192). In other words, the answer to the question of what the essence of dance is is learning to dance. That is because, as Martha Graham puts it, “the essence of dance is in movement not in language”.²² Nevertheless, or better yet, because of the fact that dance does not easily lend itself to verbal fixing, Coetzee takes up the challenge of revealing some of the essence of dance in the trilogy.

In a fragment of *Schooldays* that echoes *Summertime*, Coetzee seeks to reach a different bodily vocabulary by experimenting with the relationship between one’s self and body. Although Simón initially confesses to Mercedes that “I find dance somewhat of a foreign language”, he nevertheless proceeds to take a dance lesson from her in the musical accompaniment of señor Arroyo (Coetzee, *SJ* 191). In other words, Simón begins to construct a new subjectivity in dance. Coetzee makes use of irony in the depiction of Simón wearing dancing slippers too small for him which make his toes protrude in a ridiculous way. “He, Simón, is not steady on his feet as he thought he would be, perhaps because he hasn’t eaten” (Coetzee, *SJ* 259). The moment when

²² View the full video on the website: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=itKJXEoBWWg>.

Simón starts to dance, shuffling backwards and forwards, and allowing himself to feel through the rhythms of Arroyo's music represents a departure from the awkwardness of John's attempts to dance in *Summertime*. "He [Simón] obeys. It is cool in the studio, he is conscious of the high space above his head. Mercedes recedes; there is only the music. Arms extended, eyes closed, he shuffles in a slow circle. Over the horizon the first star begins to rise" (Coetzee, *SJ* 260). The description of Simón's dancing, with its emphasis on arms, circular movements, and visions, once again shows the pervasive influence of a modernist aesthetic on Coetzee's literary representation of dance. Simón experiences the immediacy that Kelly refers to as being characteristic of performing arts. He learns to be present in the here and now, and to inhabit a different mode of being available only in dance. In Simón's movements, we can see Martha Graham's definition of dance as "the symbol of the performance of living" (120).

Once he opens himself to dance, it becomes a core element of Simón's subjectivity. He considers himself "a dancer too, though a late convert and without any gifts" who dances "in private, in the evenings alone (Coetzee, *DJ* 8). In pyjamas, "he plays the gramophone at a subdued level and dances for himself, with his eyes shut, long enough for his mind to go blank. Then he switches off the music and goes to bed and sleeps the sleep of the just" (Coetzee, *DJ* 8). There is a dose of scepticism and irony here as well as a trace of Kleist's influence in the implication that Simón gives up self-consciousness in dance. The choice of music that Simón dances to is peculiar, and consists of "a suite of dances for flute and violin", with no title, and which are composed by señor Arroyo (Coetzee, *DJ* 9). The reference to dance suites has its origins in the Baroque era, thus further strengthening the association between

Arroyo and the historical Bach. Simón dancing opens himself to tolerating the philosophy of the Academy

not only out of consideration for David but also because, when he is in the right mood, during his solitary dancing of an evening, there sometimes comes to him a vision, momentary, transient, of [...] silvery spheres too many to count rotating about each other with an unearthly hum, in unending space. (Coetzee, *DJ* 8-9)

The account captures a sense of fascination that Coetzee has with the body and what it is capable of.

Instead of adopting a reductive approach to dance as a substitute for language capable of translating abstract concepts into movement, the trilogy deliberately avoids such a reading. The idea is nevertheless introduced when Alyosha tries to share his interpretation of David's message with Simón but ends up airing señor Arroyo's opinion: According to Alyosha, and by extension señor Arroyo, David

translated anything and everything into dance. Dance became the master key or master language, except that it was not a language in the normal sense, with a grammar and a vocabulary and so forth that you could learn out of a book. You could learn only by following. When David danced he was somewhere else, and if you were able to follow him you would be transported to that place too – not always, but now and again, definitely. (Coetzee, *DJ* 177)

This account grants dance its authority as another mode of thinking and of communication that is fundamentally different from ordinary language. The distinction is made clearer when Alyosha explains that “[m]aybe it is not in the power of dance to deliver messages. Maybe dance and messages belong to different realms” (Coetzee, *DJ* 177). Dance is thus not a substitute for language, but is, in the words of

Pippin, an aesthetic mode of apprehending the world, with its own idiosyncratic grammar, ways of feeling and of thinking. But dance also celebrates the body and its idiosyncratic elegance, spontaneity, and expressivity while also actualising our condition of being human.

