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Introduction

J. M. Coetzee is the author of fourteen novels, three autobiographical fictions, and several volumes of translations, critical essays, correspondence, and short stories. Born in 1940 in Cape Town, South Africa, and resident there throughout his childhood and for much of his adult life, he has lived since 2002 in Adelaide, Australia. Claimed initially as a South African author, and subsequently by a host of other constituencies, Coetzee's career has been powerfully shaped by his intimate experiences of apartheid's brutality and the demands of decolonization; the twilight of European imperialism and the persistent inequalities wrought by neo-colonialism and late capitalism; the 'hypercentrality' of the English language and the provinciality of the two settler colonies in which he has made himself at home.[1] These experiences are at the heart of all Coetzee's writings, as is his commitment to a rigorous thinking through of literary practice, literary history, and the horizons conditioning literary forms and their expressive possibilities.

There are certainly continuities across Coetzee's oeuvre, but also striking shifts in theme, genre, narration, and even syntax. Readers already immersed in his writings will be familiar with an element of style that first becomes prevalent only in his middle fictions: moments in which an otherwise unremarkable word is made the subject of a semantic unravelling, exposing more of its textures and hues, so that it seems as if Coetzee is indeed using certain words with 'the full freight of their history behind them'.[2] Frequently, this unravelling involves a kind of speculative etymology and is conducted by the concatenation of cognates: once the central term is highlighted (often by italicization), its meanings ramify by the apposition of phrases or clauses. *Blessing, care, charity, comfort, grace, gratitude, heart, possession, soul, stupidity, substance, visitation*: all are amplified in this way, the effects colouring subsequent as well as antecedent occurrences, both in the works themselves and across the corpus.

The word *companion* receives this treatment in *The Childhood of Jesus* (2013): 'Companionable: that is what they have become, over time.

Compañeros by mutual agreement. Companionate marriage: if he offered, would Elena consent?' (*CJ*, 168). Here, the central term is not only italicized, but given in its ostensibly untranslated 'original' (a neat variation on Coetzee's strategy in previous fictions). Imbricated with *companionable* and *companionate*, the word's simplest meanings are brought to the fore by its inflected repetitions – one who often spends time with another, a person with whom one chooses to socialize or associate, a friend (*OED*) – though particular emphasis is given to mutuality and accord. To Simón, the novel's chief focalizer, such an habitual being-together offers ease: 'Living with Elena and Fidel in their flat would certainly be more comfortable than making do in his lonely shed at the docks' (*CJ*, 168); yet it seems also to entail compromise, a relationship of convenience rather than of passionate encounter. We glimpse as much in Simón's previous explanation for visiting the *Salón Confort*, a kind of brothel: 'I am not looking for some ideal match, I am simply looking for company, female company' (*CJ*, 166); but it is especially apparent in a still earlier passage, where he reflects on the forking paths of goodwill and desire: 'From goodwill come friendship and happiness, come companionable picnics in the parklands or companionable afternoons strolling in the forest. Whereas from love, or at least from longing in its more urgent manifestations, come frustration and doubt and heartsore' (*CJ*, 68).

Companionship, then, is a stay to solitude, and may even provide solace and satisfaction, but it is nevertheless somehow deficient. However, as so often in Coetzee's fictions, the focalizer's views are gradually disarticulated. In catching on *companion*, Simón's thoughts do not resolve its meanings, but ask that we put them into question. They ask, indeed, that we consider these meanings in light of words drawn from the same semantic fields, and upon which the novel similarly alights (comrade, friend, brother, guardian, uncle, godfather, father, mother; friendship, family, fatherhood, motherhood, brotherhood); in light of the narrative, which turns on different ways of configuring and understanding the bonds between adults, between children, between adults and children, and between animals and humans; and in light of other stories about companionship, drawn from a repertoire that includes the New Testament and Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605/ 1615).

