

**J.M. Coetzee's Occluded Intertextuality: Reading Text, Intertext and the Archive in  
*Life & Times of Michael K* and *Foe***

by

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## Abstract

This thesis is a study of occluded intertextuality in two novels by South African author J.M. Coetzee, *Life & Times of Michael K* (1983) and *Foe* (1986). It examines Coetzee's novels in concert with intertexts and archival materials to determine how Coetzee employed intertextuality as a means of negotiating his positionality as a white liberal author in late-apartheid South Africa. In Chapter 1 I examine Coetzee's initial intention, exhibited in a working notebook and early drafts, to rewrite Heinrich Von Kleist's 1811 novella *Michael Kohlhaas*, demonstrating how, although Coetzee ultimately moved away from this intertext, its traces remain in *Michael K* through an inescapable lacuna which creates an experience of hesitation for character, author, and reader. In Chapter 2, I trace Coetzee's attempts to rewrite Daniel Defoe's 1724 courtesan narrative, *Roxana*, although *Foe*'s typically identified intertext is *Robinson Crusoe*. A contrapuntal reading of *Roxana* reveals that imperialism, motherhood, prostitution, and authorship form a knot in that text, which is transferred to Coetzee's novel via the return of Susan Barton's lost daughter in the novel's final section. Chapter 2 thus seeks to supplement readings of *Foe* that posit Friday as the novel's ultimate representation of ethical engagement with alterity. This thesis establishes a relationship of comparative exchange between several kinds of intertext and in doing so aims to construct a personal ethics of reading. Derek Attridge describes the ethics of reading as an encounter, through literature, with the other, or an other. For Attridge, "Coetzee's works both stage, and are, irruptions of otherness into our familiar worlds" (xii) precisely because reading his work is an *event*. This thesis seeks to expand Attridge's conceptualization of reading Coetzee's work as an event beyond the borders of individual texts to consider the ethical force that results from reading text, intertext and foretext concurrently and interactively.

## **Preface**

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, C. Turner.

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Preface.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Table of Contents .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>List of Abbreviations .....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Dedication .....</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>Chapter 1   Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Archive, Intertext, Hypertext: Reading Coetzee Interactively.....	1
1.2 Archival and Historical Contexts.....	4
1.3 Intertextual Practice .....	12
1.4 Structure and Argument.....	14
<b>Chapter 2   Life &amp; Times of <i>Michael Kohlhaas</i> .....</b>	<b>17</b>
2.1 A Novel of South Africa? .....	17
2.2 Between Allegory and Realism .....	20
2.3 Michael K Reading <i>Michael Kohlhaas</i> .....	26
2.4 The German Novella and Contingency as Resistance .....	32
2.5 The Modern Novella in <i>Life &amp; Times of Michael K</i> .....	36
2.6 A Lacuna in My Own Position: Author, Character, Reader .....	40
<b>Chapter 3   The “Fortunate Mistress’s” <i>Foe</i>: Roxana and the Return of the Intertextual</b>	
<b>Daughter. ....</b>	<b>48</b>
3.1 A Novelist’s Novel .....	48

3.2	Friday's Withholding at the Critical Centre.....	52
3.3	From Daughter to Mother: The Unviable Intertextuality of <i>Roxana</i> .....	56
3.4	Whore, Merchant, Mother: Imperialism in <i>Roxana</i> .....	63
3.5	"The life of a substantial body:" Collaborative Storytelling in Mr. Foe's Attic.....	69
<b>Chapter 4   Conclusion .....</b>		<b>78</b>
<b>Works Cited.....</b>		<b>83</b>

## List of Abbreviations

*MK*

*Life & Times of Michael K*

*Petersburg*

*The Master of Petersburg*

*Heart of the Country*

*In the Heart of the Country*

*DP*

*Doubling the Point*

*Barbarians*

*Waiting for the Barbarians*

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*For my grandmother, Iris Vivian Bales*

*April 16, 1918 – June 12, 2012*



## Chapter 1 | Introduction

### 1.1 Archive, Intertext, Hypertext: Reading Coetzee Interactively

The scene described in J.M. Coetzee's writing notebook from 1979 will be recognizable to any reader familiar with his work. The protagonist is unnamed and described only by his gender and prior privileged insulation from violence. This, however, is telling enough:

A man of liberal conscience returns home one day to find his home burgled in a particularly sordid way (random destruction, shit on the floor, etc.) He makes the usual liberal noises to the police as well as to his friends; but traces of the invasion come to obsess him. (Gray notebook 1)

The obsession with this traumatic invasion of personal space soon leads to further consequences:

Though he has lucid spells in which he sees—with horror—what is happening to him, he moves, in a drugged way, toward an uncovering of the resentful, hate-filled violence of disposition that had for all his life been covered over by a liberal ideology—an ideology which (he now recognizes) had only been permitted him because such agencies as the police stood between him and the violence of the suppressed classes. (Gray notebook 1)

The scene of sordid disarray, the destruction of property followed close behind by the destruction of the liberal conscience: the parallel protagonist to the unnamed man is David Lurie, defeated lothario of Coetzee's 1999 Booker-winning novel *Disgrace*. In that scene, David comes home to Cape Town after a three-month absence to discover his apartment ransacked, his Beethoven records disappeared, the shit on the floor replaced, in this case, by a dead pigeon decomposing in the bathroom (*Disgrace* 176). In this excerpt, the event of the robbery triggers the uncovering of a "hate-filled disposition;" as such, the violation of privacy is what reveals the hypocrisy of

white privilege. In *Disgrace*, by contrast, the event has already occurred in the form of Lucy Lurie's rape during a prior home invasion; David's looted flat is a mere coda, yet "another incident in the great campaign of redistribution" (176) that he wearily accepts. The correspondences between the scenes described in Coetzee's notebook and later novel are striking enough that one could plausibly assert that the first is a sketch for the second. In each, the confrontation with and eventual abandonment of liberal ideology is triggered by an act of flagrant vandalism, a crime that in any other circumstance would cry out for justice but which, in contemporary South Africa, is justified in the context of a post-apartheid redistribution of resources.

The excerpts quoted above are from a working notebook of Coetzee's dated October 17, 1979. The thematic parallel between the man of liberal conscience and David Lurie may seem obvious: given that the sketch in the notebook was made twenty years before *Disgrace*'s publication, we might even say that the sketch serves as an early model for David Lurie. Yet anyone familiar with Coetzee's work knows that such neat parallels are far too easily undermined to be sustained in a cohesive reading. The second paragraph on this page reveals that the model for David Lurie originates in another, anterior template:

This "movement" of the book culminates with an act of violence on his part (e.g., a shot he fires at an intruder) which formally marks his renunciation of his charitable liberalism and his engagement in class struggle.

The first movement is carried out at a "relentless" pace. The model is Kleist's *Michael Kohlhaas*. It constitutes a mere prelude to the body of the work.  
(Gray notebook 1)

As we can see from this excerpt, the source of this renunciation originates in an intertext:

*Michael Kohlhaas*, the 1811 novella by Heinrich Von Kleist, which recounts the life and death of the eponymous vigilante hero. Kleist's novella is a showpiece of German Romanticism in which the protagonist wages a war against a cronyistic aristocracy—a war that he both loses, by facing execution at the end of the tale, and wins, by ensuring the enduring success of his family line.

The gray casebound notebook comprises 85 pages of dated entries that Coetzee recorded between October 1979 and November 1982 as a compositional aid to his third novel, *Life & Times of Michael K*. While the arrangement of the notebook does not nullify the connection to *Disgrace*, the relationship between this *Disgrace*-like sketch, Coetzee's earlier novel, and *Michael Kohlhaas* warrants exploration. What is the nature of the intertextual relationship between these texts? What can a study of Kleist's brigand horse dealer, as Coetzee represents him in the notebook, reveal about *Michael K*'s abject, wormlike protagonist?

I begin with this sketch, and the questions it generates, because it has three important implications for the project at hand. Page 1 of the *Michael K* notebook offers a snapshot of the evolution of Coetzee's writing process that has only recently become available to critics of his work: the notebook is now housed in a publicly accessible archive at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center in Austin, Texas. Secondly, the entry from October 17 is evidence of Coetzee's intertextual practice—a process of writing whereby he commenced composing a novel with a specific intertext in mind, one that helped him address the complicity he felt as a white liberal living in South Africa during a time when those of black, Indian and mixed-race<sup>1</sup> ancestry were subject to the inescapable oppression of apartheid laws. Third, Coetzee's man of

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<sup>1</sup> Under apartheid-era racial designations, mixed-race persons were defined as "Coloured."

liberal conscience, crafted in 1979, complicates readings of *Disgrace* that place it within the sphere of post-election South African politics. The notebook entry instead points to a continuity between the works of Coetzee's early career and those composed after 1994, complicating readings of *Disgrace* that describe it solely as a realist account of post-apartheid South Africa.<sup>2</sup> This thesis will explore the first and second implications for two of Coetzee's novels, *Life & Times of Michael K* (1983) and *Foe* (1986). Through the practice laid out in the pages that follow, I establish an ethics of reading that accounts for Coetzee's intertextual practice while asking: how can an explication of the creative process act upon, complicate, or enrich the process of reading? Can an understanding of Coetzee's specific employment of intertextuality in the early stages of composition help us, as readers, (begin to) apprehend the alterity we encounter in his work?

## 1.2 Archival and Historical Contexts

This thesis makes extensive use of archival material from the J.M. Coetzee Papers. The Ransom Center acquired 153 boxes of archival material from Coetzee in October 2011, and the collection has been open for research since March 2013. The archive is extensive. It contains drafts of all of Coetzee's major works from *Dusklands* (1974) to the omnibus edition of *Scenes from Provincial Life* (2011), along with personal and business correspondence, research materials, scrapbooks and Coetzee family files. The importance and research potential of this

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<sup>2</sup> Critics tend to focus on *Disgrace*'s specific historical context more than with Coetzee's other novels—not only because it is set in 1997/98 (Attridge 163 n.2), but because it was the first novel Coetzee wrote after the elections in 1994. Jane Poyner reads *Disgrace* as an allegory of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, while Derek Attridge describes it set in a time when “the struggle against the repressive, racist state is finally over, apartheid is a discredited policy of the past, and democratic government has finally been established” (163). Historical context is undeniably relevant here, given that David Lurie's hearing at the University seems to be mock TRC hearing. However, Coetzee's notebook does demonstrate a continuity between his pre- and post-1994 works that may have been overlooked.

archive cannot be overstated. Coetzee's contemporary status is, in a word, massive. He has been called "the most important writer living today" (Poyner, *J.M. Coetzee* 1), "inarguably the most celebrated and decorated living English-language author" (Poplak), and, in addition to his significance as a master of fiction, "a critic who ha[s] said everything about everything" (Twidle). A winner of the Nobel Prize and two-time winner of the Man Booker prize, Coetzee is the subject of a substantial critical industry. His novels and critical essays have been treated in at least thirty dedicated single-author studies in addition to hundreds of book chapters and critical articles. His novels regularly appear on university syllabi around the world and his work is frequently the subject of dedicated undergraduate and graduate courses, conferences and symposia. The acquisition of his work by the Ransom Center is yet another marker of his canonical status; the Center paid \$1.5 million (US) to acquire the collection (Vertuno).

I visited the Ransom Center in April 2013 and spent five days examining material in the J.M. Coetzee Papers. Thirty-two boxes from the collection were previously housed on deposit at the Houghton Library at Harvard University; these include the drafts of Coetzee's first seven novels, from *Dusklands* (1974) to *The Master of Petersburg* (1994).<sup>3</sup> This thesis engages the early drafts of Coetzee's fourth and fifth novels and examines their interrelationship with the detailed working notebooks Coetzee kept while composing them. The notebooks were not included in the Houghton Collection and so were not available for research purposes until March

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<sup>3</sup> These boxes were on deposit at Harvard from 1995-2011. However, I have encountered little critical work that engages with this material. Kai Easton discusses the drafts of *Dusklands* in her 2006 article on the novel, and her dissertation from 2000 also references the Houghton collection. Easton writes that the collection at Harvard was not well advertised, which could explain its absence from critical literature on Coetzee ("The Cape," 10). By contrast, the Ransom Center acquisition in October 2011 was widely advertised. The National English Literary Museum in Grahamstown, South Africa also holds a small Coetzee collection; this appears to be comprised mainly of teaching materials, speeches and related documents.

2013. Coetzee's working notebooks offer a fascinating glimpse into his writing process, not least because they demonstrate the multiple speculative routes that Coetzee considered, but finally did not take, when composing his earlier works.<sup>4</sup> Making extensive use of archival material, particularly working notebooks and manuscript drafts of the novels under consideration, carries with it the inherent risk of investing the archive with too much authority. However, reading *Life & Times of Michael K* and *Foe* alongside their early drafts and Coetzee's notebooks allows us to examine how the switchbacks, detours, and dead ends of the creative process show their traces in the published novels. This is but one way that the archive opens a previously unexplored avenue in Coetzee studies.

The period of Coetzee's career that I address in this thesis is 1979-1985, the time during which his reputation ascended from that of modestly well-known South African writer to internationally recognized literary star. Coetzee was born in 1940 in Cape Province, eight years before the National Party's ascent to power and the official commencement of apartheid. He spent most of his childhood in Cape Town. In 1962, after earning a degree in English and Mathematics from the University of Cape Town, Coetzee left South Africa for London, "very much in the spirit of shaking the dust of the country from his feet" (*DP* 392). From London, he relocated to the United States to pursue a doctoral degree at the University of Texas at Austin. Coetzee then moved to Buffalo, New York, where he worked as an English professor for three years before his involvement in Vietnam War protests complicated the renewal of his visa. He

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<sup>4</sup> The archive contains working notebooks for most of Coetzee's earlier fiction, from *In the Heart of the Country* (1977) to *Age of Iron* (1990). There is no dedicated notebook for *The Master of Petersburg*, although the drafts are peppered with marginal reflections and journalistic accounts of his writing process. There is a notebook for *Disgrace*, but not for any of Coetzee's fictional work following it. The Ransom Center also acquired computer disks relating to novels from *Age of Iron* onward, and it is possible that the discs contain work on the later novels of the kind found in the earlier notebooks. However, these materials are not yet available for research purposes.

was denied permanent residency and returned to South Africa with his family in 1971, taking a teaching position at the University of Cape Town and publishing his first novel, *Dusklands*, three years later. *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), was a best-seller,<sup>5</sup> but the awarding of the Booker Prize for *Life & Times of Michael K* (1983) secured his international renown. Following the publication of *Michael K*, Coetzee began spending more time teaching and speaking abroad, and continued to receive further literary prizes and earn international acclaim for his fiction and non-fiction work alike.

In the early 1980s, as Coetzee became better known and respected for his work in an international context, his native country was the subject of increasing global scorn and sanction. This period in South Africa was marked by increased militarization, provoked by border conflicts with newly liberated neighbouring states such as Mozambique and Angola, frequent guerrilla attacks by the African National Congress (ANC) and other anti-apartheid groups,<sup>6</sup> and nominal efforts by the National Party to placate the non-white population.<sup>7</sup> The State of Emergency declared in 1985 (which effectively remained in place until 1990) gave the apartheid government absolute power to halt protests, crush dissent, and detain thousands of individuals without trial or public knowledge. Increased isolation from the outside world accompanied these internal conditions. Censorship of newspapers, books, and magazines by the Publications Control Board was pervasive and systematic because, as Coetzee notes in *Giving Offense*, “South Africa

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<sup>5</sup> It seems that Coetzee earned his first front-page review in the *New York Times* for *Waiting for the Barbarians* in April 1982—in a letter to Coetzee, Tom G. Rosenthal calls the positive review a “a major breakthrough in the American market” (Rosenthal).

<sup>6</sup> Gallagher cites official government figures that list guerilla attacks as increasing from two per six-month period in 1976 to more than five per week in 1986 (137).