Coetzee's literary representation of dance in the trilogy shows the persistent influence of modernist ideas about the body. Turning to Central European modernism, specifically its German-speaking part, allows Coetzee to draw creative inspiration due to a strong sense of liberation – intellectual, physical, formal – that characterises this period. Important figures such as Robert Walser, Rudolf Steiner, and Émile Jacques-Dalcroze form a network that eventually becomes a springboard for Coetzee's creative work that helps him reach a sense of completion in his own thinking about and representation of one of the most fundamental and long-standing themes in his oeuvre: the body. In a sense, Coetzee is able to achieve in the trilogy what was not possible in earlier works such as *Foe* and *Summertime* in terms of how they portray the body and dance. The intermediality at work in the Jesus novels allows Coetzee to experiment with new dance vocabularies in fiction that expand the possibilities of the novelistic form and offer his writing a new texture that transmutes the human experience of embodiment more vividly. His fascination with the body and with the different ways of thinking about language comes to fruition in his search for a new language of the body that expresses itself most comfortably in dance.

Afterword

She tries a test that seems to work when she is writing: to send out a word into the darkness and listen for what kind of sound comes back. (Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*)

This epigraph captures an essential quality of the creative process behind Coetzee's late works: self-consciousness of representation. Having lost "for ever the simple urge to represent", an observation that Coetzee makes in the manuscripts of *Diary of a Bad Year*, the late fiction exhibits forms of self-reflexivity in relation to writing that exceed Coetzee's earlier practice (Attwell 236). Representation in the late works is not so much a matter of working with the words on the page but with their resonances and vibrancy, their music and echoes. As my epigraph suggests, the creative process behind the writing of the late works is comparable to an act of echolocation. Coetzee sends out words into the darkness to help him navigate through the writing process of the late texts, guided as he is by the musicality of words. There is a shift of emphasis here in the creative process whereby the linguistic is superseded by the poetic.

This thesis's aim has been to work with the echoes of words in Coetzee's Jesus novels to probe what new ontologies they make available. Daniel Heller-Roazen's notion of "echolalia" proved a fruitful source of light which, when cast over the trilogy, revealed new dimensions of human experience. With regard to the role of language in the story universe created in these three novels, Heller-Roazen's concept allows the coming into view of an echolalic language. This language permeates the Spanish that the characters acquire as their new tongue and challenges the epistemology of their mother tongue. When applied in the context of human-animal

communication, echolalia casts light on the challenge that Coetzee poses to the nature of the speaking being. This manifests as an emphasis on the futility of human language in communicating and connecting with other forms of life, notably animals, who, as I have shown, put words into the minds of characters. Thinking through the concept of echolalia in relation to the prominent role Coetzee attributes to the arts – particularly music and dance – in the trilogy, what is evident is that he questions the uniqueness of ordinary language, and the mother tongue more specifically, as a fundamental means of accommodating and expressing thought. Instead he advances music and dance as vehicles for thinking and expressing subjectivity through sound and movement. The four research strands – language, animals, music, and dance – explored in this thesis are crucial components of Coetzee’s late style. This is most prominent in the Jesus novels, which epitomise an experimentation with the idea of language as a means of communication. The trilogy and, more generally, the late works expand definitions of language, proposing instead the co-existence of a plurality of languages, which encompass verbal, non-verbal, aesthetic, and ethical.

This is by far Coetzee’s most elaborate achievement in terms of the experimentation with the limits and limitations of his medium, English. What facilitates this extended exploration is the form of these novels, which make up a trilogy. This is not, however, the first trilogy Coetzee has published over the course of his career as a writer. *Scenes from Provincial Life*, Coetzee’s three-part fictionalised autobiography, appeared as an omnibus edition in 2011. While these three autobiographical texts provide a portrait of Coetzee as a writer and an artist, the Jesus trilogy is much broader in scope. It constitutes a prolonged meditation on the role and function of the arts in our lives, in addition to exploring, among other themes, the human relationship to other forms of life, specifically animals, and what possibilities

of connection there are between human and non-human beings. Not only does the trilogy as form enable Coetzee to flesh out more fully the new ontology embedded in non-verbal languages but also to play with the possibilities of the novel.

Each of the three texts centres around a different aspect that is explored at length throughout the volume. Drawing on Robert Pippin's categorisation of the trilogy into the regime of reason, passion, and nothing, which apply to the three volumes respectively, these texts pose fundamental questions about their overarching themes. *The Childhood of Jesus* broadly raises questions such as "What would a world ruled by rationality and reason look like?" and "What would life without art amount to?". *The Schooldays of Jesus* provides an answer to these questions: art can give us the impression that life is meaningful, though it does not avoid outlining the potentially dire consequences of too much passion. In *The Death of Jesus* there is shift whereby such questions become futile when confronted with the contingent nature of existence. The structure of the trilogy therefore accentuates the fact that even without the mother tongue as a reliable tool to make sense of experience, the aesthetic and ethical impulses assert themselves. Shifting the stress away from the linguistic to the aesthetic and ethical, Coetzee opens up the liberating possibility of a multiplicity of equally important ways of understanding the world.