While it becomes a central theme and question of *The Childhood of Jesus*, companionship has, in truth, been one of Coetzee's persistent preoccupations. Across the whole of his oeuvre, we find some version of the question: what does it mean to be in the world with others? This concern is played out at the level both of character and plot, structuring relations between the personages of the novels, as well as their tasks and the events they undergo. Journeys in particular seem to demand companionship. This is plainly the

case with Jacobus Coetzee and his servants in *Dusklands* (1974); the magistrate and barbarian girl in *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980); K and his mother in *Life & Times of Michael K* (1983); Susan Barton and Friday in *Foe* (1986); Elizabeth Costello and her son John in *Elizabeth Costello* (2002); Simón, David, Inez, and Bolivar in *The Childhood of Jesus*. In other fictions, it is travel of a metaphysical or at least figurative kind that occasions companionship. Verceuil in *Age of Iron* (1990), Fyodor Mikhailovich in *The Master of Petersburg* (1994), David Lurie in *Disgrace* (1999), Anya in *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007): all are imagined as chaperones or guides for departing souls. And even where the prospect of death is less immediate, as in *Slow Man* (2005), its proximity gives rise to relationships that are as intimate as they are odd.

Of course, there are differences. In the early and middle fictions, companionship is frequently inhibited by brute oppression, while it is merely complicated by those legacies of colonialism, migration, socio-economic stratification, and bureaucratic rationalization that characterize the worlds of the 'South' with which Coetzee's more recent novels have been concerned.[3] Nevertheless, a generalization is possible: no matter how unlikely and ill-suited, companions provide a kind of succour or care; and yet, if the intimacy that arises in getting together from one place to another is essential, it is also uncomfortable, even challenging, something to be endured more than enjoyed. For the match is never ideal, and companionship entails an entanglement with others, obligation as much as assistance. However vital, this entanglement is merely the condition of a sociality whose full realization can only be intimated or intuited in works which confront the truth of a damaged life, a life which denies us a reciprocity for which we must nevertheless continue to long.

You hold in your hands, or otherwise in your gaze, the *Cambridge Companion to J. M. Coetzee*. To whom is such a volume directed? Whom or what does it accompany? Certainly not the author *in propria persona*. John Maxwell Coetzee is unlikely to keep this volume with him, if at all, and its focus is chiefly on his works not his life. Only occasionally do we approach the person of J. M. Coetzee, however refracted by his archive and writings, and by his public performances. For the rest, the materials of his biography (which he has carefully guarded and marshalled) are outlined in this volume's chronology, where they are framed by concurrent events of literary and socio-political significance.[4]

This volume should therefore be thought of principally as an accompaniment to Coetzee's corpus as it traverses the various circuits of the academy; and to its readers, as they pick their paths across its sometimes difficult terrain. In both respects, it seeks to emulate the companions that people

Coetzee's fictional worlds, offering to comfort and discomfit, to console and provoke, through readings that are intimate and careful, partial and probing, and that do their best to indicate avenues of discovery, without attempting or being able to pursue interpretations to their very ends.

Brought together by design and common purpose, the chapters in this *Companion* offer literary critical readings, rather than overviews, and do not aim to be exhaustive or comprehensive, either individually or collectively. In fact, they occasionally cut across and overlap one another, sometimes pull in different directions, and always leave room for the future unfoldings of Coetzee's career, and for readers later to expand upon or qualify their arguments.[5] Nevertheless, the volume is so organized as to ensure that Coetzee's novels, as well as his autobiographical fictions, are discussed at some length; and that adequate treatment is given also to his translations, scholarly books and essays, and works of correspondence. Rather than proceeding thematically or by strict chronology, the chapters repeat at a larger scale the approach of this introduction: they begin immanently, with particular features of Coetzee's practice, and from these starting points chart itineraries across the corpus. In this way, they avoid the routes made familiar in previous volumes of this kind, and reveal continuities as well as discontinuities.