<sup>7</sup> These included the repealing of several controversial apartheid-era laws, including the Mixed Marriages Act and the Immorality Act, both repealed in 1985.

operated one of the most comprehensive censorship systems in the world” (34).<sup>8</sup> Divestment campaigns in North America and Europe, United Nations anti-apartheid resolutions, and cultural and economic boycotts increased South Africa’s distance from Western cultural and intellectual centres. As Susan VanZanten Gallagher notes, the “silencing of dissent in South Africa reached perhaps its greatest effectiveness in 1984 and 1985—during the same period in which Coetzee ironically achieved his greatest international voice” (168). Gallagher demonstrates Coetzee’s continual reluctance to speak *for* South Africa during this period, shown in his apparent cageyness on political subjects in interviews (167) and exemplified, in an interview with Tony Morphet, by Coetzee’s repudiation of “that vast and wholly ideological superstructure constituted by publishing, reviewing and criticism that is forcing on me the fate of being a ‘South African novelist’” (“Interview” 2).<sup>9</sup>

Accompanying the demand on Coetzee and other internationally known South African authors to speak as a source of authority on their native country was an internal demand to adhere to the tenets of social realism as the best means of culturally resisting apartheid. The traditional features of realism originally described by Ian Watt, including a “minutely described time-scale” (24), “attention to the description of milieu” (28) and stylistic adherence to the “immediacy and closeness of the text to what is being described” (32), took on a new meaning in

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<sup>8</sup> Three of Coetzee’s novels were embargoed and reviewed by the Publications Control Board before they were released to the South African public: *In the Heart of the Country* (1977), *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Life & Times of Michael K*—although none of his books have ever been banned in that country.

<sup>9</sup> Coetzee’s continued reticence on political matters has meant that critics tend to quote a few select pieces as sources of authority outside of his fictional work. These include the interviews with Tony Morphet (1983 and 1987), “The Novel Today” (1987), *Doubling the Point* (1992), “Into the Dark Chamber” (an essay on torture, 1986) and his Jerusalem Prize Acceptance Speech (1987), in which he emphatically denounces apartheid practices. I mention this practice not derisively, but to identify a practice that speaks to the desire to use an author’s public speech as a source of interpretation despite his emphatic resistance to it. The archival materials cited in this thesis provide another, previously inaccessible, means of interpretation that can supplement these other materials in the future.



the context of the South African novel. George Moore describes realism in the African novel as fundamentally representational, pertaining to the “immediate appearances, rather than the unseen spiritual essences, of daily life” (14), which in early 1980s South Africa meant the depiction of daily life as it was experienced under apartheid.<sup>10</sup> Of course, this daily life differed enormously for blacks and whites, which meant that black and white authors were thought to have different duties in the cultural struggle against apartheid: Gallagher writes that “black writers [had] a social responsibility to educate their readers about the reality of black life under apartheid” (7), while the responsibility of the white author was, according to Nadine Gordimer, to “raise the consciousness of white people who, unlike himself, have not woken up” (qtd. in Gallagher 7). Realism was seen by apartheid-resistance groups as the best means of conveying culture as a weapon of the struggle (Poyner 105), and, as Gallagher notes in relation to Coetzee, writers who did not adhere to this style were seen as shirking their authorial responsibility (12).<sup>11</sup> Coetzee explicitly references this debate, and the pressure he felt to adhere to a designated style, in his working notebook for *Foe*. In an entry dated March 17, 1984, he writes:

They (“they?”) want me to be a realist. They want my books to be—about.  
Specifically, to be—about South Africa, about social relations in that country.  
They chuck my text against what they have picked up from the popular media  
about SA, and where there is a correspondence they say it is “true.” The rest they

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<sup>10</sup> The determination of realism as the best mode was by no means an unquestioned fact—allegory was also practiced and valorized as a mode of writing, both for its practical implications (because it meant that books could get past the censors) and because, as Stephen Slemon writes, it enables the postcolonised writer to “destabilize history’s fixity” (qtd. in Dovey, “Allegory” 139). See Dovey, “Allegory” 138-141 for a more detailed summary of how allegory has been employed in postcolonial literary contexts.

<sup>11</sup> For instance, Gallagher describes a review of *Waiting for the Barbarians* that anticipated its being “enthusiastically assimilated into the very system it (vaguely) condemns” (qtd. in Gallagher 12). She also writes that others deplored Coetzee’s “political naiveté” or suspected him of “acquiescing to the oppressive system” (12).

cannot, will not read.

“They” include my publishers and my agents. As I am now, as I am writing now,  
I am their prisoner. I am their token South African. (Green notebook 47-48)

This entry succinctly expresses Coetzee’s frustration at the dual pressures placed on the South African writer: first, to be a spokesman for his country, and second, to produce a realist text that ostensibly corresponds to the perceived reality of South Africa, depicted in the Western media as the seat of racial segregation and human rights abuses. The complex debate about realism in South Africa has already been widely discussed in critical literature on Coetzee and other South African writers. Furthermore, criticism on South African literatures is now less invested in realism’s political significance than it was in the 1980s and early 1990s—as both Jane Poyner and Derek Attridge point out, the years since 1994 have seen the emergence of a greater variety of genres attuned to private life in South Africa (Poyner, “Under Pressure” 103) and more varied critical debates that acknowledge the value of modernist and postmodernist forms (Attridge 2). However, the debate about realism as the best mode for employing culture as a weapon of struggle has a historical relevance to my study for three reasons. First, it has informed many studies of the novels I examine in this thesis.<sup>12</sup> Secondly, Coetzee directly references this debate in the notebooks and drafts of these novels. Finally, this debate is a point of contrast to the lens I employ in studying Coetzee’s process of composition as it relates to the ethics of reading: that of intertextuality. After all, Coetzee’s notebook entry from March 1984 pertains to *Foe*, the novel he was composing at the time, a postcolonial rewriting of the *Robinson Crusoe* story. In this study, then, I examine Coetzee’s struggle over whether to adhere to or reject the demands placed

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<sup>12</sup> See, in relation to *Michael K*, Attridge 33, Gallagher 12, Poyner, *J.M. Coetzee* 71 and Attwell 92-93.

upon the South African writer in concert with his sustained and continuous engagement with *other texts* throughout the writing process.

I want to emphasize that Coetzee's reflections on these matters do constitute a struggle: that is, despite his consistent reticence on political matters in South Africa and his perpetual reluctance to act as a figure of political interpretation for his novels, he did not reject realism outright in the early 1980s; nor was he blind to what such a rejection of realism (or, by extension, insulation from political matters in South Africa) would mean. In fact, Coetzee demonstrates an intense concern with his positionality in the working notebooks for *Michael K* and *Foe*. As I use it in the subsequent pages, "positionality" is an acknowledgement of one's position as it relates to others in a social and historical context. As Frances Maher and Mary Kay Tetreault describe it, "gender, race, class, and other aspects of our identities are markers of relational positions rather than essential qualities" (118); positionality thus acknowledges the "subject as nonessentialized and emergent from a historical experience" (Alcoff 433). Just as reflexive geographical studies employ positionality to acknowledge that "no production of knowledge can ever dismiss or disclaim its author's involvement and positionings" (Sanchez), Coetzee repeatedly acknowledges his positionality as a liberal white living under apartheid, and how that positionality is enacted, complicated or reinforced through his writing. By "liberal white," I mean that Coetzee objected to apartheid (both publicly and privately) but refused to join an active resistance movement—this despite (or perhaps because of) his involvement in Vietnam War protests alongside other faculty members at SUNY Buffalo. In *Doubling the Point*, Coetzee describes how he decided to return to South Africa after living in the United States out of a "will to remain in crisis" (337), but that despite this he refrained from political engagement: "a *real* resolution would have been to hurl myself bodily into the anti-imperialist struggle," he writes, "But the picture of myself marching

into the fray—I, with my craving for privacy, my distaste for crowds, for slogans, my almost physical revulsion against obeying orders . . . the picture was simply comic” (337). I

acknowledge that the term “liberal white” has become somewhat overused to date, but I employ it because Coetzee describes himself that way during the time period I address, and because it aptly describes both the privilege he enjoyed as a white in South Africa and the abhorrence to oppression that he felt unable, or unwilling, to translate into political action in that country.<sup>13</sup>

### 1.3 Intertextual Practice

The lens I employ in this project when reading Coetzee’s archival material alongside two of his published works is that of occluded intertextuality. This lens takes up Gérard Genette’s theorization of “hypertexts” as a particular form of intertextuality. For Genette, intertextuality in its broadest form is a “relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts . . . eidetically or typically as the actual presence of one text within another” (12) and usually represented by quotation or allusion.<sup>14</sup> Many of Coetzee’s novels are known for their relationships with prior works and are therefore intertextual in a variety of ways. For Genette, the most important form of relation between two texts is that of hypertextuality, a specific form of intertextuality whereby an author explicitly transforms a prior text (referred to as the hypotext) into a new work (the hypertext). This kind of transformation signifies a substantial relationship between two texts, because the hypertext could not exist without the hypotext (Genette 5). This sustained form of engagement with a prior work is the kind of intertextuality I explore in this

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<sup>13</sup> Poyner also points out that the term “liberal” has “very specific connotations in South Africa because, whilst on a fundamental level disagreeing with apartheid ideology, liberals were perceived by some to be willing to turn a blind eye to apartheid abuse, making them complicit” (*J.M. Coetzee* 79).

<sup>14</sup> “Intertext” therefore signifies the original work that is being referenced in the newer work.

thesis. Genette's definition of a hypertext is one in which the transfer from hypotext is massive and "more or less explicitly stated" (9). In each chapter of this thesis I explore how Coetzee began writing a novel with a specific hypotext in mind, but ultimately occluded the original hypotext in favour of a different model. As such, the transfer between *Michael Kohlhaas* and *Michael K*, for instance, is not as "massive" as Genette's form of hypertextuality. However, the relationship between the two texts is still an example of Genette's "transformation" (5), since the hypertext (*Michael K*) could not exist without the hypotext (*Michael Kohlhaas*) due to the way Coetzee employed *Michael Kohlhaas* during the early stages of the writing process. The focus of my study is to examine how the occluded intertexts of *Michael Kohlhaas* and *Roxana* are retained in *Michael K* and *Foe* through thematically significant traces.<sup>15</sup>

Intertextuality is an apt lens through which to examine the archival material on *Michael K* and *Foe* found in the J.M. Coetzee Papers because, as I will demonstrate in the following chapters, Coetzee clearly employed intertextuality as a means of negotiating his positionality while writing the early drafts of these two novels. I also endeavour to view the archival documents as intertexts themselves, taking up Genette's statement that "every successive state of a written text functions like a hypertext in relating to the state that precedes it . . . From the very first sketch to the final emendation, the genesis of a text remains a matter of auto hypertextuality" (395). As such, the term "foretext" in this thesis refers to drafts or iterations of a novel prior to its published version. Treating Coetzee's unpublished material intertextually provides a check against investing the notebooks and drafts with an unproductive amount of authority; instead, I strive to consider the foretexts in balance with the novels and their intertexts.

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<sup>15</sup> Intertextuality, as I use it here, refers to the general relationship between two texts, whereas terms such as "hypertext" and "occluded intertext" refer to a specific form of intertextuality.

Examining foretextual documents such as notebook sketches and drafts as intertexts can also recuperate the role of the reader in an intertextual reading practice. Genette initially restricts designations of hypertextuality to works where the transfer between text A and B is explicitly stated; the less massive this transfer, “the more does its analysis depend on constitutive judgment; that is, on the reader’s interpretive decision” (9). Such an activity, he writes, would “invest the hermeneutic activity of the reader” (9) with an undue level of authority. So while Genette views texts as open entities with relationships of copresence between them, this relationality does not extend to the act of reading. Tisha Turk attempts to reverse Genette’s rejection of “hypertextual hermeneutics” (Genette 8) in her analysis of *Foe*. Arguing that “[a] transformative narrative’s meaning therefore lies *outside* the text, in the space between text and intertext” (Turk 296), she concludes that the activity involved in reading a narrative like Coetzee’s “make[s] for an especially high level of audience participation amounting to a co-construction of the text.” (296). My study uses the foretexts to fill the space “outside” the narrative that Turk describes by incorporating them into intertextual analyses of *Michael K* and *Foe*. Furthermore, it employs the foretexts to supplement the kinds of stories we can tell about Coetzee’s novels, for the very reason that they supply us with intertextual evidence we might not have outside the context of the archive.

#### **1.4 Structure and Argument**

Chapter 1 of this project examines Coetzee’s writing process for *Life & Times of Michael K* as it relates to that work’s occluded intertext, *Michael Kohlhaas*. I examine studies of *Life & Times of Michael K* by David Attwell and Engelhard Weigl that use the intertextual presence of Kafka in Coetzee’s novel to answer questions that go unheeded by readings of the novel as realist or allegorical. I then turn to *Michael Kohlhaas*, first tracing Coetzee’s attempts to rewrite

Kleist's novella and then discussing how the concerns of the modern German novella, including resistance to historiography and contingency as a ruling principle, remain in Coetzee's published novel. Using Laura Moss's theory of readerly hesitation in Coetzee's work, I argue that the ethical core of *Life & Times of Michael K* is the scene wherein K decides not to join the guerillas he sees on the Visagie farm. This decision, instead of enacting a viable form of resistance, in fact undercuts the idea of resistance and creates an experience of hesitation, which is registered by Coetzee in his notebook and is reflected in *Michael K's* published text.

In Chapter 2, I explore Coetzee's writing process for his next novel, *Foe*, as it relates to Daniel Defoe's *Roxana* (1724). While some critics have identified *Roxana* as an intertext in this novel, critics such as Attridge and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak have tended to focus on the significance of *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) as an intertext. However, as *Foe's* notebook and early drafts reveal, Coetzee commenced writing *Foe* with the express intention of rewriting Defoe's later courtesan narrative. I follow this creative process and then contrapuntally reread *Roxana* in order to illuminate the knots linking imperialism, prostitution and mothering in that text. I then return to a reading of *Foe* where I examine how this linkage is transferred from Defoe's hypotext *Roxana* to Coetzee's hypertext, demonstrating that the knot binding imperialism, authorship, prostitution and mothering is transferred to Coetzee's novel through the reappearance of Susan Barton's supposed daughter. My objective in the second chapter is twofold. First, I seek to demonstrate how reading *Foe's* notebooks and drafts alongside the published novel allows for a richer contrapuntal reading of *Roxana* that accounts for specifically female investments in imperialism (through prostitution and mothering). Secondly, my reading of *Foe's* final section in light of this process of re-reading shows how the echoes of supposedly silenced voices often remain on the published pages of a text.

How are the intertexts affected by this reading process? Genette argues that the “interpolation staged by supplemental hypertexts brings about a transmutation of meaning and value in their hypotexts” (205)—meaning that reading a work we know to be intertextual alters our reading of the hypotext. This effect applies especially to works written in a postcolonial context that engage works of the European canon—as Edward Said writes of contrapuntal reading, “what we learn about . . . hitherto ignored aspect[s of these texts] actually and truly *enhances* our reading and understanding of them” (xiv). Reading these occluded intertexts alongside their Coetzee-crafted hypertexts not only alters the way we read *Michael Kohlhaas* and *Roxana*, but also affects our reading of Coetzee’s work. The drafts and notebooks considered here are central to this process, because they provide the bridge between (reduced) hypotext and (subtle) hypertext. Thus, this thesis aims to outline a relationship of exchange between several kinds of intertext. What I hope to create through this process of comparative exchange is a personal ethics of reading. Attridge describes the ethics of reading as an encounter, through literature, with the other, or an other. For Attridge, “Coetzee’s works both stage, and are, irruptions of otherness into our familiar worlds” (xii) precisely because reading his work is an *event*. This thesis seeks to expand Attridge’s conceptualization of reading Coetzee’s work as an event beyond the bound border of individual texts and consider the ethical force that results from reading text, intertext and foretext concurrently and interactively.



## Chapter 2 | Life & Times of *Michael Kohlhaas*

### 2.1 A Novel of South Africa?

*Life & Times of Michael K*, published in 1983, was Coetzee's fourth novel and, in many ways, represents a departure from his first three works. Although they differ in theme, structure and plot, *Dusklands* (1974), *In the Heart of the Country* (1977) and *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) are each recounted in the first person present tense<sup>16</sup> by obsessively analytical and largely unlikeable protagonists. The setting of each is separated from South Africa in the late 1970s by some degree of spatiotemporal distance: In *Dusklands*, Eugene Dawn's Vietnam Project takes place from 1972-73, but in the United States, while the megalomaniac Jacobus Coetzee's treks to South Africa's interior occur in the colonial past, between 1760 and 1762. *Heart of the Country* is set on a farm in the remote veld of South Africa, but the time period appears to shift over the course of Magda's narrative.<sup>17</sup> *Barbarians* has the vaguest setting of all, a colonial outpost of a vast and unnamed Empire whose borders are haunted by equally unnamed (and thus allegorically potent) barbarians.

The "man of liberal conscience" whose home invasion "comes to obsess him" (Gray notebook 1) more closely resembles these previous protagonists than the hare-lipped gardener who would ultimately become the centre of Coetzee's fourth novel. Michael K, born in Cape Town to a domestic servant and raised in the institutional setting of Huis Norenius, is "not quick," lacks skill with words and is unaffected by modern notions of "generalized moral norms" and "profit and progeny" (Attridge 49). The novel's third person, past tense narration increases

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<sup>16</sup> The one exception to this is "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee," one half of *Dusklands*, which is narrated in the first person past tense.