Despite the fact that these novels form a trilogy, inconsistencies still exist between them. Conceptually, the worldview in Novilla in *Childhood* differs considerably from that of Estrella in *Schooldays*. While the former stresses rationality, moderation, and restrained temper, the latter promotes irrationality, desire, and passion. This stark contrast between the two cities, which are presumably not too far from one another or at least within driving distance from each other, is puzzling in terms of the radically different philosophy of life they promote. There are, in addition,

some minor inconsistencies that disrupt an immediate, taken for granted association of the three novels with a trilogy. In “Reason and Its Others in Coetzee’s Jesus Novels” (2021), Derek Attridge points out two such details. The first is the spelling of the name David with an accent, “David”. This change only occurs in *Schooldays*, though it is not present in the other two novels. The second is also connected to spelling, though with regard to the names of places. The name of the destination where Simón and the rest are heading at the end of *Childhood*, “Estrellita” (little star), changes in *Schooldays* to “Estrella” (star), without characters seeming to notice. These structural and orthographic inconsistencies between the three fictions, combined with the issues of translation and mistranslation explored earlier in this thesis, serve to reinforce the experience of fictionality. Furthermore, they draw attention to ordinary language as approximation and imperfection.

That the narrative perspective remains unchanged throughout the three novels indicates an elaborate exploration on Coetzee’s part of the nature of consciousness. Simón’s predisposition to sceptical enquiry paired with his linguistic insecurity heightens the importance of moments in which he experiences the aesthetic power of music and dance, and the ethical potential of interacting with animals, notably Bolívar. Both the arts and animals function as transformative ethical principles that shift Simón’s inner landscape. The change they produce is immediately noticeable in his changing attitude in relation to the world as well as to David, whose rather eccentric worldview he shows willingness to understand. The arts and the presence of animals therefore represent forces that have the ability to pierce through and unsettle a worldview governed by reason in order to draw attention to their importance. That is their power.

Coetzee's late style is therefore particularly suited to offering us an experience beyond words. With its focus on non-verbal, aesthetic, and ethical phenomena, it expands our awareness and understanding of experience otherwise unimaginable and unsayable. Feelings, thoughts, and states of being which often resist expression, despite being perceived intuitively, find a home in Coetzee's story universe. This quality of the writing is more acutely evinced in the novels published post-*Disgrace* and it reaches the apex in the Jesus trilogy. In the late stage of the life of writing, Coetzee has produced a kind of fiction where words seem to have taken flight from the page and all that remains is the sound of their flutter.

Bibliography

(List of Works Consulted)

- Achebe, Chinua. "Politics and Politicians of Language in African Literature." *The Education of a British-Protected Child: Essays*. Penguin Classics, 2009, pp. 96-106.
- Adorno, Theodor W. "Late Style in Beethoven." *Essays on Music*. Translated by Susan H. Gillespie, University of California Press, 2002, pp. 564-568.
- . *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott, Polity Press, 1998.
- Alberti, Rafael. "Los Ángeles Colegiales" (The Grammar School Angels). *Concerning the Angels*. Translated by Christopher Sawyer-Laucanno. City Lights Publisher, 1995, p. 125.
- Anderson, Amanda, and Rita Felski, and Toril Moi. Introduction. *Character: Three Inquiries in Literary Studies*. The University of Chicago Press, 2019, pp. 1-26.
- Anker, Elizabeth S. "Why We Love Coetzee; or, *The Childhood of Jesus* and the Funhouse of Critique." *Critique and Postcritique*, edited by Elizabeth Anker and Rita Felski, Duke University Press, 2017, pp. 183-208.
- Armstrong, Charles I. "Dwelling Upon Time: Memory's Changing Function in the Poetry of Wordsworth." *Nordic Journal of English Studies*, 2002, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 215-232.
- Attridge, Derek. *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event*. University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- . *The Singularity of Literature*. Routledge, 2017.