The chapters of Part I, Forms, address Coetzee's fictions from the perspectives of particular elements of technique. Frequently praised for his craft – his spare, taut, and lyrical prose, his narrative and generic inventiveness – Coetzee has from the outset written with an eye to the history of the novel, as well as with subtle appreciation of the subterranean operations of grammar, rhetoric, and narration. Scholars have therefore felt confident emphasizing the importance of questions of form, even if they have often responded by assigning Coetzee's practice to fairly lumpy categories on rather spurious grounds. In contrast, this volume makes some effort to treat Coetzee's works with the same attention to detail and to the practical demands of storytelling that one finds in his own literary criticism.

Coetzee's critical acuity, and his interest in questions of style, are evident as early as his PhD thesis on Samuel Beckett's English fictions, completed at the University of Texas at Austin, where he scrutinized Beckett's manuscripts in the hope of discerning their principles of composition. In his recently published intellectual biography *J. M. Coetzee and the Life of Writing* (2015), David Attwell follows closely in Coetzee's path, making extensive use of his notebooks and drafts in order to reveal the secrets of Coetzee's craft. In his chapter in this *Companion* (Chapter 1), Attwell relies on this

research to give illuminating accounts of two of the most celebrated of Coetzee's novels, *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Life & Times of Michael K*, bringing to light signal features of Coetzee's compositional practice, and reflecting on the reversals, blockages, and serendipitous encounters that have shaped it and that sit alongside and athwart the long-held notion of Coetzee as a highly controlled craftsman. In so doing, Attwell also attends to the sometimes surprising and far-flung intertexts on which these novels draw, even as they respond to the very local political and discursive pressures of apartheid South Africa.

Meg Samuelson, writing about *Foe*, *Boyhood* (1997), *Youth* (2002), and *Slow Man* in Chapter 2, similarly considers Coetzee's awareness that the specificities of locale are always embedded in histories and conflicts that exceed the nation. She does this by exploring why and how setting matters in Coetzee's fictions, focusing on its 'indexical function': the way that narrative, in fleshing out its spatial and temporal dimensions, both invokes a reality beyond the fiction, and makes its own imagined reality more tangible. This is to depart somewhat from Coetzee's own preoccupations. Indeed, he has often disavowed a realism premised on inventorizing reality. But, as Samuelson shows, these disavowals should not obscure his accomplishment in rendering fictional worlds that are vivid and compelling, and which thereby attain their own substance, whilst calling attention to the world outside of themselves, divided and structured by histories of trans-oceanic and trans-hemispheric trade, conquest, and colonization.

My own chapter (Chapter 3) is prompted by Coetzee's longstanding interest in stories and storytelling, an interest that is registered across his critical essays and reviews, and thematized in several of his works. Focusing on *In the Heart of the Country* (1977), *The Master of Petersburg*, and *The Childhood of Jesus*, as well as the computer poem 'Hero and Bad Mother in Epic' (1978), the chapter charts the relationship between the nature of the stories that Coetzee has told – generally limited in the scope of their plots and the number of their principal characters – and the forms of narration he has adopted, which vary from the first-person character narration of certain of his early and middle fictions, to the tightly focalized external narration of many of his later works, to the dialogue-heavy and somewhat affectless narration of the *Jesus* novels. In each case, I suggest that the particular form of narration is related to the particular truth with which the work seeks to confront its readers.

Narrative perspective is addressed also by David James, in Chapter 4, along with other of 'the most granular properties' of Coetzee's style, including those of rhetoric, syntax, prosody, phonology, and lexis. James tracks

from Coetzee's first novel, *Dusklands*, through *Age of Iron* and *Disgrace*, to his very recent work, *The Schooldays of Jesus* (2016). In each he finds evidence of a desire to police the 'grace of language', which he associates with Samuel Beckett's repudiation of 'style as consolation'. Yet, if the strict economy of his prose signals that Coetzee approves of this repudiation, at least at the outset of his career, James is particularly interested in moments in which this economy is disturbed. These moments include the frenzied catalogues of *Dusklands*, which give the lie to imperialism's rhetoric of expansion; but also fleeting passages of 'pellucid and euphonious language', which coincide in the middle and late fictions with efforts to scrutinize the nature of absolution, consolation, comfort, and the self.