<sup>17</sup> Magda initially sees her father return home in a horse-drawn cart (*Heart of the Country* 1), but by the end of the novel she hears airplanes buzzing overhead (142).

the narrative distance between Michael K and the reader; furthermore, his thoughts are mediated by a highly controlling narrator. The striking, richly wrought sentences that evoke the “scratch of ant-feet” (*MK* 97) upon the earth, the “sensual delight” (*MK* 114) K experiences while eating grilled pumpkin, or K’s experience of “time flowing slowly like oil from horizon to horizon over the face of the world” (115) are continual reminders that K is not reporting his tale directly. The words of the narrator are those of a masterful mind completely in control, whereas K’s head is continually described as “blank” (*MK* 33), foggy (64), or “stupid” (184).<sup>18</sup> Derek Attridge convincingly argues that this style of narration continually reminds us “that we are outside Michael K’s consciousness” (50) and that living through K’s experiences with this constant narratological reminder of our distance from him is what causes Coetzee’s novel to engage so powerfully with otherness.

Another generically significant difference between *Michael K* and its predecessors is the novel’s initial adherence to realism, established by correspondences between the novel’s setting and time period and South Africa in the early 1980s. The entire novel takes place within the geographically specified area of South Africa’s Western Cape. K’s tale begins in Sea Point, a suburb of Cape Town, where he cares for his ailing mother, Anna K. Michael and Anna embark on a journey from Sea Point to the countryside of Anna’s childhood, but only make it to Stellenbosch before Anna is admitted to hospital and dies. From there, K travels onward to Prince Albert and spends several months on an abandoned farm, a sojourn that is briefly interrupted by a stay in a labour camp, before he is arrested as a rebel supplier and imprisoned in a rehabilitation camp at Cape Town’s former Kenilworth racecourse. After escaping from

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<sup>18</sup> For a more detailed analysis of how the narrator mediates K’s thoughts, see Attridge (51).

Kenilworth, K returns to Sea Point, bringing his tour of the Western Cape full circle. The geographical verisimilitude of *Michael K* is accompanied by temporal markers, including pass laws, prison camps, guerrilla attacks and states of emergency, all of which indicate that South Africa has descended into the civil war that many thought to be imminent in the early 1980s. While this initial adherence to realism and the novel's depiction of the multiple cruelties K suffers at the hands of the state at first appear to satisfy the demands by Marxist and anti-apartheid critics for an art "governed by its immediate effectiveness in the struggle for change" (Attridge 1), Michael K ultimately disappoints as the hero of a realist anti-apartheid novel. In what Coetzee has termed the "most politically naked moment in the novel" (*DP* 207), K considers joining the rebel army to fight the totalitarian state, but chooses to stay behind with his crop of pumpkins, rejecting political engagement and valorizing the Arcadian lifeway of the gardener. Part II of *Michael K*, narrated as it is by an obsessive camp medical officer reminiscent of *Barbarians*'s magistrate, also undercuts the novel's realism and stalls the story's coherent narrative arc through the doctor's extended first person meditations on historiography.

While *Michael K*'s self-conscious insularity and the novel's deviations from the conventions of realism prevent it from being read as a token of apartheid resistance, an examination of Coetzee's working notebook and the early drafts allows for a reading of *Michael K* that returns it to the realm of a self-constructed politics—albeit a perpetually hesitating form of politics that is lacking in a praxis. This chapter takes as its starting point the gulf that separates the first page of Coetzee's notebook, depicting the man of fractured liberal conscience, and the result of *Life & Times of Michael K*. What path did Coetzee take to get from the former to the latter, and what can we learn about the novel from tracing that same path? My guiding text in this case is *Michael Kohlhaas*, the work that would become *Michael K*'s occluded intertext. I

will demonstrate how Coetzee uses *Michael Kohlhaas* as a tool in the writing process for working through his own conflicted positionality. In doing, so he constructs a process of what Laura Moss terms “readerly hesitation” (140) that reverberates phenomenologically across planes of experience, from author, to character, to reader. Referencing Coetzee’s working notebook as well as drafts of *Life & Times of Michael K*, I explore the significance of his engagement with Kleist’s text in the early stages of the writing process. Both *Michael Kohlhaas* and the generic traits of the German novella are valuable frames for thinking through intertextuality in Coetzee’s novel. The German novella’s representation of the absolute power of contingency is externalized in *Life & Times of Michael K*, both through the thematization of historiography in the medical officer’s narrative and in the gap that opens for K following his conscious withdrawal from the war. This is *Michael K*’s ethical force: that it involves the reader in an experience of hesitation, an inescapable lacuna that persists through the novel’s conclusion.

## **2.2 Between Allegory and Realism**

Criticism on *Life & Times of Michael K* tends to characterize it as either a realist representation of late-apartheid South Africa, or as an allegory for the way a totalitarian bureaucracy can obliterate the human capacity for sympathy and encroach on the world’s unpatrolled spaces. This critical debate had diminished somewhat since the end of apartheid, but I turn to it now because it speaks to the political conditions in which Coetzee wrote. For instance, Susan VanZanten Gallagher, arguing for a New Historicist approach to Coetzee’s work, describes *Michael K* in terms of the apocalyptic, pre-revolutionary atmosphere that defined South Africa in the early 1980s (136), while David Attwell contextualizes the novel in debates about multinationalism in the first half of the decade, which led to the creation of a South African tricameral parliament in 1984 (90). Gallagher also outlines the correspondence between

apartheid-related events that occurred in South Africa in the early 1980s and the events of *Michael K*. For instance, mandatory conscription was instituted in 1978 to supply forces for multiple border conflicts, and the Visagie grandson in Coetzee's novel is a deserting soldier (61). There was a marked increase in guerrilla attacks between the late 1970s and early 1980s (mirrored by the attack on Prince Albert in *Michael K*, 89),<sup>19</sup> and increased security made travel around the country difficult, especially for the non-white population (which figures in Michael and Anna K's inability to obtain a permit to leave the Cape for the Karoo, 22).<sup>20</sup> These parallels led critics and reviewers in South Africa to see Michael K's political stance as representative of Coetzee's, which subsequently meant that K's decision not to join the guerrillas was used as proof of Coetzee's liberal complicity. For instance, a reviewer in the *African Communist* (identified only as Z.N.) believed that the "absence of any meaningful relationship between Michael K and anybody else" meant that "those interested in understanding or transforming South African society can learn little from the life and times of Michael K" (qtd. in Attwell 92). Nadine Gordimer, in her widely cited review of the novel, declared *Michael K* "magnificent" and even sympathized with Coetzee for wanting to hold himself "clear of events [in South Africa] and their daily, grubby, tragic consequences." Yet Gordimer, too, criticized Coetzee for K's sense of removal, arguing that the author "did not recognize what the victims [of apartheid], seeing themselves as victims no longer, have done, are doing, and believe they must do for themselves" (n. pag.). It seems that *Life & Times of Michael K*'s correspondences to its historical context and apparent adherence to the tenets of social realism subsequently made the novel *more*

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<sup>19</sup> The likely inspiration for the Prince Albert attack in *Michael K* was the attacks on SASOL plants in Sasolburg, on the night of May 31<sup>st</sup>/June 1<sup>st</sup> 1980.

<sup>20</sup> For further details on the parallels between *Life & Times of Michael K* the concurrent South African situation, see Gallagher (138-40). She also details speculations of apocalypse (140-42).

vulnerable to attacks of hermetic moral quietude than Coetzee's earlier novels (particularly *Dusklands* and *Heart of the Country*) that exhibit markers of late modernism.<sup>21</sup>

While *Life & Times of Michael K* is geographically specific and depicts a plausible present or near-future, the text's central nexus of struggle (the individual seeking to escape the iron clutches of the state), combined with an intentional lack of specificity on certain key points can be used to support an allegorical reading.<sup>22</sup> Attridge details the features of the novel that tempt allegorical interpretation, including the "portrayal of a country ruled by means of military and police coercion, in which there are no unpatrolled spaces for the misfit . . . and in which the liberal conscience struggles . . . to find a way of palliating the violence of the state" (49). We can add to this Michael K's abbreviated last name and multitude of marginal qualities (he is coloured, hare-lipped, inarticulate), which have tempted readers to view him as a sort of ultra-beleaguered Everyman, a symbol both of apartheid's specific cruelties and of the oppressive hardships wrought by the modern world in general. Rita Scholtz, the reader chosen to review *Michael K* for South Africa's Publications Control Board, admired the book for its universal message: it "could be read on many levels—as a fable, as a comment on the human condition in South Africa, as a protest novel: in the sense that it protests against the way in which people are caught up in processes beyond their control" (qtd. in McDonald, "Not Undesirable" 14).<sup>23</sup> Peter

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<sup>21</sup> For a discussion of the late-modernist aspects of Coetzee's first two novels, as well as their distinctiveness from works classified as postmodern, see Attridge Chapter 1.

<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, Attridge initially represents *Michael K* as "an extension of South Africa at the time of writing" (49)—meaning that this kind of allegorical reading (one that Attridge disproves) would see K's South Africa as an allegory for South Africa in the near future, whereas other critics have viewed the novel as an allegory for a much broader universal situation. No matter what the specific form of the allegorical reading, however, both approaches take the contents of the protagonist's journey, and the novel more generally, as standing in for something else.

<sup>23</sup> Of course, allegory also plays a role in the context of censorship, because a text that embodies universal themes (like "struggle") will not then be characterized as promoting localized resistance (i.e., the struggle

Porter, a judge for the 1983 Booker Prize won by Coetzee, described the novel as “a fable for our time,” K the “ideal survivor of a society even more afflicted in its social evils” (qtd. in Kaleidoscope). The disparity between realist and allegorical readings of the novel demonstrates the extent to which elements of *Michael K* can be used as mechanisms of interpretation—on the one hand, the South African apocalyptic setting becomes a means of condemning Coetzee’s political vacillation, while on the other, K’s abbreviated name and elaborated marginality is used to prove his story’s global relevance. Yet each of these reading strategies is complicated by the other. As Attridge points out, the novel has several features that do not support an allegorical reading, including “evocations of the passage of time, moments where interpretation is thwarted, [and] narrative gaps” (49). The novel also lacks several key factors that would support South Africa-specific dystopian readings: for instance, matters of racial distinction are almost entirely omitted from the text,<sup>24</sup> as are indications about when and how the civil war began. These missing pieces severely undermine the argument that *Michael K* is a projection of a plausible South African future.

While the novel’s historical context is important, especially in light of this project (which seeks to situate Coetzee’s writing process within its historical and political contexts), designations of allegory or realism in the novel are only moderately productive. Some critics have turned to the novel’s intertextual elements, specifically its allusions to the works of Kafka,

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of the ANC to overthrow the National Party, for example). Attridge reads McDonald’s work to suggest that “enlightened academic advisors” (33 n.) might have purposely resisted a localized reading in order to ensure that Coetzee’s novels were not banned, although it is important to note that McDonald himself does not hold such a high opinion of Coetzee’s reviewers (see “Not Undesirable” and “The Writer, the Critic, the Censor.”)

<sup>24</sup> K’s racial identity is hinted at in one moment in the novel, when he is admitted to the Kenilworth Camp and listed as “C.M.”, or Coloured Male (*MK* 70). Attridge also points out that we can also assume that Anna K is coloured because she works as a servant for a white family (59 n.). On the other hand, the racial identity of members of the rebel army is never discussed.

to work through these designations.<sup>25</sup> References to Kafka in *Michael K* that critics have identified include K's last name as an homage to Josef K (Attridge 49), the medical officer's references to *The Castle* in Part II,<sup>26</sup> K's hideout on the Visagie farm as a recreation of the unfinished story "The Burrow" (Meljac), and, finally, K's refusal to eat in the Kenilworth camp as a re-enactment of "A Hunger Artist" (Weigl 77).<sup>27</sup> Both Attwell and Weigl employ Kafka as an interpretive tool of their studies. For Weigl, the medical officer's long monologue in Part II "overtaxes the realism of the novel" but Coetzee's interweaving of this metanarrative "with Kafka's text deepens the novel's contact with Gnostic and other mystical traditions of thought," especially because of the hunger artist's position in a "tradition of ritualistic starving (87). The religious connection that Kafka's work provides, can, for Weigl, help answer the question of why Michael K stops eating, a dilemma that the text's realist elements cannot solve. For Attwell, *Michael K* stages a conflict "over the symbolic value of narrating" and argues that K's lack of political position is symptomatic of Coetzee's own concerns with authority (93). The connection to Kafka is therefore a "field of operation" for an "image of resistance in the open-endedness of writing," which thus celebrates the "marginal freedom" of textuality (103). For both Weigl and Attwell, discussing the intertextual elements of *Michael K* is a means of moving forward beyond the difficulties created by the necessary acknowledgement of the novel's political context. The argument for intertextuality thus presents a third way that circumvents the critical binds that arise

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<sup>25</sup> Critics who have explored the Kafka connection in *Michael K* include David Attwell, Theresa Dovey, Patricia Merivale, Eric Meljac, Jane Poyner, and Engelhard Weigl

<sup>26</sup> David Attwell, Peter Horn and Derek Attridge have all pointed out that the Castle referred to in Part II is actually Cape Town's Castle of Good Hope, which doesn't exclude the connection to Kafka's castle but certainly diminishes its force.

<sup>27</sup> Some critics also dismissed the Kafka connection: Gordimer writes that K's last name has no reference to Kafka, for instance, while Christopher Lehmann-Haupt acknowledges the references but finds them overwrought.



from trying to categorize the novel as future-realist or allegorical. In both cases, however, the critical journey to early twentieth-century Prague returns again to early 1980s South Africa and Coetzee's positionality in this cauldron of history. Weigl speculates that *Michael K*'s final lines anticipate a messianic happening (88), while Attwell concludes that Coetzee uses Kafka as a form of resistance to writing under the constraints of a "highly politicized culture" (103).

What can be gained from thinking about intertextuality as a means of navigating the politics of representation? For critics, exploring Coetzee's use of his predecessors has served to ameliorate some of the critical quandaries his novels seem to create—looking beyond an enigmatic novel like *Michael K* to its perceived precedent can thus provide another avenue of interpretation that allows the critic to move beyond abortive questions of allegory or realism. Coetzee has spoken about how he is not a source of hermeneutic authority for his novels, and even emphasized after *Michael K*'s publication that he did not wish to "enter the lists" as a defender of his protagonist (Morphet 2). Despite this reticence, Coetzee's working notebook for *Michael K* reveals his concerns about the way his positionality related to his fiction. The notebook reveals that he used intertextuality as a means of interrogating this positionality, much as his critics would later employ it as a means of addressing *Michael K*'s contextual puzzles. As I will demonstrate, the intertext that Coetzee initially employed for this process was not the work of Kafka, but *Michael Kohlhaas* by Heinrich Von Kleist. In taking up this occluded hypotext, the following section will extend the critical practice of using intertextuality as an interpretive tool and reach further back, to the time of the novel's creation, to track how Coetzee employed Kleist's novella in the early stages of *Michael K*'s composition.

### 2.3 Michael K Reading *Michael Kohlhaas*

*Michael Kohlhaas* begins with the eponymous horse-dealer attempting to cross the border from Brandenburg into neighbouring Saxony with his wares. He is stopped at the castle of the Junker von Tronka and told that he needs a permit that he does not have because, as he later discovers, it does not exist. Leaving two prime black horses and a groom behind as insurance, Kohlhaas carries on to Dresden. He returns two weeks later to find the horses starved and the groom beaten and expelled from the castle. Kohlhaas, trusting in due process, tries to secure redress through official channels, but is continually hindered by the cronyism that plagues the German aristocracy. After several unsuccessful attempts, during one of which his wife is killed, Kohlhaas turns to vigilante justice to secure his aim, recruiting an army of brigands and setting fire to town and countryside in search of the Junker. Kohlhaas is eventually caught, tried for his crimes and sentenced to death by beheading, although he dies a contented man: directly before his death, he is told that the Junker will be imprisoned for his crime and that Kohlhaas's children will be named knights, thus securing the eventual elevation of his family position.