- . "Reason and Its Others in Coetzee's Jesus Novels." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 54, no. 3, 1 Nov. 2021, pp. 404-424.
- . "The South According to Coetzee." Rev. of *La muerte de Jesús*. *Public Books*. 25 Sept. 2019. <https://www.publicbooks.org/the-south-according-to-coetzee/>. Accessed 29 June 2022.
- Attwell, David. *J.M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing*. University of California Press, 1993.
- . *J. M. Coetzee and the Life of Writing: Face to Face with Time*. Oxford University Press, 2015.
- . "All Autobiography is *Autre*-biography: J. M. Coetzee interviewed by David Attwell." *Selves in Question: Interviews on Southern African Auto/biography*, edited by Judith Lütge Coullie, Stephan Meyer, Thengani H. Ngwenya, and Thomas Oliver, University of Hawai'i Press, 2006, pp. 213-218.
- Attwell David, and J. M. Coetzee, and Derek Attridge, and Elleke Boehmer, and Robert Pippin. "Migrant Being in the Jesus Novels." *Full Particulars*. 15 March 2022. Podcast. <https://www.litnet.co.za/full-particulars-podcast-migrant-being-in-the-jesus-novels/>. Accessed 29 June 2022.
- Badiou, Alain. "Dance as a Metaphor for Thought." *Handbook of Inaesthetics*. Translated by Alberto Toscano, Stanford University Press, 2005, pp. 57-71.
- Baker, Timothy C. "Introduction: Literary Animals." *Writing Animals: Language, Suffering, and Animals in Twenty-First Century Fiction*. 1st ed., Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp. 1-38.
- Barthes, Roland. "Lecture in Inauguration of the Chair of Literary Semiology, Collège de France, January 7, 1977." *October*, vol. 8, pp. 3-16.
- Benson, Dave. *Music: A Mathematical Offering*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.

- Benson, Stephen. "Introduction. Music for Reading." *Literary Music: Writing Music in Contemporary Fiction*. 1st ed., Routledge, 2016, pp. 1-12.
- . "Contemporary Fiction and the Music Itself." *Literary Music: Writing Music in Contemporary Fiction*. 1st ed., Routledge, 2016, pp. 105-140
- Benveniste, Émile. "Subjectivity in Language." *Problems in General Linguistics*. Translated by Mary Elizabeth Meek, University of Miami Press, 1971, pp. 223-230.
- Berger, John. "Why Look at Animals?" *Why Look at Animals?* Penguin, 2009, pp. 12-37.
- Boehmer, Elleke. "On Beyond the Representational Binary: Coetzee (and the Women) Take Wing." *Reading Coetzee's Women*, edited by Sue Kossew and Melinda Harvey, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp. 162-165.
- Brits, Baylee. "The Name of the Number: Transfinite Mathematics in *The Childhood of Jesus*." *J. M. Coetzee's The Childhood of Jesus: The Ethics of Ideas and Things*, edited by Jennifer Rutherford and Anthony Uhlmann, Bloomsbury, 2017, pp. 129-146.
- Bruhn, Siglind. Introduction. *Musical Ekphrasis: Composers Responding to Poetry and Painting*. Pendragon Press, 2000, pp. xv-xxi.
- Cameron, Emilie. "New geographies of story and storytelling." *Sage Journals*, vol. 36, no. 5, 6 Feb. 2012, pp. 573-592, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132511435000>. Accessed 29 June 2022.
- Coetzee, J. M. "The English Fiction of Samuel Beckett: An Essay in Stylistic Analysis." Diss. University of Texas at Austin, 1969.
- . *Dusklands*. Vintage, 1998.
- . *In the Heart of the Country*. Vintage, 2004.

- . *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Penguin, 2004.
- . *Life and Times of Michael K*. Vintage, 2004.
- . *Foe*. Penguin, 2010.
- . "The Novel Today." *Upstream*, vol. 6, nr. 1, 1988, pp. 2-4.
- . *Age of Iron*. Penguin, 2010.
- . *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*, edited by David Attwell, Harvard University Press, 1992.
- . "Homage." *The Threepenny Review*, no. 53, 1993, pp. 5-7.
- . *The Master of Petersburg*. Vintage, 2004.
- . *Disgrace*. Vintage, 2000.
- . "The Genius of Robert Walser." *The New York Review of Books*, vol. 47, no. 17, 2000, pp. 13-14. <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2000/11/02/the-genius-of-robert-walser/>. Accessed 24 January 2022.
- . "J. M. Coetzee with Peter Sacks." *Lannan Podcasts*. 8 November 2001. Podcast. <https://podcast.lannan.org/2010/06/28/j-m-coetzee-with-peter-sacks-conversation-8-november-2001-video/>. Accessed 14 November 2021.
- . "What is a Classic?" *Stranger Shores: Essays 1986-1999*. Vintage, 2002, pp. 1-19.
- . "Photographs of South Africa." *Stranger Shores: Essays 1986-1999*. Vintage, 2002, pp. 344-350.
- . *Elizabeth Costello*. Vintage, 2004.
- . "As a Woman Grows Older." *The New York Review of Books*, 15 Jan. 2004. <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2004/01/15/as-a-woman-grows-older/>. Accessed 23 March 2020.
- . *Slow Man*. Vintage, 2006.