Part I is brought to a close by Derek Attridge (Chapter 5), who considers a trio of late works, *Elizabeth Costello*, *Diary of a Bad Year*, and *Summertime* (2009), in light of Coetzee's belief that genres and their conventions can always be creatively re-imagined. Attridge looks closely at the ways these fictions invoke particular genres (novel, short story, lecture, philosophical meditation, diary, opinion piece, autobiography) and then spring surprises. For Coetzee, this makes it possible to keep these genres in play whilst reflecting on how they operate. For his readers, the consequent generic sliding demands that they remain agile and alert, taking the works' lessons, opinions, and reminiscences seriously, even as they recognize that these are not simple assertions of truth, and that their persuasiveness has much to do with the novelist's practice. In this manner, Attridge argues, Coetzee poses questions about the literary writer's tasks and responsibilities, and about the capacity of imaginative fictions to make 'truth claims about the world'.

Chapters in Part II, Relations, range more freely across the oeuvre. They consider Coetzee's endeavours as translator, collaborator, and scholar, as well as the nature of his engagements with fellow writers and critics, and with his environments and horizons. A capacious, avid, even avaricious reader, and a salaried academic for much of his adult life, Coetzee has often seemed preternaturally alive to the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries' intellectual and aesthetic currents. For this reason, although his own undertakings have seldom been curtailed by the fashions of the moment, his translations, critical writings, works of correspondence, and – since their unveiling – his archive of notebooks and teaching materials, have been grist to the scholarly mill, providing cues and prompts, and confirmation of Coetzee's interest in whichever writer/philosopher/school of criticism has happened to be in vogue. Instrumentalized in this way, Coetzee's nonfictions have had certain of their dimensions distorted.

This accounts for some enduring myths in Coetzee scholarship, including the view that his literary relations and aesthetic orientations were from the outset exclusively and resolutely cosmopolitan. Although clearly indebted to Samuel Beckett and Franz Kafka, to Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, to Daniel Defoe and Fyodor Dostoevsky, and to a host of other canonical European and American writers besides, Coetzee's practice was shaped alongside and against those of his South African predecessors and peers, and supported or at least valorized by South African institutions. Since moving to Australia, he has engaged with antipodean authors and problematics (his relationships with the Melbourne-based Text Publishing, the J. M. Coetzee Centre for Creative Practice at the University of Adelaide, and the Writing and Society Research Centre at Western Sydney University are three instances of this), just as he has involved himself, more recently still (2015–18), with the Universidad Nacional de San Martín in Argentina, as director of a seminar on 'Literatures of the South'. He has done all this, moreover, generously and generatively, in that spirit of collaboration which has very often characterized his professional interactions, and which belies another scholarly myth, that of Coetzee as a taciturn and difficult author, resentful of any intrusion. With an eye to distortions of this kind, the chapters in Relations broach several questions that have preoccupied literary critics: what to make of Coetzee's other pursuits and professional activities; how to understand his allegiances and affiliations; and how to determine the proper contexts in which to understand his writings.

In Part II's first chapter (Chapter 6), Jan Steyn gives an account of Coetzee's work as a translator and his views on translation. He reflects on Coetzee's knowledge of the two Netherlandic languages, Dutch and Afrikaans, and gives readings of the poem 'Eden' (2007) and the novel *The Expedition to the Baobab Tree* (1983), translated by Coetzee from the Afrikaans originals of Ina Rousseau and Wilma Stockenström respectively. In both, he finds evidence of a particular attunement to the demands of place, and also of Coetzee's belief (one common amongst translation theorists) that to translate is always to interpret. Lingering on the conditions and challenges of translation, including those which pertain to the hierarchies of the literary world, Steyn concludes by considering and ultimately resisting the claim that the simplicity of Coetzee's prose is determined by a quest for translatability.