While *Michael K* does contain some passing similarities to its predecessor on the level of plot, it would be difficult to argue that K is a modern-day update of the eighteenth-century Kohlhaas. Peter Horn has identified several “inverse parallels” (63) between the two protagonists: in both novels an arbitrary passport creates a barrier to success,<sup>28</sup> each protagonist flees his home and spends time in jail, and the world of *Michael Kohlhaas*, like *Michael K*, is plagued by violent conflict. However, the two protagonists are fundamentally different:

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<sup>28</sup> This occurs twice in *Michael Kohlhaas*: when Kohlhaas tries to cross the border into Saxony (115), and when he tries to leave Dresden (178). It occurs once in *Michael K*, when K and his mother try to secure papers to leave the restricted zone of the Cape (19-20).

Kohlhaas is a character whose sense of justice is as “fine as a gold balance” (Kleist 120).<sup>29</sup> He travels outside the domain of the law to secure redress for injustice; however, he eventually returns to the law, and his contentment at the tale’s end springs from the knowledge that the Junker will be tried and punished through official channels. Michael K, by contrast, is a figure of radical detachment who tries (unsuccessfully) to avoid contact with either party in the war. Michael K is drawn into conflict against his will and flees it at the first opportunity; Kohlhaas is the source of conflict in which others are unwillingly implicated. And while Kohlhaas is admired as a hero because, as Horn describes it, “he breaks the monopoly of violence of unjust rulers [in embodying] a counter-violence against a corrupt and arbitrary rule” (64), Michael K takes up no such action against figures of injustice. Horn convincingly argues that, because it does not exhibit the same faith as Kleist’s text in the individual’s ability to overcome the monopoly of the corrupt state, Coetzee’s novel rejects this paradigm of counter-violence as “illusory” (64). For this reason, K’s complete detachment makes him a more radical figure than Kohlhaas.

If Michael Kohlhaas is not a model for Michael K, then how is this German novella employed as an intertext in Coetzee’s novel? Coetzee’s notebook demonstrates that he was drawn to Kleist’s text but struggled to employ it as a model. During the early stages of writing, Coetzee focused on sketching out the scenes that take place at the beginning of the published novel, before Michael K and his mother flee Cape Town for the Karoo. The early sketches are set in Sea Point, indicating that Coetzee intended a specific South African setting for the novel from the beginning. The notebook contains several early versions of *Michael K* where *Michael Kohlhaas* features in a prominent way. The first is the “man of liberal conscience” (Gray

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<sup>29</sup> All quotations from *Michael Kohlhaas* are from the Luke and Reeves translation, unless otherwise specified.

notebook 1) who is arguably both a modern-day Michael Kohlhaas and an early sketch of David Lurie. From this outline, Coetzee moves gradually away from the man who resembles a modern-day Kohlhaas and toward the abject wanderer we see in the published novel. In a second sketch, the man returns home to find his house devastated, with feces on the floor in the library and evidence that the robber has “wiped himself with the typescript of a translation of *Michael Kohlhaas*” (Gray notebook 2). In another sketch from the notebook, written in April 1980, an aging coloured couple resides in Sea Point; the man is working on a poem called “Michael Kohlhaas” (Gray notebook 2-3). The third draft of the novel, begun in December 1980, is narrated by a nine-year-old boy who lives with his grandmother in Sea Point and whose father is “Michael K”; the old woman reads the stories of Michael to her grandson by candlelight (*MK* Version 3.1 4).<sup>30</sup> In the early months of 1981 Coetzee began a fifth version wherein Anna K is Michael’s common law spouse. They flee Cape Town, the dropsy-suffering Anna K secured in her cart, and on the road K thinks admiringly of Kleist’s hero:

It seemed a pity to K that people like Kohlhaas did not exist, or no longer existed (for he prepared to locate him in a past, though he did not know where to locate that past). It did not seem possible to act purely on the embodiment of a passion—say the passion for justice; it seemed that nowadays one was called on to be more various, to act from motives whose ground was mundane (*MK* Version 4.2 20-21)

Two things are notable about these early drafts. First, while Coetzee’s first protagonist—the man of liberal conscience— somewhat resembles the narrators from his earlier novels in terms of status and privilege, Coetzee soon began sketching characters who were marginalized in some

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<sup>30</sup> Citations of drafts go by draft, book, and page numbers. So *MK* Version 3.1 4 signifies *Life & Times of Michael K* draft 3, book 1, page 4.

way, whether in terms of race, class, age, or physical ability. Secondly, and perhaps because of this, the early versions almost exclusively incorporate references to *Michael Kohlhaas* through acts of reading and writing. Coetzee evidently decided not to include an embodied, updated Kohlhaas in his new novel but instead chose to represent Kleist's novella hermeneutically.

The majority of these attempts at incorporating *Michael Kohlhaas* into his fourth novel proved untenable for Coetzee. He identified this problem at an early stage of the writing process. In June 1980, he writes that he wishes to draw upon the "passion and urgency" of *Michael Kohlhaas* by creating an "interpretive translation" (Gray notebook 6), but that he is confronted by two seemingly insurmountable issues. The first of these is technical; Coetzee believes that he doesn't know Kleist's novella well enough to reinterpret it. The second block is closely related to his own identity: he shows "no advance in [his] position" from *Waiting for the Barbarians*, his most recent novel (Gray notebook 6). The need to advance his thinking is as much related to the political situation of South Africa as it is to his own authorial development: "In the present conflict," he reflects, "the material interests of the intellectual elite and the oppressors are the same. There is a fundamental flaw in all my novels: I am unable to move from the side of the oppressors to the side of the oppressed. Is this a consequence of the insulated life I lead?" (Gray notebook 6-7).<sup>31</sup> This excerpt reveals two key things about Coetzee's writing process. The first is that he was thinking about his positionality in the contemporary South African situation when he began writing *Michael K*, and that he felt an express need to advance his position from that of the

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<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, this entry was written on June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1980, the fourth anniversary of the Soweto Uprising of June 16, 1976.

conflicted liberal conscience of the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians*.<sup>32</sup> Secondly, and more significantly, this thinking was bound up with the use of *Michael Kohlhaas* as an intertext. In the paragraph before the one wherein he articulates the obstacles to his writing, Coetzee conceives of the couple (Michael and Anna K) as being “locked away from the flow of history,” the man devoted “to the art of *MK*” (Gray notebook 6).<sup>33</sup> The desire to craft a narrative of devotion to art, one that is expressly insulated from historical events, is the desire that Coetzee struggles with and fights against in the composition of *Michael K*. Thus, it appears, his desire to rewrite *Michael Kohlhaas* is at odds with the ethical imperative to both advance his authorial position and pay heed to the “present conflict,” the riots, strikes, bombings, pass laws, police torture, and threat of imminent civil war by which he, and all South Africans, were surrounded in 1980.

Despite this blockage, Coetzee continued with attempts to incorporate textual references to *Michael Kohlhaas* into *Life & Times of Michael K*. The texture of this reference eventually changed from Kohlhaas as a kind of father figure to K encountering Kohlhaas through the act of reading. In Version 5 of the novel, composed in January 1981, K stumbles upon an edition of *Michael Kohlhaas* in one of the empty Sea Point flats. The book is unnamed, but the story of the horse-dealer from Brandenburg is undeniably that of Kohlhaas, and Michael K is “gripped by the urgency of the storytelling and admire[s] more than a little the brigand hero” (*MK* Version 5.2 9).

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<sup>32</sup> Coetzee’s conflict about his positionality here stems from the fact that he is “outraged by tyranny, but only because I cannot identify with the tyrants, not because I love . . . their victims” (Gray notebook 6). Thus we can deduce that an advance on the position he takes in *Waiting for the Barbarians* would involve some kind of movement beyond this static rage at tyranny into political action or, at the very least, alliance with the oppressed classes.

<sup>33</sup> These are also the initials of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the armed military wing of the ANC—a misleading hint at K’s potential for resistance.

However, in this draft the waterlogged book is missing its last pages, so K is left wondering what becomes of the vigilante Kohlhaas, although he suspects that the “authorities had no mercy on him” (*MK* Version 5.1 8). In the same draft, Michael and Anna K strike out from Cape Town; on the road, K thinks of the horse-dealer and imagines him “leading his two starved nags to safety across a Saxon landscape of rugged mountains, whistling heaths and burning castles, across which bands of vengeful horsemen dashed holding burning torches” (*MK* Version 5.5 33). In Version 6, K also comes across an old newspaper in the wrecked Sea Point flat, and reads the headline “KHAMIESKROON MURDERER TRACKED DOWN,”<sup>34</sup> which is printed “over the picture of a handcuffed man standing between two policemen...[looking] straight back at the camera with what seemed to be a smile of triumph” (*MK* Version 6.2 14). The reference to Kohlhaas remains in this draft: on the next page Michael K yet again discovers the horse-dealer’s tale among the Buhrmanns’ waterlogged books, and yet again admires the brigand hero and the narrative’s urgent pace. Version 6 is the most extended draft to date, and includes an early meditation in the first person on K’s stay on the Visagie farm, followed by his capture by the army and internment. In the early scenes of Version 7, K yet again encounters the photo of the Khamieskroon killer in the Buhrmanns’ flat. However, the direct reference to *Michael Kohlhaas* found in earlier drafts is omitted from this version. K’s reaction to the reading material in the Buhrmanns’ flat now closely resembles the scene we find in the published novel: K dries out the waterlogged volumes, but the narrator informs us that he had “never liked books, and found nothing to engage him in life-stories of military men and long novels about people with names

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<sup>34</sup> It is possible that this is related to an actual event, but my research in this regard has, to this date, not yielded concrete proof. Coetzee recorded his decision to make this change in the notebook. In March 1981 he writes “maybe we can drop the idea of K reading *MK* in Sea Point and instead have him reading a front page report on the Khamieskroon affair, with a picture of the man in chains” (Gray notebook 23).

like Lavinia” (*MK* Version 7.2 15). This omission persists throughout all subsequent drafts of *Michael K*. There are no further references to Kohlhaas in subsequent drafts or in the published novel, save for the echo provided by the title.

The course followed by references to *Michael Kohlhaas* through the early drafts of *Michael K*, from direct quotation, to textured engagement, to imperceptible titular citation, demonstrates Coetzee’s intertextual practice. In the preliminary versions of *Life & Times of Michael K*, Coetzee attempts to include this reference first in terms of origins (Version 3) and then later through acts of reading (Versions 4, 5 and 6). Although the early references were deleted, these early drafts show an intense preoccupation on Coetzee’s part with the story of Kohlhaas. How was the significance of this intertext retained in *Life & Times of Michael K* despite the omission of all references to it in Part I of Coetzee’s novel?

#### **2.4 The German Novella and Contingency as Resistance**

An examination of the German novella’s status as a genre of resistance further elucidates why Coetzee may have been drawn to the work of Heinrich Von Kleist. Andreas Gailus describes Goethe’s *Unterhaltungen* (1795) as the first “modern” German novella that sparked an explosion of the genre in the early 1800s (Gailus 748). The German novella is distinguished from earlier examples of the genre, such as Boccaccio’s fourteenth-century *Decameron*, because it is a “genre of crisis” that endows random chance with foundational narrative power. The novella is defined by an unfathomable inner mystery, an “unheard-of event” (748), that stands in resistance to two predominant discursive forms of the early nineteenth century: historiography and the *Bildungsroman*, or novel of education. Historiography attempts to eliminate chance from narrative by contextualizing the foreign strangeness of the present in terms of the past and the future (750), while the *Bildungsroman*, and, by extension, the realist novel, domesticates



contingency by “rendering it a necessary complement to human freedom” (761). The ruling principle of the *Bildungsroman* is teleology: the protagonist progresses through a tumultuous youth, in which he is faced with difficult choices and meets with occasional ill-luck, toward eventual balanced and well-ordered maturity. Both historicist conceptions of progress and *Bildungsromane* succeed in domesticating the new by evicting random chance from a narrative composed of select events.

The novella is a reaction against the exclusion of chance from narrative because, according to Gailus, contingency is the ruling principle of the genre. In endowing chance with foundational narrative power, the novella represents the blind spot of the self, which is doubly inscribed as perpetual uncertainty about one’s biological origins and the impossibility of true self-transparency (754). Chance in the novella thematizes the inevitable failure of intentional action because it acts as a “foreign power that thwarts the character’s designs” (762).

Contingency is the genre’s ruling principle both on the large scale of events (happenings that do not fit into a narrative of progress) and on the level of the individual (one cannot escape the contingency of his or her origins). Gailus argues that Kleist expresses contingency’s power better than any other author of the period because his works make visible the anachronic narrative axis, which is the “virtual space of potential, though unnarrated, events” (763). Kleist’s novellas are therefore defined by a series of coincidences that almost always end in the violent death of the protagonist. Because contingency, rather than progress, defines these stories, Kleist’s protagonists must prove themselves “worthy of the event” befalling them, and must be capable of “affirming [the event] in its contingency and its necessity” (765). According to Gailus, Kleist’s characters almost always fail at this by refusing to acknowledge the event’s contingency

(765): like the heroes of *Bildungsromane*, they try to domesticate the event into a logical teleology. Because progress has no place in the novella, this domestication inevitably fails.

*Michael Kohlhaas* exemplifies the contingency that Gailus describes. Gailus notes that the German phrase “Es traf sich, daß,” which means “it just so happened that,” occurs twenty-two times in Kleist’s corpus (763). In the English translation of *Michael Kohlhaas* by David Luke and Nigel Reeves, such phrases occur at least thirteen times: when Kohlhaas enters the Junker’s castle, “chance would have it” (116) that the Junker is drinking with friends in the hall; later, Kohlhaas “happen[s] to be in Brandenburg” at the same time as the Elector. “As ill luck would have it” (183),<sup>35</sup> a messenger carrying a letter to Kohlhaas falls into a fit upon entering Dresden, and directly before Kohlhaas’s execution, “it chance[s]” (205) that the Chamberlain has recruited the same gypsy woman to gain access to the horse-dealer’s quarters.<sup>36</sup> Chance in *Michael Kohlhaas* thus takes on the “structure-bearing role” (764) that Gailus describes as key to Kleist’s works in particular and the modern German novella in general.

Gailus argues that almost all of Kleist’s protagonists fail to respond to the contingency of the event that befalls them. For Gailus, the only Kleistian character who does prove worthy is Toni of *The Betrothal of Santo Domingo* (765). Although Gailus does not discuss contingency in *Michael Kohlhaas*, this character’s reaction to the gypsy woman’s prophecy falls under a similar rubric of worthiness “of the event” as Toni’s does in Kleist’s other novella. In this section, Kohlhaas is given a piece of paper by a gypsy woman in Jüterbock which contains a prophecy about the Elector of Saxony; the Elector discovers that Kohlhaas has the prophecy and tries to

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<sup>35</sup> The frequency of phrases alters depending on the translation. A comparison between the Luke and Reeves translation and a Frances King translation shows that some of these phrases do not occur in both editions. However, the Luke and Reeves translation included some that were not included in the King translation, and vice versa—demonstrating chance’s overall significance in *Michael Kohlhaas*.

<sup>36</sup> For additional references to chance, see pp. 139, 165, 167, 171, 181, 186, 188, 190, 203.

obtain it from Kohlhaas before his execution. Kohlhaas refuses to oblige and swallows the prophecy before his death, causing the Elector to return to Saxony “physically and mentally a broken man” (213). This is a key component of Kohlhaas’s victory at the end of his tale.

However, as Clayton Koelb notes, many critics have considered this part of the novella, in which the narration shifts focus from Kohlhaas’s horses to the prophecy, to be an unnecessary detour that derails the novella’s “potentially successful realism” (1098). Koelb disagrees with these readings and argues that the prophecy subplot is continuous with the novella’s concerns.

Kohlhaas’s consumption of the letter “establishes reading as the means by which the story reaches its resolution” (1104) because, in eating the prophecy, Kohlhaas achieves a religious unity with the text. At this point in the tale, Kohlhaas is destined for the executioner’s axe because of his crimes. He achieves justice for the Junker’s crime against him, but the act of eating the prophecy allows him to achieve a broader form of vengeance against the Junker’s cronies, who had previously blocked him from finding justice in the courts. The unity between text and self that occurs when Kohlhaas literally consumes the text also exemplifies the “Romantic desire to recuperate and revivify the dead past by reading,” thus proving that “an act of reading may be both destructive and regenerative at the same time” (1106). Koelb’s analysis of *Michael Kohlhaas* demonstrates how an element of the text that complicates a neat generic reading—because the gypsy prophecy intrudes upon the novella’s realism—actually represents an essential thematic component of the text. This incursion is also the place where the modern German novella and Romanticism align, because Kohlhaas’s response to the event both Romantically unites text with self and, by ensuring his vengeance against the Junker, provides him with a degree of security against the novella’s profoundly anti-teleological universe.