- . "Robert Walser." *Inner Workings: Literary Essays 2000-2005*. Penguin, 2007, pp. 15-29.
- . "Voiceless: I feel therefore I am." *Hugo Weaving/ Random Scribblings*, 22 Feb. 2007. <http://hugo.random-scribblings.net/voiceless-i-feel-therefore-i-am-22feb07-sp-348963490/#.XuH-XWpKhQI>. Accessed 10 April 2020.
- . *Diary of a Bad Year*. Vintage, 2008.
- . "On Appetite, the Right to Life, and Rational Ethics." *The Death of the Animal: A Dialogue*, edited by Paola Cavalieri, Columbia University Press, 2009, pp. 119-121.
- . "Notes on Issues Raised by Matthew Calarco." *The Death of the Animal: A Dialogue*, edited by Paola Cavalieri, Columbia University Press, 2009, pp. 89-91.
- . *Summertime*. Vintage, 2010.
- . *The Childhood of Jesus*. Vintage, 2013.
- . and Paul Auster. *Here and Now: Letters 2008-2011*. Harvill Sacker, 2013.
- . and Berlinde de Bruyckere. "The Old Woman and the Cats." *Cripplewood*. Mercatorfonds, 2013, pp. 7-28.
- . *Two Screenplays: Waiting for the Barbarians and In the Heart of the Country*, edited by Hermann Wittenberg, University of Cape Town Press, 2014.
- . and Arabella Kurtz. *The Good Story: Exchanges on Truth, Fiction and Psychotherapy*. Vintage, 2015.
- . *The Schooldays of Jesus*. Vintage, 2017.
- . "Robert Walser, *The Assistant*." *Late Essays 2006-2017*. Harvill Secker, 2017, pp. 95-103.

- . "The Glass Abattoir." Lectura John M. Coetzee en Malba. *Youtube*, uploaded by Museo Malba, 11 Sept. 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5Ms65oo2wI&feature=emb_logo. Accessed 29 June 2022.
- . "The Dog." *The New Yorker*, 4 Dec. 2017. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/12/04/the-dog>. Accessed 23 March 2020.
- . "J. M. Coetzee: las literaturas del sur." *Youtube*, uploaded by Espacio Fundación Telefónica Madrid, 28 May 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DW1QRdJ9rDg>. Accessed 29 June 2022.
- . "Laureate address." *John Maxwell Coetzee: Doctor Honoris Causa Universitatis Silesiensis*. Katowice: University of Silesia Press, 2018, pp. 57-59.
- . "Growing Up with The Children's Encyclopedia." *Youtube*, uploaded by The University of Chicago, 31 Oct. 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJUOpNyQSzs>. Accessed 29 June 2022.
- . *The Death of Jesus*. The Text Publishing Company, 2019.
- . "J.M. Coetzee en la UNAM (inglés original)." *Youtube*, uploaded by Cultura en Directo. UNAM, 26 Oct. 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KowFc34iqcs&t=1207s>. Accessed 29 June 2022.
- . *J. M. Coetzee: Photographs from Boyhood*, edited by Hermann Wittenberg, Protea Boekhuis, 2020.
- Damrosch, David. "What is World Literature?" *World Literature: A Reader*, edited by Theo D'haen, César Domínguez and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, Routledge, 2013, pp. 198-206.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Monolingualism of the Other; or, the Prosthesis of Origin*. Translated by Patrick Mensah, Stanford University Press, 1998.

- . "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)." *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Translated by David Wills, edited by Marie-Louise Mallet, Fordham University Press, 2008, pp. 1-51.
- Dimitriu, Ileana. "J. M. Coetzee's *The Schooldays of Jesus* (2016): A Novel of Ideas?" *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2018, pp. 55-68.
- Dooley, Gillian. *J. M. Coetzee and the Power of the Narrative*. Cambria Press, 2010.
- . "'The Origins of Speech Lie in Song': Music as Language in Coetzee's *Age of Iron*." *Le Simplegadi*, vol. xviii, no. 2, 2020, pp. 26-34.
- Easton, Kai. "Coetzee's *Disgrace*: Byron in Italy and the Eastern Cape c. 1820." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2007, pp. 113-130.
- Easton, Kai, and Marc Farrant and Hermann Wittenberg. "Introduction: Fiction, theory and autobiography." *J. M. Coetzee and the Archive: Fiction, Theory, and Autobiography*. Bloomsbury, 2021, pp. 1-14.
- Farrant, Mark. "J. M. Coetzee's *The Death of Jesus*." *Music and Literature*, 5 May 2020, <https://www.musicandliterature.org/reviews/2020/4/15/jm-coetzees-the-death-of-jesus>. Accessed 29 June 2022.
- Felski, Rita. "Identifying with Characters." *Character: Three Inquiries in Literary Studies*. The University of Chicago Press, 2019, pp. 77-126.
- Foxcroft, Nigel H. "The Spiritual Liberation of Music, Dance, and Ritual: Verbal-versus Non-Verbal Communication in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*." *Commonwealth: Essays and Studies*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2015, pp. 11-20.
- Gardiner, John Eliot. *Music in the Castle of Heaven: A Portrait of Johann Sebastian Bach*, Penguin, 2014.
- Garrard, Greg. "Animals." *Ecocriticism*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2012, pp. 146-180.