Especially when familiar with the target language, Coetzee has often followed his own translators closely, giving advice, making corrections, suggesting improvements. This approach to collaborative labour becomes the entire focus of Rachel Bower's chapter (Chapter 7). Questioning Coetzee's reputation as a reclusive figure, and a reluctant interlocutor,

Bower looks at *Here and Now* (2013) and *The Good Story* (2015) – which record, respectively, his correspondence with the American novelist Paul Auster and with the British psychotherapist Arabella Kurtz – and at how these epistolary volumes explore 'the conditions for dialogue and working together'. Taking the nature of this correspondence as indicative of Coetzee's career-long resistance to banalized formulas of exchange, Bower unfolds Coetzee's conception of collaboration, and then uses it to frame her readings of epistolarity in *Summertime* and *Age of Iron*. In these, she attends to moments of confrontation and even provocation, as well as to slips, errors, and crossed connections, which are understood as essential rather than inimical to dialogue.

Bower concludes by remarking that, in order 'to fulfil our responsibility as interlocutors', we must read both with Coetzee's works and against them – a pertinent reminder, given the extent to which Coetzee has been able to shape the reception of his works, especially through *Doubling the Point* (1992). Until recently, this anthology of early scholarly reviews and essays, accompanied by interviews with David Attwell, the volume's editor, was the principal source of insights into Coetzee's writerly preoccupations, but it also framed these preoccupations in particular ways. This is a point made by Sue Kossew, who focuses, in Chapter 8, on Coetzee's works of criticism, which include the texts collected in *Doubling the Point*, as well as the volumes *White Writing* (1988), a landmark study of South African literary culture, and *Giving Offense* (1996), a series of reflections on the relationship between literature and censorship. Kossew addresses each of these volumes in turn, as well as the three collections of Coetzee's more recent lectures, reviews, and articles, describing their broad outlines, and alighting on individual essays, which, for better and for worse, have proven especially fruitful for critics, including the uncollected though ubiquitously cited 'The Novel Today' (1988) and 'Homage' (1993).

As Kossew indicates, Coetzee's critical writings have been ransacked repeatedly for evidence of influence. This surprisingly durable preoccupation is interrogated by Patrick Hayes (Chapter 9), who begins with several 'influence stories' that Coetzee has told about himself. Hayes observes that the notion of influence is nebulous, and that Coetzee's thinking and writing have been shaped from the outset by wide-ranging engagements of various kinds. More important, these engagements have seldom been uncritical, a point he brings home by addressing Coetzee's response to intertextuality, understood not as a practice of allusion, pastiche, and parody, but as a philosophical notion associated with the decentring of the author and of the human subject. In his readings of *Foe* and *The Master of Petersburg*, Hayes illustrates the use that Coetzee makes of significant literary

forebears, such as Beckett, Defoe, and Dostoevsky, to put pressure on this philosophical notion. Coetzee does this, Hayes argues, by revealing the moral costs of celebrating selves and texts as radically ruptured, and of treating this rupture as a condition for powerful imaginative experiences.

In Part II's final chapter (Chapter 10), Ben Etherington steps back from debates between localists and universalists, to explore the horizons of Coetzee's fictions, and the worlds and worldliness of Coetzee's practice. As a way of probing the vision of her creator as an exemplary 'world' writer, Etherington tracks Elizabeth Costello's encounters with the national and international circuits of literary prestige. He then outlines 'the distinctive repertoire of world making techniques' which are characteristic of Coetzee's body of works, and which, shaped in response to the literary and political pressures of apartheid South Africa, have a 'precondition in national circumstances of production and reception'. Finally, in Coetzee's recent efforts to establish literary relations between South Africa, Australia, and Argentina, Etherington finds signs of a Southern horizon and sensibility which have been latent across Coetzee's corpus, and from within which Coetzee's works seek both to evade the limits of nationalism and to enter the world literary market on their own terms.