## 2.5 The Modern Novella in *Life & Times of Michael K*

How are the defining elements of the German novella, which include contingency as a founding principle, a resistance to historiography, and an unavoidable gap at the centre of meaning, related to the concerns of Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K*? There are several components of Coetzee's text that serve as connecting fibres to the genre of the novella in general and the specifics of that genre as exemplified in *Michael Kohlhaas*. Evidence in both Coetzee's notebook and in the published text proves he was concerned with the same opposition between contingent event and grand historical narrative that Gailus describes. Coetzee was actively working against realism during the composition of *Michael K*, perhaps in response to the demand for the adoption of that genre in South Africa at the time. In December 1980 he writes of a "block against the principle of linear narrative" (Gray notebook 12); in March 1981 this becomes an imperative when he expresses the need for liberation from verisimilitude (Gray notebook 20). He also expresses a desire to metafictionalize his work by slipping "in a paragraph on the theory of realism" at some point in the novel (Gray notebook 17). This resistance to realism is closely followed by an acknowledgement of the role that contingency plays in K's life: it is "just one thing after another; who could give it meaning?" (Gray notebook 20). Throughout this process Coetzee resists coalescing Michael K's story into a linear, realist narrative because, like the authors of novellas in early nineteenth century Germany, he recognizes the limitations of this form and the propensity of the realist genre to exclude the unheard-of event. K's life is as close to an "unheard-of event" as one can find in Coetzee's contemporary South Africa; he is not the hero of a *Bildungsroman* but the "stony ground" (MK 48), a "parasite dozing in the gut" (116). The limitations of realism are also expressed intertextually. Part I of *Michael K* includes several references to *Robinson Crusoe*, the first English realist novel and the focus of Coetzee's

next novel, *Foe*. K is continuously positioned in opposition to Defoe's industrious bourgeois hero. When he inhabits the mountain cave after his first stay on the Visagie farm, the narrator informs us that "he did not turn his cave into a home or keep a record of the passage of the days" (68), as Crusoe does on his desert island. Later, when he returns to the farm, we are again told that he does not record the passage of time because he is not "a prisoner or a castaway" (115). The fact that these reflections are mediated through a third-person narrator means K is most likely not *consciously* opposing himself to Robinson Crusoe. Nonetheless, these references diegetically express the limitations of realism in Part I of the novel, because they demonstrate that K does not wish (directly or abstractly) to mark his time away from civilization as a definable period with a narrative arc.

In Part II of *Life & Times of Michael K*, K is picked up by the army, charged with supplying the rebel army with produce from his garden, and brought to a rehabilitation camp. This section is narrated by the camp's medical officer, and it is here that the limits of realism as teleological narrative are further thematized through metafictional devices. Part II of *Michael K* bears a similar relationship to the rest of the novel as the gypsy prophecy section does to the remainder of *Michael Kohlhaas* because it intrudes upon realist interpretations. Koelb notes that the subtitle of *Michael Kohlhaas*, "from an old chronicle," caused readers to hold it to a higher standard of verisimilitude than a novella such as *St Cecilia, Or the Power of Music*, which was dubbed "a legend" (1099). Dominic Head describes how the title of Coetzee's novel "announces a challenge" in "alluding directly to a tradition of thinking about individual identity in relation to history" (93) represented in such genres as the *Bildungsroman*, the historical novel or the political memoir. In referring to works that treat the formation of individual identity, the title sets up readerly expectations for a realist chronicle of Michael K's life and times. These expectations

are subsequently disappointed by reading Part II, because in this section the doctor lays bare the novel's theoretical concerns through several extended meditations on the nature of history. Part II frustrates a realist reading of *Michael K* because soliloquies on historicism are atypical to traditional biographical chronicles. It also positions K's life story as a singular event that is threatened with extinguishment by the sweeping narrative of historical progress. The word "history" appears eight times in Part II and not once in Parts I and III.<sup>37</sup> The medical officer first imaginarily encourages K to speak, praising him for being a "soul untouched by doctrine, untouched by history" (151) and warning him that his tale will remain a mere aberration and that he will "perish in obscurity and be buried in a nameless hole" (152) unless he gives voice to his story. Later, the doctor explicitly describes history as a deliberate progression of events when he pictures "currents of time swirling and eddying all about us, on the battlefields and in the military headquarters . . . murkily at first, yet tending ever towards a moment of transfiguration in which pattern is born from chaos and history manifests itself in all its triumphant meaning" (158). The doctor expresses a desire to be a part of this history, to participate in the "suprasensual spinning of the gyroscopes of the Grand Design" (158), but he also recognizes Michael K as an unheard of event<sup>38</sup> that has intruded upon his complacency.<sup>39</sup> So while Part II of *Michael K* resembles the gypsy prophecy in *Michael Kohlhaas*, in that it complicates realist readings of the text, it moves beyond the concerns of the modern German novella by explicitly thematizing the concerns of that genre, concerns that are embedded, although not as explicitly

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<sup>37</sup> see pages 151, 152, 158, 159 and 161.

<sup>38</sup> Gailus discusses the various definitions of "unheard-of:" a) never before heard, b) unusual or singular, and c) scandalous (748). K embodies all three definitions: he is both ordinary and singular, since for the doctor, his whole life is a kind of scandal, to the point that "it was a mistake from beginning to end" (155).

<sup>39</sup> The medical officer tells K: "I did not ask you to come here. Everything was well with me before you came. I was happy, as happy as one can be in a place like this. Therefore I too ask: Why me?" (149).

stated, in the novel's bracketing sections. The doctor's section simultaneously undermines *Michael K* as a realist text and positions K's story as one caught between the contingency of the singular event and history as a sweeping narrative that neutralizes contingency.

Despite the doctor's resistance to the narrative of progress promoted by war propaganda, he still reveals a desire to stuff K into a teleological framework by assigning meaning to his stay in the camp. After K's escape, the doctor reflects that he should have followed him, or should have remained in a state of constant readiness with a "packet of biscuits and a can of sardines" and slept across K's doorsill until the moment of his departure arrived (161). In other words, he believes that he has failed in the same way that Kleist's protagonists fail to prove unworthy of the event, because he did not take the opportunity to follow K out of the camp. The doctor professes to recognize the nature of this failure, lamenting that "the only chance I had is gone, and gone before I knew" (165). However, even this failure demonstrates a desire to appropriate K's story. The doctor insists that K's meaning is essential and emergent from K himself (165); the irony of this insistence is that we know it to be wrong, that the doctor has *misread* his patient to the extent that he calls him the wrong name, "Michaels." While the hero of the modern German novella reacts, in a pure and unmediated way, to the event that befalls him, the camp doctor in *Michael K* wishes obsessively to prove worthy of the event that he is anticipating. This desire leads him to assign an overdetermined meaning to his emaciated patient by situating K in the context of his own personal narrative, thus demonstrating his complicity in historical processes despite his professed resistance to them.

The medical officer's narrative also makes the reader aware of her complicity in historical processes. This section is narrated in the first person, making the camp doctor's thoughts and motivations more readily available to the reader than Michael K's. This creates an

affinity between reader and camp doctor that rests in opposition to K's inaccessible alterity. Furthermore, the doctor's repeated failed attempts to "read" K alert us to the fact that *we* have been (mis)reading his story as well—and, perhaps, trying to read meaning into it, whether as a parable of universal suffering or as a realist portrayal of apartheid's breakdown. Upon *Michael K*'s publication, reviewers such as Cynthia Ozick lamented that the doctor's section "thickens the clear tongue of the novel by naming its "message,"" expressing unease at the way Part II of the novel disrupts the arc of K's narrative by articulating the novel's metafictional concerns. I argue in contrast that the value of this section lies in its act of naming, in its drawing our attention to the fact that K's story cannot be assimilated to a comprehensible narrative framework, despite the doctor (or the reader)'s best efforts.

## **2.6 A Lacuna in My Own Position: Author, Character, Reader**

While Part II of *Life & Times of Michael K* explicates the limitations of historical progress and thematizes the novella's concerns with contingency, the ethical centre of the novel is found at an earlier point, during K's stay on the Visagie farm. In December 1981, Coetzee writes of the need for "something *between* the solution of taking up arms....and the option of going on as before, waiting for the war to blow over, just enduring" (Gray notebook 54). It is clear at this point that a modern recreation of Michael Kohlhaas was not feasible for Coetzee; he is thus seeking a third representative option that is neither violent rebellion (represented by the rebels in *Michael K*) or liberal complicity (enacted most evidently by the doctor, but also represented by such minor characters as the Buhrmanns or the nurse in Stellenbosch). This third option seems to appear when K is given the opportunity to join the guerrillas. He emerges from his burrow one evening to see young men in camouflage camping on the farm. Realizing that they are rebels, K briefly considers joining them, but almost immediately decides against it:



K knew that he would not crawl out and stand up and cross from darkness into firelight to announce himself. He even knew the reason why: because enough men had gone off to war saying the time for gardening was when the war was over; whereas there must be men to stay behind and keep gardening alive, or at least the idea of gardening; because once that cord was broken, the earth would grow hard and forget her children. That was why. (109)

This decision seems at first to typify a viable form of resistance: that of conscious detachment and radical passivity, a rejection of both sides of the conflict in favour of a valorization of the earth and a profoundly anti-modern form of ecological sensitivity. This form of detachment resists historiography and teleology-based narrative, just as the German novella does, but it also resists the kind of violent rebellion taken up by Michael Kohlhaas and the rebels of *Michael K*. Because it presents a third option between endurance and rebellion, this scene has received much attention from critics in the context of the novel's (and Coetzee's) politics. For instance, Nadine Gordimer writes that this scene confirms the "idea of gardening" as the work's central creed, wherein K's sole joy is in growing pumpkins that are safe from the "just and unjust marauding of history." This distortion of the unity between private and social destiny is, for Gordimer, what prevents *Michael K* from being a great novel. Coetzee's notebook demonstrates that he was aware of the political sensitivity of this moment at the time of composition and that he knew a moment of such conscious pacifism could not be represented without criticism. On September 9, 1981, he writes, referencing his most recent draft (Version 6), that "the message of the book comes as close to being expressed on p. 116 as anywhere" (Gray notebook 46). The page in question is an early version of K's decision not to join the guerrillas, initially recounted in the first person, in which K expresses the desire to be "the one gardener who was a gardener

throughout. Who did not hoe and plant in order that a war should be won . . . but because the earth called to be hoed and planted” (MK Version 6.15 116). It is clear from Coetzee’s notebook, as well as from critical analyses of the published novel, that the “message” of *Life & Times of Michael K* lies in K’s decision not to join the guerrillas.

In the notebook for *Michael K*, Coetzee acknowledges the ethical problem of representing a position that consciously withdraws from the conflict.<sup>40</sup> He continues his September 9, 1981, entry by writing that “the only defensible strategy the book can have is to be a critique of this message” (Gray notebook 46). The notebook demonstrates that Coetzee did not intend to *neutrally* represent K’s passivity—but how did he subsequently craft a strategy to critique this problematic message? Ten months later, in July 1982, Coetzee expands on the need to critique this position and explicitly aligns K’s position with his own:

Going off with the guerrillas is thematized as a lacuna in his story. It is a lacuna in the logic of his political progression, a lacuna in my own position. It is an unbridgeable gap (and must be so with all comfortable liberal whites) and the best one can do is not to leave it out but to present it as a gap. (Gray notebook 78)

The word “lacuna” carries a double significance here: it means both a “gap” and an “empty space” and signifies a missing portion of a text (OED), implying something that has been wilfully excised or omitted. In the published text of *Michael K*, Coetzee’s lacuna is represented as a gap that K identifies immediately after deciding not to join the guerrillas:

Between this reason and the truth that he would never announce himself,

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<sup>40</sup> Of course, conscientious objection and pacifism more generally have been adopted as moral positions throughout the history of violent conflict. However, Coetzee doesn’t appear to have considered pacifism as a moral path in this case because he so clearly abhors the enforcers and supporters of apartheid.

however, lay a gap wider than the distance separating him from the firelight.

Always, when he tried to explain himself to himself, there remained a gap, a hole, a darkness before which his understanding baulked, into which it was useless to pour words. The words were eaten up, the gap remained. His was always a story with a hole in it: a wrong story, always wrong. (110)

Coetzee evidently arrived at the decision to represent the gap as a result of thinking through K's detachment as it related to his own positionality as a "comfortable liberal white." Version 6, the first draft wherein the "message" of the book is represented, from September 1981, does not contain this acknowledgement of the gap. K's position in this draft is also more explicitly political: he does "not believe in total war," and, having "excerpted this [garden] plot from the tyranny of total ownership" he does not wish it to become involved in the war or "fall into another system of regimentation" (MK Version 6.15 116). K's decision-making process is not nearly so straightforward in the published novel: he makes the decision, but is unable to account for it, and the gap before which his understanding baulks is the gap that prevents self-justification. Coetzee's notebook therefore aligns his position with the position of his protagonist. The gap for K is also the gap for Coetzee, a gap that prevents self-justification for his decision *not* to write a novel that comes out clearly in favour of apartheid resistance. The gap that K experiences undermines his decision to withdraw from the war and remain a gardener: by the end of the novel, he believes himself to be more like an "earthworm" or a "mole" (MK 182). The fact that K's identification as a gardener—the occupation he ostensibly chooses over and against joining the guerrillas—begins to break down by the novel's end means that his withdrawal cannot be refigured in the terms of a return to a form of idealized South African pastoral.

This gap, which is central to the ethical concerns of *Life & Times of Michael K*, places Coetzee's novel within the tradition of the modern German novella because it represents the blind spot of the self.<sup>41</sup> Gailus argues that the "unheard-of event" that constitutes the German novella is an "unfathomable inner mystery" wherein "the obstacle to be overcome by the novella's protagonist is the protagonist him- or herself" (745). Because this inner mystery is irresolvable, it cannot come to a conclusion without the utter destruction of the novella's protagonist. The *Bildungsroman* proceeds from primary to secondary observation, in that the protagonist is initially observed by the narrator but comes to reflect on the meaning of his story at its end; thus, the protagonist is eventually unified with the narrator in his capacity for self observation. The novella deconstructs this model because the "unheard-of event is . . . that blind spot upon which the pedagogical ideal of complete self-transparency founders" (Gailus 755). Michael K is similarly incapable of self-transparency and founders at the attempt to justify his own detachment from the world.

*Michael K* differs from the novellas described by Gailus on one important point: in the novella, the "unfathomable inner mystery" comes to be resolved *despite* the protagonist's destruction, whereas the gap that K experiences persists through the novel's conclusion. In *Michael Kohlhaas*, the protagonist consumes the written prophecy before he, or the reader, is able to learn of its contents; but this is secondary to the fact that Kohlhaas's eating achieves the sought-after Romantic unity between text and self, a unity that erases the blind spot by filling the self with text. This "inner mystery" is never resolved in *Life & Times of Michael K*. Novellas

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<sup>41</sup> Gailus also describes how the novella prefigures Freudian psychoanalysis in both form and content (758-760). The blind spot of the self, like the unconscious, prevents complete self-knowledge, while Freud's reports seem to mimic the structure of novellas. Another line of inquiry from the present analysis might examine the intersection of the novella, psychoanalytic theory, and *Michael K*.

such as *Michael Kohlhaas* suggest that the blind spot is ultimately resolvable, even if this resolution is dependent upon the death of the protagonist: Kohlhaas may die at the end of his story, but he dies with the assurance of the elevation of his family position and the knowledge that justice has been meted out. *Life & Times of Michael K* offers no such resolution, even that of death: the novel ends with an emaciated K imagining a return to the Visagie farm, where he could subsist on drops of water fished from the depths of the earth by a spoon (184). We are uncertain about Michael K's fate: he may die of starvation, or he may endure and continue to exist as a gardener-cum-earthworm outside the forces of history. The novel's ambiguous ending means that K's inner mystery, his inability to justify himself, remains. Furthermore, Coetzee's notebook proves that this gap is part of an authorial strategy to undermine the ethical argument for withdrawal. The blind spot of the self in *Michael K* is bound to the politics of representation and to Coetzee's own particular position in South Africa at the time of writing.