- Gilburt, Iona. "Cinematic and Photographic Aesthetics in the Novels of J. M. Coetzee." Diss. University of Western Cape, 2017.
- Girard, René. *Violence and the Sacred*. Translated by Patrick Gregory. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977.
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. "Erlkönig." *Oxford Lieder*, <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/1420>. Accessed 29 June 2022.
- Goodbody, Axel. "Ecocritical Theory: Romantic Roots and Impulses from 20th century European Thinkers." *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Environment*, edited by Louise Westling, Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 61-74.
- Graham, Martha. "I am a Dancer." *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*. 3rd ed., edited by Jen Richard Giersdorf and Yutian Wong, Routledge, 2019, pp. 120-125.
- . "Martha Graham on Technique." *Youtube*, uploaded by Martha Graham Dance Company, 28 April 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=itKJXEoBWWg>. Accessed 29 June 2022.
- Hall, Alice. *Literature and Disability*. Routledge, 2016.
- Haraway, Donna. "When Species Meet: Introductions." *When Species Meet*. University of Minnesota Press, 2008, pp. 3-44.
- Harmash, Liudmyla, Natalia Khalanska, Svitlana Melnyk, Iryna Razumenko, and Tetyana Tyshchenko. "Nonverbal Means of Communication in Modern Literature: J. M. Coetzee's Novel 'The Master of Petersburg'" *Revista Amazonia Investiga*, vol. 8, no. 23, 2019, pp. 252-258.
- Heller-Roazen, Daniel. *Echolalias: On the Forgetting of Language*. Zone Books, 2008.

- . *Dark Tongues: The Art of Rogues and Riddlers*. Zone Books, 2013.
- . *No One's Ways: An Essay on Infinite Naming*. Zone Books, 2017.
- . *Absentees: On Various Missing Persons*. 2021.
- History. "Dancer Isadora Duncan is killed in car accident." A&E Television Networks, 13 Nov. 2009. <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/dancer-isadora-duncan-is-killed-in-car-accident>. Accessed 29 June 2022.
- Hofmannsthal, Hugo von. "Ein Brief" (A Letter). *The Lord Chandos Letter and Other Writings*. Translated by Joel Rotenberg, New York Review of Books, 2005, pp. 117-128.
- Hofstadter, Douglas R. *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid*. Penguin, 1980.
- Huggan, Graham, and Helen Tiffin. Introduction. *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2015, pp. 1-26.
- Hussein, Amer. "Mother Tongue, Father Tongue." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 47, no. 2, 2011, pp. 199-204, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2011.557198>. Accessed 29 June 2022.
- Johnston, Peter. "'Presences of the Infinite': J. M. Coetzee and Mathematics." Diss. Royal Holloway, University of London, 2013.
- Jones, Sam. "An Introduction to Robert Walser." *Words Without Borders: The Home for International Literature*. 3 June 2008. <https://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/an-introduction-to-robert-walser>. Accessed 29 June 2022.
- Jones, Susan. *Literature, Modernism, and Dance*. Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Kannemeyer, J. C.. *J. M. Coetzee: A Life in Writing*. Translated by Michiel Heyns, Scribe, 2012.

- Kellman, Steven. "J. M. Coetzee and Samuel Beckett: The Translingual Link." *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol.33, no. 2, 1996, pp. 161-172.
- . Preface. *Switching Languages: Translingual Writers Reflect on Their Craft*, edited by Kellman, University of Nebraska Press, 2003, pp. ix-xix.
- . "Elias Canetti: From *The Play of the Eyes*." *Switching Languages: Translingual Writers Reflect on Their Craft*, edited by Kellman, University of Nebraska Press, 2003, pp. 299-307.
- Kelly, Michelle. "Other Arts and Adaptations." *The Cambridge Companion to J. M. Coetzee*, edited by Jarad Zimbler, Cambridge University Press, 2020, pp. 187-205.
- Kleist, Heinrich von. "On the Marionette Theatre." *The Drama Review: TDR*. Translated by Thomas G. Neumiller, vol. 16, no. 3, The "Puppet" Issue, 1972, pp. 22-26.
- Klopper, Dirk. "'We are not made for revelation': Letters to Francis Bacon in the Postscript to J. M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello*." *English in Africa*, vol. 35, nr. 2, 2008, pp. 119-132.
- Knott, Marie Luise. "There is No Other Place: J. M. Coetzee's Jesus Trilogy." *Los Angeles Review of Books*. 22 June 2020. https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-re-is-no-other-place-j-m-coetzees-jesus-trilogy/?fbclid=IwAR2dUvohm-BxFBxcDqeSfuGx_-1HtxEhTNBAzDnhuI_ArUZWDT32mpJ4KeM. Accessed 29 June 2022.
- Krell, David Farrell. "'Talk to the Animals': On the Myth of Cronos in the Statesman." *Plato's Animals: Gadflies, Horses, Swans, and Other Philosophical Beasts*, edited by Jeremy Bell and Michael Naas, Indiana University Press, 2015, pp. 27-39.