Throughout his career, Coetzee has responded to film-makers, photographers, composers, and musicians; as well as to works of linguistics, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, psychology, pedagogy, and history. In turn, he has captured the attention of readers and scholars far beyond the confines of literary studies. His fictions seem to be increasingly attractive to philosophers, and recent adaptations have brought them into contact with operatic, theatrical, and cinematic audiences. With these matters in mind, the chapters of Part III, Mediations, consider the exposure of Coetzee's works to other forms, media, discourses, disciplines, institutions, and publics; as well as the intersection of life and art within them.

In Chapter 11, Michelle Kelly begins by asking what Coetzee's interest in 'other arts' contributes to our understanding of his works. She notes that his fictions often attribute to visual and performing arts 'expressive powers' that exceed those of literary art forms: to film and photography a more immediate access to the real; to music the ability to overcome linguistic and cultural differences that otherwise condition aesthetic experience. This, she suggests, is a feature of Coetzee's broader concern with the 'mediated nature' of human language. Indeed, the otherness of other arts has to do precisely with their access to forms of expressivity unavailable to the literary arts, and to the novel especially. Which is why, Kelly argues through her readings of musical experience in *Youth* and *Age of Iron*, and of dance and song in

Disgrace and *Foe*, Coetzee so often turns to embodied art forms when seeking to 'interrogate the bounds of the literary'. Yet, as Kelly explains in her chapter's final section, precisely because they encode visual and performing arts as other to writing, Coetzee's works invite but also challenge adaptations, which must struggle to keep faith both with Coetzee's 'original' and with the 'aesthetic conventions and histories' of their own forms and media. The crux of this difficulty is illuminated in Kelly's reading of *Slow Man* and its operatic adaptation by Nicholas Lens.

In the chapter that follows (Chapter 12), Anthony Uhlmann pursues a related set of arguments concerning Coetzee's encounter with philosophers. After a brief description of Coetzee's formation and institutional affiliations, he turns his focus to the ways in which Coetzee has probed both the capacity of literary works to confront philosophical questions as well as the limitations of philosophy's own embedded disciplinary procedures and approved forms of discourse. Coetzee has done this, Uhlmann argues, by developing provocations: elaborating propositions – about the nature of human language, consciousness, and being; about the nature of truth, knowledge, and existence – that entice and frustrate philosophical readers, asking that they at least consider what their discipline takes for granted or leaves out of account in its framing of these issues.

Several chapters in this volume, Uhlmann's included, draw extensively on the meticulously organized (and carefully curated) Coetzee Papers. Housed in the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, this archive includes manuscript drafts of Coetzee's novels (formerly available at the Houghton Library, Harvard College), as well as notebooks, correspondence, teaching materials, and photographs. Recently opened, the archive has prompted a new wave of critical studies, only some of which have been sufficiently alert to, or indeed sceptical of, the procedures and decisions involved in its establishment and organization. This is a matter on which Andrew Dean reflects in Chapter 13. He considers the provenance of these papers in light of Coetzee's career-long quarrying of autobiographical materials, his project of self-archiving, his fictions' explorations of archival themes, and his preoccupation with the nature of secrets and lies, of concealment, distortion, and revelation. For Dean, it is vital that critics think carefully about their own purposes in reading the archives; about the writer's purposes in producing them; and about the kinds of truth at stake in the works, the archives, and the literary criticism they occasion.

Part of the story that Dean tells has to do with the institutions of publication, reception and consecration that have mediated Coetzee's work, and that have called on him to perform in public, and to disclose his private