Both *Michael Kohlhaas* and the broader concerns of the German novella are essential to an understanding of Coetzee's working-through his own positionality in the creation of his fourth novel. While Part II of *Life & Times of Michael K* is germane to the novel's ethical project because its metafictional qualities externalize resistance to narratives of historical progress and undermine both realist and allegorical readings of the novel, the ethics of reading emerges most forcefully in the scene wherein K chooses not to join the guerrillas. Because K acknowledges the gap, the experience of hesitation created by it persists, for both the reader and K, through to the end of novel. Knowing that K questions his decision not to join the guerrillas, the reader cannot easily assimilate this withdrawal to a narrative of idealized earthly engagement; for both reader and K, this "third way" is not an easy solution to the question of whether to take up arms or insulate oneself from the war. In an essay where she compares the experience of reading

Coetzee's *Disgrace* to reading Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, Laura Moss argues that the pedagogical value of Coetzee's novels lie in the experience of hesitation that they create (138). *The Turn of the Screw* traps readers in an experience of the fantastic that they remain in beyond the novella's conclusion because James makes it impossible to decide whether the ghosts the governess claims to see are real or hallucinations (134). Similarly, Moss writes, "Coetzee renders his readers 'shaken' between reading literally and figuratively but he also has the characters hesitate to rest well-aligned with one interpretative strategy. In the end, Coetzee makes it difficult for a reader to emerge from her own hesitation" (137). Moss suggests that one strategy for reading Coetzee's work is to register and acknowledge the discomfort created by these dual readings, which remain irreconcilable (138). I argue that *Michael K* goes one step further in this experience of dual readings because it also registers the moment of hesitation, and this moment is one that persists for the remainder of the novel. This form of hesitation is by no means prescriptive, and, because it is not, the novel is somewhat pessimistic about the degree to which ethics can be effectually realized in the political realm. Nor are we necessarily meant to read K as exclusively aligned with, or representing a version of, Coetzee himself. Attridge warns against this move, arguing that "to treat Michael K as a representative of the author...is to bring him prematurely within the circle of the same, overlooking the stylistic movements that keep him constantly opaque" (7). *Michael K*'s drafts and associated notebooks also tempt this reading, because Coetzee explicitly identifies K's position with his own, but this identification doesn't mean that we can read K *only* in that way. Rather, I argue that this experience of hesitation created by K's moment of indecision both demonstrates a failed political awareness on K's part and indicates an *experientially* ethical awareness that the decision not to decide—to watch from the sidelines, or to grow pumpkins—is not a viable moral alternative to joining the revolutionary

cause. The registration and affective experience of hesitation depicted here carries its own ethical value, particularly as it is embodied in the process of reading.

## Chapter 3 | The “Fortunate Mistress’s” *Foe*: Roxana and the Return of the Intertextual Daughter.

### 3.1 A Novelist’s Novel

In September 1985, J.M. Coetzee wrote a letter to Michelle Lapautre, his French agent. The topic of the letter is *Foe*, his latest novel:

I have been working on a fifth novel since 1983 . . . Could I ask you, ahead of time, whether there is any point in considering [publishing it in] France in this respect? I should perhaps add that the book is in no sense *actuel*—it was conceived years ago, before everything blew up here. In fact I would regard it as a rather private book, a novelist’s novel.” (Lapautre)

Several things are notable about this letter. The first is that Coetzee, writing from South Africa, apparently feels the need to excuse his most recent work for not being “actuel,” or current, enough. The months directly prior to when Coetzee wrote this letter constituted a particularly tense and violent time in South Africa. A state of emergency had been declared in July, which extended police authority and increased censorship. In August, protests continued in the townships, the United States began imposing sanctions on the country, and ANC President Oliver Tambo vowed to intensify the struggle against apartheid. Coetzee’s caveat that his new book is not “current” can be interpreted as a partial apology for not writing about present-day events in South Africa, and as a warning, both to Lapautre and to others in the publishing industry, who might expect him to “speak” for his homeland through his writing. Indeed, this cautionary sentence is not unexpected from an author who had already been criticized for his perceived self-distancing from South African politics—as we have seen, Michael K’s radical



detachment from the world was criticized by members of the anti-apartheid camp upon that novel's release in 1983. Given *Foe*'s subject matter, then, Coetzee's warning to Lapautre is perfectly reasonable: while *Michael K*'s setting is correlative to South Africa in the early 1980s, the central events of *Foe* occur in 1719 and 1720, first on an obscure desert island between Bahia and Bristol, and later in London. Furthermore, both novels are intertextual, but *Michael K*'s oblique references to German-language novels merely makes for a subtle connection between intertextuality, canonicity and European imperialism. By contrast, *Foe*'s central subject is *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), a foundational novel in the British canon, which bestows on Coetzee's fifth novel an evident concern with Eurocentric cultural formations not overtly present in *Life & Times of Michael K*. *Foe*'s postmodern aspects, which include a shifting mixture of narrative voices, a textual aporia represented by the character of Friday, and a collage of intertextual references beyond *Robinson Crusoe*, further supports—at least provisionally—its status as a reflexive novelist's novel.

Given, then, his apparent lack of authorial concern with *public* events in South Africa, Coetzee's decision to characterize his new work as “a private book” seems logical. *Foe* is a “novelist's novel” in two senses: first, because it is an example of textual “transposition”<sup>42</sup> that overtly references works of the British canon, it presupposes a certain level of knowledge about that canon in its audience.<sup>43</sup> It tells the story of Susan Barton, a female castaway who washes up

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<sup>42</sup> Gérard Genette describes transposition as a form of hypertextual practice that amounts to the “serious transformation” of a text (213). A single hypertext can be many different kinds of transposition at once, so *Foe* would come under the headings of thematic transformation (because it changes the ideological basis of *Robinson Crusoe*) and transsexuation (because the narrator becomes a woman), among others.

<sup>43</sup> *Foe* engages with several texts on many different levels: aside from *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxana*, critics have noted references to *Moll Flanders*, Dante, Beckett, Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, *Heart of Darkness*, Gilbert and Gubar's madwoman-in-the-attic, and Rich's poem “Diving into the Wreck.” For a more extensive summary, see Chris Prentice on *Foe*, p. 110.

on Robinson Crusoe[e]’s<sup>44</sup> island and spends a year with Crusoe and his mute manservant Friday before they are rescued. Crusoe perishes en route back to England, leaving Barton with Friday and an insatiable desire to publish her story of exile. *Foe* is also a “novelist’s novel” because it is concerned with metafictional questions of authorship, with the way authors compile narratives from a selection of empirical data and thus necessarily exclude certain voices from that composition: Part III features Daniel (De)foe, the author himself, who disregards Barton’s authorial demands and ultimately reshapes her narrative for his own ends. The fact that Coetzee uses the term “novelist’s novel” to support his description of *Foe* as private sets up a dichotomy between what constitutes a private novel and a public one—private novels are “novelist’s novels,” while “public” ones are presumably those that treat current events. However, just as Michael K’s radical detachment belies a detachment from politics on Coetzee’s part, the notebook in which Coetzee recorded his creative process throughout the composition of *Foe* demonstrates a concern for the way his writing relates to current events in South Africa. Coetzee employed Kleist’s *Michael Kohlhaas* as an intertext in negotiating his positionality, and an intertext in *Foe* serves a similar methodological function: in this case, it is *Roxana*, Defoe’s 1724 fictional rendering of the courtesan narrative.

The presence of *Robinson Crusoe* in *Foe* is significant and has been widely documented by critics. *Roxana* has also been identified as an intertext, but, even so, critics tend to focus on the intertextual presence of *Robinson Crusoe* in Coetzee’s novel, perhaps because the themes of

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<sup>44</sup> At least two names from Defoe’s era are truncated in *Foe*: Robinson Crusoe becomes Crusoe, while Defoe is known as Foe, the author’s family name before he added the aristocratic *De*. As David Attwell persuasively argues, Coetzee’s use of these “preliterary” names “place[s] the transformation of the “literary” into question” (107).

that novel are perceived as more central to Coetzee's authorial project.<sup>45</sup> However, just as Coetzee's notebook reveals that he set out to write *Life & Times of Michael K* with *Michael Kohlhaas* in mind as a model, the notebook he kept while writing *Foe* confirms that he began that novel with the intention of rewriting *Roxana*. The green casebound notebook comprises 110 handwritten pages with entries from December 1982 to June 1985 and, along with the early drafts of *Foe*, it demonstrates Coetzee's increasing frustration with, and eventual abandonment of, *Roxana* as his new novel's primary intertext. In the pages that follow, I investigate *Roxana*'s intertextual significance for Coetzee's fifth novel. First, I identify a prominent critical trend in *Foe* criticism—one that acknowledges *Roxana* as an intertext, but sees its significance ultimately superseded by the weight of Friday's unrelenting silence in the face of Susan Barton's attempts at community and pedagogy. I then trace the introduction, development, and rejection of *Roxana* as a model in the early stages of Coetzee's writing process, using *Foe*'s notebook and drafts as tools for examining *Roxana*'s specific relevance to the published novel. The fourth section of this chapter employs contrapuntal reading to elucidate the interrelation of prostitution, imperialism and mothering in Defoe's fictional whore biography.<sup>46</sup> Finally, I demonstrate how Coetzee's archival material, when examined in concert with a contrapuntal reading of *Roxana*, allows us to see the traces of this intertext in Parts III and IV of *Foe*, wherein the return of Susan Barton's supposed daughter reveals the knotting of imperialism, mothering, prostitution and

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<sup>45</sup> Attridge characterizes *Robinson Crusoe* as "Western culture's most potent crystallization of its concern with the survival of the individual, the fundamentals of civilized life, and the dialectic of master and servant" (70). This, along with the extensive tradition of the Robinsonade to which Coetzee contributes with *Foe*, explains why critics might grant more attention to this intertext than to *Roxana*.

<sup>46</sup> Whore biography is a narrative subgenre, popular in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, that depicted the lives of courtesans in England and France. They were frequently marketed as memoirs and ranged from "euphemistic racy tales to explicit pornography" (Peakman 163). See also *Whore Biographies, 1700-1825*. Ed. Julie Peakman. London: Pickering & Chatto 2006.

authorship in Coetzee's text. This reading not only gestures toward the intersectionality of postcolonial and feminist critique in Coetzee's hypertext, it also allows us to read Defoe's hypotext—and the potential for feminist critiques of imperialism contained therein—differently.

### 3.2 Friday's Withholding at the Critical Centre

Many critics who discuss *Robinson Crusoe* in *Foe* also mention the presence of *Roxana* as an intertext in Coetzee's fifth novel.<sup>47</sup> For instance, Tisha Turk argues that the specific interaction of *Foe* with *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxana* is key to reading the novel because it “transforms selected characters and events from [them] in order to encourage the audience to construct a fictional account of their production” (298). While Turk's analysis grants equal weight to castaway and courtesan narratives, other critics who address *Roxana* tend to begin by discussing *Foe* and its similarities to and differences from *Robinson Crusoe*. They then identify *Roxana* as an intertext and discuss the relationship *Foe* has with Defoe's later novel. While the significance of *Roxana* is acknowledged, almost every critic who discusses *Roxana* moves away from this intertext at the conclusion of his or her analysis, and instead posits Friday, and Friday's refusal to speak, as the heart of *Foe*. So, while *Roxana*'s presence in *Foe* has been critically acknowledged, this attention has generally been limited to using *Roxana* as a bridge that critics cross over in order to reach a final argument about Friday as *Foe*'s representation of inassimilable alterity. I will now discuss two examples of this pattern that illustrate Friday's critical presence in ways that can be fruitfully applied to my intertextual analysis of *Roxana*.

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<sup>47</sup> Turk lists several critics who have recognized the *Roxana* connection, including Derek Attridge, David Attwell, Dominic Head, David Marshall, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Susan VanZanten Gallagher. Others include Robin Runia, Radhika Jones, Jane Poyner (*J.M. Coetzee*), Theresa Dovey (*The Novels of J.M. Coetzee*), and Laura Wright.

Derek Attridge discusses the particularly ethical components of *Foe* through its relationship to the canon, suggesting that, while all of Coetzee's novels display canonical qualities, *Foe* does this most overtly (68). As such, one could argue that Coetzee's novels merely seek admittance to the canon and do not attempt to resist it.<sup>48</sup> However, Attridge believes that *Foe* does challenge the canon through Cruso, Barton, Foe and, most powerfully, Friday. Attridge notes that Coetzee's Cruso scarcely resembles the "figure of bourgeois resourcefulness" (76) we know from Defoe's novel.<sup>49</sup> For Attridge, this is because longstanding isolation has caused the castaway to lose "touch with [culture's] founding narratives and need for narrative" (76). Susan Barton, by contrast, seeks substantiality in narrative, and the fact that her story finally becomes Defoe's *Roxana* (or so we are led to believe) is an example of the way processes of canonization highlight certain stories (the resourceful merchant capitalist on the desert island) while erasing others (the female castaway who joins the exiled bourgeois and his slave). Furthermore, Barton is excluded from the process of *self*-canonization by her "gender, her social status, her economic dependence, and her unfamiliarity" with the requirements for admission to literary canons (76). Attridge situates Barton and the intertextual elements of *Roxana* on one side of his argument, stating that *Foe* critiques the canon by laying bare its exclusionary methods. He goes on to argue that Friday's presence in *Foe* "considerably complicates" (80) this portrayal of Coetzee's fiction because it reveals how the canon silences by *inclusion*: Friday's seeming refusal to communicate his story figures him as an absolute absence. This impenetrable silence has an ethical force

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<sup>48</sup> Some critics have argued exactly this: Benita Parry writes that, with *Foe*, "Coetzee fails not only to move beyond a Eurocentric stage, but inadvertently reimposes the very authority he endeavours to critique" (qtd. in Turk 101).

<sup>49</sup> For instance, Cruso has brought no tools with him from the wreck save a knife (*Foe* 15), and has no desire to record his life on the island or mark the passing of time (18). Cruso has no desire to leave the island (13), and even his accounts of his personal history before exile vary widely from night to night (11).

because it serves as an injunction to “oppressed and oppressing groups to create breaks in...totalizing discourses” (86). Attridge thus utopically believes that *Foe*, and novels like it that also question the ideology of canonization, have the power to alter the institutions from which the canon derives its power (90). It is Friday’s silence in the novel, more so than Barton’s identity as a prototype of Roxana, which demonstrates practices of canonical exclusion and literature’s ability to reverse it.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak positions her study as a supplement to Attridge’s, which, as he admits, focuses on questions of race in *Foe* at the exclusion of a discussion of gender politics in the text (85). As such, Spivak explores the presence of *Roxana* in Coetzee’s novel more deeply than Attridge does. For Spivak, the mother-daughter subplot in *Foe* and Barton’s abandonment of her daughter in Epping Forest marks an aporia in the text, which subsequently demonstrates the “impossibility of restoring the history of empire and recovering the lost text of mothering in the same register of language” (11). The fact that *Foe* divides Barton’s female castaway story into the stories of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxana* implies that feminism and anticolonialism cannot occupy a “continuous (narrative) space” (12). Like Attridge, Spivak moves on from her discussion of Barton and *Roxana* to argue that Friday’s silence is the ethical core of Coetzee’s novel. “It is Friday rather than Susan who is the unemphatic agent of withholding in the text,” she writes, “‘The native,’ whatever that might mean, is not only a victim, he or she is also an agent. He or she is the curious guardian at the margin” (16). Coetzee’s Friday, as the silent guardian of the margin, subverts the “prototype of the successful colonial subject” (14) we see in Defoe’s original novel: this Friday does not possess European facial features, as his original does (*Foe* 6), nor is he able (or willing) to learn English, despite Susan’s multiple attempts to teach him. While Defoe’s Friday makes his way “out of the margin”

(Spivak 14) at the conclusion of *Robinson Crusoe*, Coetzee's Friday remains firmly, resistantly within it. Spivak compellingly elucidates the implications of *Foe* for postcolonial theory and criticism, but for the purposes of my argument, I find her separation of Barton and Friday on the matter of marginality intriguing. Spivak associates Barton with feminist critique and Friday with postcolonial critique, and uses the textual aporia, opened up by the scene in Epping Forest, to demonstrate how these critiques cannot be executed concurrently in Coetzee's text. She concludes from this that Friday's silence carries more critical weight than Barton's conscious withholding (16).<sup>50</sup> For Spivak, the silence of the marginalized colonial subject supersedes the silence of the marginalized white bourgeois female.