- Lachman, Kathryn. "Opera and the Limits of Representation in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*." *Borrowed Forms: The Music and Ethics of Transnational Fiction*. Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 113-136.
- Laertius, Diogenes. "Diogenes." *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*. Translated by Robert Drew Hicks, Book VI, Harvard University Press, 2014, pp. 22-83.
- Le, Nam. "Who Gets to be Australian?" *The Paris Review*, 20 April 2019. <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2019/04/30/who-gets-to-be-australian/>. Accessed 29 June 2022.
- Mason, Emma. "Chapter 3 Poetics." *The Cambridge Introduction to William Wordsworth*. Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 44-62.
- McDonald, Peter. "J. M. Coetzee." *University of Oxford Podcasts*. Podcast. <https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/jm-coetzee>. Accessed 29 June 2022.
- Mudura, Diana. "Metaphysical Exile: On J. M. Coetzee's Jesus Fiction". Rev. of *Metaphysical Exile*. *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2021, pp. 177-179.
- Mulhall, Stephen. *The Wounded Animal: J. M. Coetzee and the Difficulty of Reality in Literature and Philosophy*. Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Murphet, Julian. "Coetzee and Late Style: Exile within the Form." *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 57, no. 1, 2011, pp. 86-104.
- . "Coetzee's Lateness and the Detours of Globalization." *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 57, no. 1, 2011, pp. 1-8.
- Nethersole, Reingard. "Reading in the in-between: Pre-scripting the "postscript" to *Elizabeth Costello*." *Journal of Literary Studies*, vol. 21, no. 3-4, 2005, pp. 254-276.

- Newton, Michael. "Tsk, Ukh, Hmmm." *Rev. of Echolalias: On the Forgetting of Language*, *London Review of Books*, vol. 28, no. 4, 23 Feb. 2006.
<https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v28/n04/michael-newton/tsk-ukh-hmmm>.
 Accessed 29 June 2022.
- Ngũgĩ, Thiong'o Wa. "The Language of African Literature." *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of African Literature*. Heinemann, 1986, pp. 4-33.
- Nowak-McNeice, Katarzyna. "Belonging to the Human and Non-human Animals in J. M. Coetzee's Recent Novels." *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-century Writings*, vol. 6 (1), no. 9, 2018, pp. 1-20.
- Philippou, Elena. "Dogs, Horses, and Red Herrings: The Animal in J. M. Coetzee's *The Childhood of Jesus*." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 57, nr. 2, pp. 217-227.
- Pippin, Robert. "What does J. M. Coetzee's *The Childhood of Jesus* have to do with the Childhood of Jesus?" *J. M. Coetzee's The Childhood of Jesus: The Ethics of Ideas and Things*, edited by Jennifer Rutherford and Anthony Uhlmann, Bloomsbury, 2017, pp. 9-31.
- . "What is the Question to Which Dance is the Answer?" *A Book of Friends: In Honour of J. M. Coetzee on His 80th Birthday*. Text Publishing Company, 2020, pp. 145-158.
- . *Metaphysical Exile: On J. M. Coetzee's Jesus Fictions*. Oxford University Press, 2021.
- Plato. "Phaedrus." *The Dialogues of Plato*. 4th ed.. Translated by Benjamin Bowett, vol. 3, Oxford University Press, 1953, pp. 107-189.
- . "Meno." *The Dialogues of Plato*. 4th ed.. Translated by Benjamin Bowett, vol. 1, Oxford University Press, 1953, pp. 249-301.

- . "Symposium." Translated by Benjamin Bowett, 7 Nov. 2008, EBook, *The Project Gutenberg*.
- Pythagoreanism. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 29 Mar. 2006. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pythagoreanism/>. Accessed 29 June 2022.
- Rabatè, Jean-Michel. "Pathos of the Future: Writing and Hospitality in *The Childhood of Jesus*." *J. M. Coetzee's The Childhood of Jesus: The Ethics of Ideas and Things*, edited by Jennifer Rutherford and Anthony Uhlmann, Bloomsbury, 2017, pp. 33-56.
- "Rubicon." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Rubicon>. Accessed 29 June 2022.
- Said, Edward. "Timeliness and Lateness." *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain*. Bloomsbury, 2017, pp. 1-16.
- . "Glimpses of Late Style." *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain*. Bloomsbury, 2017, pp. 97-116.
- Sánchez, Patricia Álvarez. "The Limits of Reason in J. M. Coetzee's *The Schooldays of Jesus*." *miscelánea: a journal of english and american studies*, no. 60, 2019, pp. 107-126.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics*, edited by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye. Translated by Wade Baskin. New York: Philosophical Library, 1959.
- Salomon, Hannah, et. al. "Cooperative Communication with Humans Evolved to Emerge Early in Domestic Dogs." *Current Biology*, vol. 31, no. 14, 12 July 2021, doi: 10.1016/j.cub.2021.06.051.
- Schulenberg, David. *The Keyboard Music of J. S. Bach*. Schirmer Books, 1992.