The emphasis that critics tend to place on *Robinson Crusoe*'s intertextual presence in *Foe* often leads to readings that connect the work back to its compositional context. Because it lays bare the constructedness of literary canons, Attridge argues that the novel presents a challenge to apartheid, a "political and social system whose founding narratives claim to reflect a prior and 'natural' truth of racial superiority" (80). Simultaneously, it elucidates the difficulties of simply granting a voice to the oppressed "within the socio-cultural discourses that are already in place," and therefore also has important implications for the politics of representation in post-apartheid South Africa (85). For Spivak, *Foe* has important implications for postcolonial theory, because it narrates the impossibility of befriending the "wholly other," and Friday, specifically, is the marker of that limit (18). While Jane Poyner discusses *Roxana* briefly in order to highlight the differences between its protagonist and Susan Barton (*J.M. Coetzee* 95), she also concludes her analysis by centring her argument on Friday. She argues that Barton's (and, by extension, the

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<sup>50</sup> In her conversation with *Foe*, Barton distinguishes between her silence, which is "chosen and purposeful," and Friday's, which is a "helpless silence" (122).

reader's) error is in mistaking Friday's "bodily substantiality for his substance as story," believing that he is nothing until he is "fashioned in discourse" (90). While *Roxana* is discussed as an intertext by each of these critics, its importance is usually reduced in favour of readings centred on Friday that connect *Foe* to South Africa particularly (for Attridge), postcolonial situations more generally (Poyner) and the field of postcolonial pedagogy and criticism (Spivak).

Readings of *Foe* that focus on Friday do so legitimately: he is, as Attridge says, the way in which Coetzee's novel "engages most powerfully with otherness" (80). My interest lies in exploring the kinds of readings that are closed off when we forgo analysis of one subtle intertext in favour of another, more apparent one. Spivak and Attridge both pose important questions of *Foe* through a lens that prioritizes *Robinson Crusoe*'s intertextuality in the novel. As I will demonstrate in the following section, Coetzee initially emphasized *Roxana*'s intertextual presence in Barton's narrative. How can we apply Attridge's question about canonical criteria and Spivak's reading of the maternal aporia to an analysis of *Foe* that accounts for *Roxana*'s importance? In other words, what can we read in to *Foe*'s concerns with authorship, appropriation, and marginality when we treat *Roxana* as the primary intertext of interest? To address these questions, I will first turn to the novel's archival source material, and once again trace Coetzee's process as recorded in his working notebook (1982-1985) and in early sketches of *Foe*.

### **3.3 From Daughter to Mother: The Unviable Intertextuality of *Roxana***

Spivak describes *Foe* as reopening two novels by Defoe that tried to constitute marginality in the eighteenth century. The first, *Robinson Crusoe*, represents the "white man marginalized in the forest" who "encounters Friday the savage in the margin" while the second, *Roxana*, recounts the "individualist female infiltrat[ing] nascent bourgeois society" (4). At the



beginning of her history, Roxana (whose given name is Susan) is indeed marginalized in multiple ways. She is a diaspora Huguenot living in England who is married to a brewer at the age of fifteen. Her family soon perishes, leaving her with “no recourse to family that might stand as a bulwark to the foreign territory around her” (Thorne 332). Her husband, who quickly proves to be a “weak, emptyheaded, untaught Creature” (Defoe 48), eventually squanders his money and disappears, leaving Roxana to care for five children with no viable means of support. She leaves her children in the care of reluctant relatives and takes up an affair with her landlord. This liaison commences a life of prostitution in which Roxana carries on extended affairs with a prince, a merchant, the King of England, and a wealthy Lord, amassing a fantastical quantity of capital in the process. She is eventually undone when one of her abandoned children, a daughter also named Susan, tracks her down and demands filial recognition. The novel ends ambiguously, with Roxana, presuming that her maid Amy has murdered the child, vaguely recounting her subsequent downfall. The novel was published once in Defoe’s lifetime and several more times in the years after his death in 1731. Each subsequent eighteenth-century publication contains an alternate conclusion, one wherein Roxana perishes in jail, and another in which she is happily reunited with her children—alterations that perhaps speak to readers’ initial dissatisfaction with the ambiguity of the original ending.

In his 1999 introduction to the Oxford World’s Classics edition of *Robinson Crusoe*, Coetzee compares it unfavourably to Defoe’s later novels: *Moll Flanders* is “more consistent in its execution,” while “*Roxana*, though uneven, rose to even greater heights” (qtd. in Jones 61). Coetzee’s admiration for *Roxana* is demonstrated by the early drafts of *Foe*, which he commenced writing in June 1983 as a rewrite of Defoe’s final novel wherein Susan Barton,

Roxana's abandoned daughter, is the protagonist. In this first version of *Foe*, Susan<sup>51</sup> is a servant in the Foe household, and brings Mr. Foe meals in his attic study as he writes *Robinson Crusoe*. The draft is narrated in the first person by Susan, who recounts her childhood as Roxana's daughter: her mother came to England to escape persecutions, her father was a malt merchant who gambled away their savings and abandoned the family (*Foe* Version 1.1). Susan's mother left the children with a relative and disappeared with her maid Amy. Years later, Susan takes a service position in the home of a wealthy courtesan, and soon discovers that her employer is in fact her mother, the lady Roxana, who is making her "great confession" to Mr. Foe, so that he may write it "down for all to read, as an awful warning" (*Foe* Version 1.1 6).

The first draft of *Foe*, although quite distinct from Coetzee's published novel, bears important similarities to it. First, concerns about authorship are already evident here: Susan feels a burning desire to have her story told, and knows, inexplicably, that it can only be articulated by Mr. Foe. Susan argues that hers is a "story that must be told by a teller who, when he unsheathes the word *grief*, can sink it like a sword into his listener's heart" (*Foe* Version 1.3 19), and this echoes the later Barton's invocation to Foe to "return to me the substance I have lost" by creating a narrative out of her experience on the island (*Foe* 51). Furthermore, Susan feels a connection to her mother that is not reciprocated, just as Susan's daughter in *Foe* claims a connection with her that goes unreturned. The Susan of Version 1 professes to feeling the "strangest intimacy" (*Foe* Version 1.3 21) with her former mistress, just as Barton's unwanted daughter claims kinship with her by comparing their hands (*Foe* 76). Notably, *Robinson Crusoe* occupies a minor place in this draft. While both *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxana* are intertexts here, the former is merely

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<sup>51</sup> For the purposes of clarity, I use the name "Susan" when speaking of the character in Coetzee's drafts and "Barton" when referring to the character in the published novel.

mentioned as Defoe's fictional project, while a character from the latter (Susan/Roxana's daughter) controls the narrative.

As the drafts progress from Versions 1 to 5, Coetzee's intertextual emphasis gradually shifts away from *Roxana* and towards *Robinson Crusoe*, although the concerns about authorship expressed by Susan in Version 1 remain throughout. Version 2, begun around June 20, 1983, sees Susan Barton writing to a man she believes to be Robinson Crusoe, asking to enter his service upon his return to civilization. When she realizes Mr. Crusoe<sup>52</sup> is in fact a work of fiction, Susan writes to Mr. Foe instead. The draft then continues in a similar vein as Version 1, with Susan working in the Foe household, but instead of imagining her childhood in an orphanage, she imagines herself returning to the island to be the "sister of Friday" (*Foe* Version 2.2 9) Susan pictures herself in the position of Crusoe's manservant:

For like Friday I would have no language in common with Crusoe, and would have to be taught everything from the beginning. I would first learn my name, which would be Monday, the day upon which I was discovered. Thereupon I would learn the word *yes*, and the words *wash*, *scrub*, *cook*, *carry*, and then I would enter the service of Robinson Crusoe. (*Foe* Version 2.2 9)

Here, the "real" Susan admires Robinson Crusoe's tale for its veracity, as many early readers of Defoe's novel undoubtedly did. When she discovers that the castaway is Foe's invention, she wishes for Foe to create her in narrative as he has Crusoe (no mention is made in *Foe* of Alexander Selkirk, the historical model for Defoe's hero). The influence of *Robinson Crusoe* is

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<sup>52</sup> Interestingly, in these early versions Defoe's name has been truncated to Foe, but Crusoe's has not, suggesting that Coetzee is engaging with the *published* version of *Robinson Crusoe* in these early drafts—whereas the story of Cruso that we encounter in *Foe* is the "preliterary" version, as Attwell describes it (107).

even more prevalent in the next draft, wherein Susan writes her confession to Mr. Foe. In Version 3 Susan is both Roxana's daughter and the female castaway of Coetzee's published novel. Throughout this draft, as in the first, Susan feels compelled to tell her story to Mr. Foe so that he can translate it into a coherent narrative. She writes: "I have a burning story in my breast...and in holding my silence, I have grown thin and peaked" (*Foe* Version 3.1 1). So, while *Robinson Crusoe* has become more prominent as an intertext, Susan's concerns about authorship and her trust in Mr. Foe as an agent of narrative remain.

Just as he struggled to realize a viable modern adaptation of *Michael Kohlhaas* through *Life & Times of Michael K*, Coetzee found it difficult to execute a transformative narrative of *Roxana*. Despite his apparent interest in the story of Defoe's courtesan, Coetzee acknowledged that his new novel required an ethical anchoring external to this intertext—a mooring he came to represent through the character of Friday. On June 7, 1983, six days after he began writing the first draft of *Foe*, Coetzee wrote in his notebook:

When I think of writing this book, I am struck by the fact that there is no core subject, just a technical exercise. I could write it and there would be nothing worth reading. The core will have to be provided by Friday, by Friday as Susan secretly reads him. In what way are the fates of Friday and Susan similar?

Answer: 1. They have no mother, 2. Defoe is in some sense their father, and can continue to 'make' them as he will. (Green notebook 7)

In this draft, Coetzee introduces the layers of agency and exegesis that will figure in the published novel. Friday is positioned at the centre, with degrees of interpretation fanning out around him: first Susan secretly reading Friday, and exterior to that, Defoe wilfully creating and recreating his two characters. Coetzee also expresses the difficulty he seems to be encountering

with Susan's place in this network. As he acknowledged the need to make Friday the core of the book, his frustration over his inability to represent Susan as a character increased. In October 1983, he writes: "what is the whole thing about? I have no interest in this woman, there is no potential in her as there was in the Magistrate or Michael K" (Green notebook 27). Throughout this period, Coetzee faced two difficulties that conflicted with one another: a desire to reinterpret *Roxana* accompanied by a perceived inability to do so, along with a self-imposed ethical imperative to rewrite Crusoe's marginalized manservant while staging the difficulties of such an interpretation.

Despite difficulties with his original intertext, Coetzee began a fifth draft in November 1983 that grants equal narrative weight to *Roxana* and *Robinson Crusoe*. This draft is distinct from previous versions because Susan is no longer the abandoned daughter of a wealthy courtesan, but the mother of a lost child. In other words, Susan has become Roxana. In this version, Susan marries the foolish brewer and gives up her children after her husband's flight (*Foe* Version 5a 12.xi.83).<sup>53</sup> She then follows a lover to Bahia and washes up on Cruso's island after a shipwreck.<sup>54</sup> She and Crusoe have an affair, which leads to the birth of a child, and when the rescue ship arrives, Susan is forced to depart alone, leaving her child behind with Cruso and Friday. From here, her story becomes Roxana's—she becomes mistress to a jeweller, then to a Count, and is proposed marriage by a Dutch merchant (*Foe* Version 5a 13.xi.83-19.xi.83). Susan eventually attempts to hire a ship and sail to the island to recover her lost child (*Foe* Version 5a 20.xi.83). In this version, as in *Roxana*, an unwanted offspring appears: a child from Susan's first marriage stalks her and demands acknowledgement. Here, Susan's spiritual desire to have Foe

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<sup>53</sup> This draft is marked with dates rather than page numbers, so 12.xi.83 signifies November 12, 1983.

<sup>54</sup> This is also the first draft wherein Coetzee amputates the "e" from Robinson's last name.

author her story is accompanied by a material need: she wants Mr. Foe to tell her story so that she can raise the funds to return to Cruso's island and retrieve her lost child (*Foe* Version 5a 26.xi.83). Furthermore, while Coetzee includes plot details of *Roxana* in this draft (such as Susan's affair with the count and her having a maid named Amy) the key part of *Roxana* that appears in Version 5a is the return of the lost daughter—an element that disrupts Susan's narrative of seeking her *other* lost child.<sup>55</sup> For Susan, the return of this daughter is an unwelcome event because, as she tells Mr. Foe, she did not love this child. If she had, she says, she would have tried to keep her, and as a result "I should not be writing these words, nor should you be reading them. There would be no book of *Robinson Crusoe*" (*Foe* Version 5a 24.xi.83). Spivak argues that the history of empire and the lost text of mothering cannot be represented in the same narrative space in *Foe* (16), but in Version 5a, it is motherhood and authorship that cannot coexist: if Susan had truly loved her first daughter, she believes, she would have succumbed to a life of drudgery to keep her, and her story would not be one worth telling.

Coetzee's attempts to retain elements of *Roxana*'s plot in his new novel ultimately proved untenable. A notebook entry dated December 16, 1983 signals a definitive shift away from *Roxana*:

I have come to an absolute dead end. There is nothing in the subject that engages me. For a couple of years I have had the thought at the back of my mind that the story of Roxana's daughter would be worth telling. But I can't imagine that story, partly because I don't know the environment. So I can only write the story as a parody of English stories about that environment. (Green notebook 33)

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<sup>55</sup> This draft is also distinct from the published novel in that Susan does not deny the existence of her child; she is, in this sense, more like Roxana than the later Susan Barton.

Two weeks later, at the beginning of 1984, Coetzee writes: “new start: the Robinson Crusoe story” (Green notebook 37), signalling a shift in intertextual focus from *Roxana* to *Robinson Crusoe* that is apparent on *Foe*’s published pages. Mentions of *Roxana* in the notebook also drop off significantly after February 1984.<sup>56</sup> Although Coetzee retains Susan Barton as narrator, the Crusoe story now has narrative focus, since the novel begins with Barton’s arrival on the island and not with Barton in service at Foe’s house in England, as the early drafts do. Mothering (through the relinquishment of maternal duty) and authorship (through the drive to achieve substance in narrative) are introduced as immediate themes from the first draft of *Foe*, through Coetzee’s use of *Roxana* as an intertext. While these remain relevant to the published novel, it is evident from the drafts that Coetzee felt compelled to represent Friday as the heart of his new novel, and this impulse conflicted with his original intertextual focus. Writing a novel primarily focused on *Roxana* with Friday as the core necessitates a blending of the two intertexts, so that, as Spivak writes, the “margins of bound books are themselves dissolved into a general textuality” (8). In the published novel, Susan Barton still seeks to tell her story, but it is the story of a female castaway, not the scandalous life of a courtesan or the sordid tale of her daughter, which holds our attention.

### 3.4 Whore, Merchant, Mother: Imperialism in *Roxana*

It is evident from Coetzee’s notebooks and the early drafts of *Foe* that the failed instincts of mothering and authorship were prevalent themes for the author from the early stages of the novel’s composition. It would also appear, from Coetzee’s reflections on Friday, that he felt the

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<sup>56</sup> Of course, the remainder of the notebook contains multiple references to the character of Susan, but not as a remake of *Roxana*. For instance, an entry from February 23, 1984 is a sketch of Daniel Defoe writing *Roxana* while Susan, Friday and Crusoe occupy the house in Stoke Newington (Green notebook 45). No other *direct* references to the courtesan narrative are to be found on the notebook’s remaining 65 pages.

need to incorporate Friday, and Friday's withheld speech, as a central tenet in *Foe*. Because Defoe's Friday is the ideal colonial subject, as Spivak posits (14), representing Friday as an agent of resistance is an avenue for critiquing imperialism in *Robinson Crusoe*, and, because this text is a foundational English novel, Friday also allows Coetzee to critique ideological processes of canon formation, as Attridge has argued. In this way, Coetzee's novel can be classified both as a Robinsonade and as a postcolonial rewrite in the vein of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. One component of *Roxana*'s intertextual presence in *Foe* that has not yet been explored in full is the representation of Empire as it is transferred to Coetzee's novel: close inspection of colonial themes in *Roxana* reveals that imperialism, prostitution and motherhood are inextricably linked in this text, and that this linkage is transferred to *Foe* via the return of Barton's disappeared daughter in Part IV. Examining the role that colonialism plays in *Roxana* can therefore also reveal another way in which *Foe* critiques imperialism and canon formation, and can serve as a supplement to readings that emphasize the potential for critique embodied by Friday.