- Schweitzer, Albert. *J. S. Bach*. Translated by Ernest Newman, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955.
- Spitzer, Michael. *Music as Philosophy: Adorno and Beethoven's Late Style*. Indiana University Press, 2006.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Lie Down in the Karoo: An Antidote to the Anthropocene." Rev. of *The Childhood of Jesus*. *Public Books*. 6 Jan. 2014. <https://www.publicbooks.org/lie-down-in-the-karoo-an-antidote-to-the-anthropocene/>. Accessed 29 June 2022.
- Steiner, Rudolf. "Materialism and the Task of Anthroposophy." 23 Apr. 1921. Lecture. <https://rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA204/English/AP1987/19210423p01.html>. Accessed 29 June 2022.
- . "Lecture on Eurythmy." 26 Aug. 1923. Lecture. <https://rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA279/English/RSP1967/19230826p01.html>. Accessed 29 June 2022.
- Tajiri, Yoshiki. "Beyond the Literary Theme Park: J. M. Coetzee's Late Style in *The Childhood of Jesus*." *J. M. Coetzee's The Childhood of Jesus: The Ethics of Ideas and Things*, edited by Jennifer Rutherford and Anthony Uhlmann, Bloomsbury, 2017, pp. 187-209.
- The University of Chicago Chronicle*. "Coetzee wins Nobel Prize." vol. 23, no. 2, 9 Oct. 2003. <http://chronicle.uchicago.edu/031009/coetzee.shtml>. Accessed 29 July 2022.
- Tomasello, Michael. "Primate Intentional Communication." *Origins of Human Communication*. MIT Press, 2008, pp. 13-55.
- Tremaine, Louis. "The Embodied Soul: Animal Being in the Work of J. M. Coetzee." *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 44, no. 4, 2003, pp. 587-612.

- Uhlmann, Anthony. "Creative Intuition: *The Childhood of Jesus*." *J. M. Coetzee: Truth, Meaning, Fiction*. Bloomsbury, 2020, pp. 171-190.
- Valéry, Paul. "Philosophy of Dance." *Salmagundi*, no. 33/34, 1976, pp. 65-75.
- Walkowitz, Rebecca. "Introduction: Theory of World Literature Now." *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature*. Columbia University Press, 2017, pp. 1-48.
- . "Close Reading at a Distance." *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature*. Columbia University Press, 2017, pp. 49-91.
- Walser, Robert. *Jakob von Gunten*. Translated by Christopher Middleton. *New York Review of Books*, 1999.
- Wiegandt, Kai. "J. M. Coetzee's "Dog-Man" and the Cynicism of *Disgrace*." *Anglia*, vol. 131, no. 1, 2013, pp. 121-140.
- . Introduction. *J. M. Coetzee's Revisions of the Human: Posthumanism and Narrative Form*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp. 1-16.
- . "The Human, the Animal, and the Body." *J. M. Coetzee's Revisions of the Human: Posthumanism and Narrative Form*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp. 119-176.
- Wierzbicka, Anna. *English: Meaning and Culture*. Oxford University Press, 2006.
- . *Imprisoned in English: The Hazards of English as a Default Language*. Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe. 3rd ed., Blackwell Publishing, 2001.
- Wittenberg, Hermann. "Late style in J. M. Coetzee's *Diary of a Bad Year*." *Scrutiny 2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 40-49.
- Wolff, Christoph. "Bach's Organ Music: Studies and Discoveries." *The Musical Times*, vol. 126, no. 1705, Bach Tercentary Issue, 1985, pp. 149-152.

Wordsworth, William. "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood." *The Prelude: Selected Poems and Sonnets*, edited by Carlos Baker, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1954, pp. 152-158.

Yildiz, Yasemin. "Introduction: Beyond the Mother Tongue? Multilingual Practices and the Monolingual Paradigm." *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition*. Fordham University Press, 2012, pp. 1-29.

Zimble, Jarad. *J. M. Coetzee and the Politics of Style*. Cambridge University Press, 2014.