This approach takes into account Edward Said's method of contrapuntal reading, which calls for examining a text "with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which . . . the dominating discourse acts" (51). This kind of reading is vital to a postcolonial critique of *Roxana*, which, unlike *Robinson Crusoe*, takes place in the metropolitan centres of London and Paris, and, like Defoe's earlier novel, implicitly positions merchant capitalism as imperative to the success of the nascent bourgeoisie. While *Roxana* has not been subject to quite the level of postcolonial critique as *Robinson Crusoe*, some critics have explored imperial themes in Defoe's later novel. For instance, both Susanne Scholz and Felicity Nussbaum base their analyses on the scene wherein Roxana dons a Turkish outfit and dances. Having returned from the Continent a very wealthy woman, Roxana



hosts lavish public parties in her Pall Mall mansion. One evening, she disappears from the crowd and returns in an exotic dress and turban. This outfit was purchased for Roxana in Naples along with a “little Female *Turkish* slave” (131), both acquired through marine conquest by a “Maltese man of War” (132). Instructing the musicians to begin a “*French* tune,” Roxana begins to dance:

It was indeed, a very fine Figure, invented by a famous Master at *Paris*, for a lady or a Gentleman to dance single; but being perfectly new, it pleas'd the Company exceedingly, and they all thought it had been Turkish; nay, one Gentleman had the Folly...to say, and I think swore too, that he had see it danc'd at *Constantinople*. (194)

In order to perform this dance, Roxana dresses up in the costume of the subjugated, exotic Other, a disguise that grants her further power while cementing her identity as a courtesan. Directly after her performance, Roxana acquires her name, one used in Defoe's time period to signify “prostitute” but that also carries connotations of exotic, Oriental, politically subversive concubines.<sup>57</sup> For Nussbaum, this scene is key to a postcolonial reading of Defoe's novel: because he shifts the “venue of imperial relations away from England's colonization of the New World [the setting of *Robinson Crusoe*] . . . to the Turkish empire and the Orient . . . *Roxana* masks the relations between the cultural text of mothering and the cultural text of colonialism” (32). Nussbaum describes how traces of Orientalism in Defoe's novel exemplify the

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<sup>57</sup> Nussbaum cites Roxane from Racine's *Bajazet* as a model for Roxana and argues that the name “signalled a sexual, public and exotic persona with influence over political decisions” (34). Scholz describes Roxana as a reference to two famous mistresses by that name: that of Alexander the Great and the concubine-turned-wife of Suleiman the Magnificent (96). In her critical edition of *Roxana*, Melissa Mowry writes that Roxana was a common name in Restoration drama, and “most characters who bore the name were Asian or Middle Eastern in origin and sexually available women” (195).

irreconcilability of female wage labour and mothering in the eighteenth century (32). Yet while Nussbaum prioritizes Roxana's dances in her analysis, the text also contains multiple references to colonial interests that, when explored in more detail than Nussbaum offers, can shed fuller light on how the dance cements Roxana's identity as both courtesan and mother.

Imperialism's specific interrelation with merchant capitalism, prostitution, and mothering figures in *Roxana* in four ways. The first is by allusion to Britain's eastern colonial interests. Roxana describes herself as a "Passenger coming back from the *Indies* . . . having, after many Years Fatigues and Hurry in Business, gotten a good Estate" (252). In the world of early bourgeois capitalism, Roxana's sexual exploits are comparable to the dealings of the exploratory merchant—dangerous and tiring, yet replete with financial reward. The capital gains of her life of libertinage are soon put to financial use, and this is the second way colonial interests figure in the text. Roxana describes the process by which she orchestrates successful careers for two of her sons: her first son, by the brewer, she sets up as a "Turkey merchant" so that he may earn a living trading with the Ottoman Empire, and for the second she arranges a career as a merchant in the East Indies, sending him "over the Value of 2000*l* at several times, with which he traded, and grew rich; and, *as 'tis to be hop'd*, may at last come over again with forty or fifty Thousand Pounds in his Pocket" (270). Far from dooming her children to a life of neglect, Roxana's life as a courtesan has in fact allowed her offspring to become responsible citizens of Empire, manning Britain's imperial outposts while amassing capital for themselves. These references demonstrate a similar kind of recognition of British imperialism to that described by Said. Just as the summary references to Antigua in *Mansfield Park* "reveal and accentuate the interdependence" between colony and metropolis in Jane Austen's novel (96), Defoe's allusions to the necessity of

merchant capitalism to bourgeois success demonstrate the importance of Empire in *Roxana*. However, in Defoe's novel, this success is also bound up with the practice of prostitution.

The third point of connection between imperialism and prostitution in *Roxana* is through the valorization of merchant capitalism as contrasted with Roxana's internalized hatred of her profession, a polarity that further emphasizes the interdependence of the two. In the Restoration England of Roxana's narrative, prostitution and merchant capitalism are at moral odds: unsurprisingly, Roxana finds the concept of prostitution morally repugnant before she commences her career (67), and, years later, admits to having a "Heart loaded with Crime" as a result of her exploits (272). By contrast, trading in the Indies is seen as a viable means of acquiring capital for members of the bourgeoisie. Defoe reveals the contrast between these two means of acquiring capital when Roxana combines her estate with her new husband's. Roxana has invested her earnings in domestic mortgages and securities, while her husband has earned his fortune by trading abroad. Roxana is tormented with guilt at the secret of her illicitly acquired estate:

*Shall my ill-got Wealth, the product of prosperous Lust, and of a vile and vicious  
Life of Whoredom and Adultery, be intermingled with the honest well-gotten  
Estate of this innocent Gentleman, to be a Moth and a Caterpillar among it, and  
bring the Judgments of Heaven upon him, and upon what he has, for my sake!*  
(266)

The opposition between the moral implications of prostitution and mercantile capitalism is evident here: while the Dutchman's estate is "well-gotten" as the result of mercantile labour, Roxana believes that the fruits of her extramarital sexual labour will both eat away at the moral heart of her husband's fortune and lead to eternal damnation for them both. Prior to this scene,

Roxana has cast off the luxurious lifestyle of the Pall Mall courtesan and moved in with a Quaker woman in the hope of eventually meeting her children without revealing the truth of her career (221). To facilitate this transition, Roxana and Amy employ a narrative of imperialism to cover over the true story of Roxana's career, a masquerade that designates the fourth join between imperialism, prostitution and mothering in Defoe's novel. When Amy initially approaches Roxana's children in London, she tells their caretaker that she has earned her fortune abroad—this is a plausible cover-up because it “was not a strange thing for young Women to go away poor to the *East-Indies*, and come home vastly Rich” (210). Roxana later repeats this lie about herself when she arranges her children's inheritances at the end of the novel (324). Nussbaum writes that *Roxana* demonstrates how prostitution and mothering cannot be reconciled in eighteenth-century England. While this is true, it is equally important to acknowledge Roxana's attempts to reconcile the two by covering over her life as a courtesan with a narrative of merchant capitalism.

Having examined the way Roxana uses imperial merchant capitalism to reconcile her status as a mother with the unseemly means by which she amassed her fortune, the Turkish dancing scene emerges as one wherein Defoe employs a metaphor of imperial conquest to signify the inseparability of maternal and sexual labour. What is notable about this scene is that Roxana is *watched* throughout—she indulges the scopic pleasure of not only the gentlemen and ladies in attendance, but also that of the King, *and* her abandoned daughter, who has unknowingly taken a position as a servant in her household. In fact, it is Roxana's dressing up in the garb of the exoticized, subjugated Other that leads her daughter to identify her: as the younger Susan tells Amy, she never saw her mistress when she was employed at Roxana's house *except* when she “danc'd in the fine Turkish Habit” (220). This scene is therefore crucial to a

contrapuntal reading of *Roxana*, but not only because the “Other woman is commodified and degraded” (36) through it, as Nussbaum argues. Roxana’s costume is a disguise, but it actually comes to serve the opposite function, by publicly establishing her as a courtesan (through her naming) and by establishing an image of her in her daughter’s mind that will eventually be linked to mothering. This display of exoticism, the material result of imperial conquest, is what grants Roxana her name and starts her affair with the King, but it also gives birth to her downfall, because her daughter witnesses this scene and eventually comes to identify her as both a courtesan *and* as her mother as a result. Thus, imperial conquest, prostitution, and mothering are inseparably integrated through Roxana’s Oriental disguise. This scene demonstrates how, despite Roxana’s efforts to disguise prostitution with a narrative of imperial merchant capitalism in order to reengage her maternal identity, all three threads form a knot in her story that cannot be loosened. Roxana’s life as a prostitute cannot be successfully reframed in the terms of market conquest, an impossibility that also gestures to her inability to remain the agent of her narrative. While Robinson Crusoe exhibits masterful control over the unfolding of his story’s plot, *Roxana* ends with the fortunate mistress hinting at the “dreadful Course of Calamities” (326) she falls into as a result of her life of crime. This is a loss of agency that the later Roxana, Coetzee’s Susan Barton, will attempt to counter.

### **3.5 “The life of a substantial body:” Collaborative Storytelling in Mr. Foe’s Attic.**

How are the intertwining threads of prostitution, mothering, and imperialism, so indivisibly connected in *Roxana*, represented in *Foe*? While Coetzee’s decision to focus on *Robinson Crusoe* finally led him to reduce *Roxana*’s apparent presence in his new novel, traces of *Roxana* remain on *Foe*’s published pages. The novel contains a small number of subtle allusions to Barton’s being a courtesan (*Foe* 42, 115), although the kind of explicit self-titling

that Roxana employs is absent from Barton's narrative. Barton, like Roxana, is also forced to sell housewares and jewellery to pay for her and Friday's meals (93). The most significant connection, however, is undoubtedly the appearance outside Mr. Foe's house of a girl professing to be Barton's daughter.<sup>58</sup> Like Roxana's daughter, this girl is also named Susan; she claims that her father, like Roxana's first husband, was a brewer who lost his money in gaming houses (75). The girl also insists that her mother had a "maidservant named Amy or Emmy" (76) as Roxana does. One important distinction exists here between the intertext and foretexts and the published novel: while Roxana goes to great lengths to evade her daughter, she does not deny her existence, and neither does the Susan of *Foe's* Version 5 draft. Barton, by contrast, denies Susan and her entire history: "I explain to her that I have never lived in Deptford in my life, that I have never known a brewer, that I have a daughter, it is true, but my daughter is lost, she is not that daughter" (75). In this sense Coetzee externalizes a theme that undergirds the story of *Roxana*, which is that the courtesan's desire to be the independent architect of her own life is undermined by the return of an abandoned child. Here, Barton's desire to be author of her own life is undermined by the return of someone who claims to be her daughter, but who could easily be a thread in someone else's story (like Daniel Foe's): in denying the girl her claim of kinship, Barton tries to shut down this plotline in order to craft her life story as she so desires. This is the most important way that *Roxana's* intertextual presence shows its traces in *Foe*. Barton's emphatic denial of the girl makes her entry into the story seem staged, as though someone, whether Foe or Coetzee, is trying to forcibly write the younger Susan into existence.

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<sup>58</sup> Attridge observes that the events of *Foe* do not match up to those of Defoe's life; similarly, the events described by the daughter do not match up to *Roxana*. The girl in *Foe* says she was born in 1702, whereas Roxana's daughter is born sometime between 1688 and 1696—yet another way Coetzee highlights the constructedness of stories.

Spivak describes the scene wherein Barton abandons her daughter in Epping Forest as central to the mother-daughter subplot. This scene also echoes one in *Roxana* wherein Amy lures Roxana's daughter into Greenwich forest and contemplates murdering her (Defoe 315). In *Foe*, Barton tells the girl: "what you know of your parentage comes to you in the form of stories, and the stories have but a single source...you are father-born. You have no mother. The pain you feel is the pain of lack, not the pain of loss" (91). Spivak argues that this scene marks an aporia in the text that proves the impossibility of representing a narrative of capitalism and colony and a mother-daughter story in the same continuous space (12). In this scene Barton makes yet another attempt to remain author of her life by expelling this unwanted thread of narrative. She acknowledges the extent to which we are all constructed by stories, but her attempt to control the girl's story fails. As Spivak observes, this "first severing is not neat" (14). The girl returns. What can her reappearance tell us about authorship as communicated by the intertextual presence of *Roxana* in Coetzee's novel?

While the early drafts of *Foe* demonstrate nascent, yet discrete, concerns with prostitution and authorship, the return of Barton's unwanted daughter in *Foe*'s third section leads to the eventual collapse of the distinction between these two categories. This intertextual reference carries the important thematic element of self-fashioning from *Roxana* forward into *Foe*, although Susan Barton is more concerned with the authorial construction of identity than with the establishment of an estate, as Roxana is. The narrative focus finally returns to the space of imperial conquest in Part IV, completing the link between prostitution, mothering, imperialism and authorship that *Roxana* introduces. The thematic transference from *Roxana* to *Foe* is broken into roughly three stages. First, Barton finds Mr. Foe's hiding place in a Whitechapel attic and enters with Friday. She asks how her narrative is progressing, to which Foe responds that her

story of the island is “not a story in itself” and can only be “brought to life by setting it within a larger story” (117)—that is, by including the narrative of the rediscovered daughter that Barton has just tried to delete. In this scene, Barton makes a clear distinction between prostitution and authorship: she tells Mr. Foe that, although she could return to the “life of a substantial body” she refuses to, because “such a life is abject. It is the life of a thing. A whore used by men is used as a substantial body” (126). Furthermore, Barton claims agency over how her story is told—she believes that she has the power to reject the alternate narratives Foe has selected for her, including the addition of cannibals and pirates to Crusoe’s island and the reduction of the island story to an episode in the “history of a woman in search of a lost daughter” (121). At the beginning of this scene, Barton adheres to the distinction between substance and substantiality that Poyner outlines in her study of *Foe*: she seeks substance, or “discursive wordliness” through authorship and rejects substantiality, or “bodily materiality” (*J.M. Coetzee* 91).

As soon as the girl claiming to be Barton’s daughter reappears, however, Barton’s strictly delineated categories begin to collapse. This time, the girl is accompanied by “Amy, from Deptford,” as the girl says, “my nurse when I was little” (*Foe* 129). Barton, believing that Mr. Foe is again trying to turn her life into a story, begins to protest:

I am not a story, Mr. Foe . . . my life did not begin in the waves. There was a life before the water . . . all of which makes up a story I do not choose to tell. I choose not to tell it because to no one, not even to you, do I owe proof that I am a substantial being with a substantial history in the world. I choose rather to tell of the island, of myself and Crusoe and Friday and what we three did there: for I am a free woman who asserts her freedom by telling her story according to her own desire. (131).



Here, Barton is resisting the narrative of *Roxana* that Foe is trying to (and eventually will) create, choosing instead to maintain her presence in Cruso's narrative. However, she also conflates two key terms in this passage. Prior to the girl's appearance, Barton rejects the life of a substantial body because this is the life of a thing—or, as she says, the life of a whore. In this passage, by contrast, she *asserts* her substantiality as it is related to her own history—her personal narrative as she chooses to recount it. Secondly, prior to her daughter's entrance, Barton compares herself to the free women of Bahia: as she says, a woman who goes abroad freely in Bahia "is thought a whore. I was thought a whore. But there are so many whores there, or, as I prefer to call them, free women, that I was not daunted" (115). In this earlier paragraph, the status of a free woman is associated with prostitution—an association Barton explicitly connects herself to. However, in the later scene, Barton's status as a free woman is connected not to prostitution, but to self-authorship—she is a "free woman who asserts her freedom by telling her story" (131). The repetition of these two phrases, previously used by Barton in association with prostitution, collapses the distinctions between "author" and "whore" that she has so carefully defined in her prior conversation with Foe. The appearance of the daughter enacts this transition.

Following the girl and Amy's departure, these categories become indistinguishable. Foe begins seducing Barton while the two apparitions are still in the room: he kisses her and calls her "my sweet Susan" (134), an endearment she finds difficult to resist. Later, as Foe undresses, Barton wonders "what it augure[s] for the writing of my story that I should grow so intimate with its author" (137). Shortly thereafter, they have sex, and this is the only sex act in *Foe* that is succeeded by a monetary exchange. The next morning, Foe commands Barton to teach Friday his letters and gives her sixpence for their breakfast, which "though no great payment for a visit from the Muse," (145), she accepts. While Barton compares herself to "the Muse when she visits

her poets” during their coupling (139), there is also a material reason for her having sex with Foe: as she tells him, she has not eaten for two days and her clothes are in tatters, because her search for substance in narrative has turned her into a “filthy old gipsy-woman” (125). Just as Roxana’s career as a courtesan is covered over by imperial merchant capitalism in Defoe’s novel, Coetzee’s Barton disguises her act of prostitution with a metaphor about authorship.<sup>59</sup> The conflation of these two labels is further demonstrated by Foe’s later admission that he is “an old whore who should ply her trade only in the dark” (151), a comment that emphasizes the creativity of intercourse even as it sexualizes authorship. Following the appearance of Barton’s daughter, whore and author have become interchangeable.

After they copulate, Barton and Foe participate in an act of co-authorship—that is, they create the final section of *Foe* together. Foe speaks of Friday’s uninterpretable act of spreading petals on the ocean (31), imagining that Friday “steers his fragile craft” into the terrible orbit of the *kraken* sea monster (140). This is the “eye of the story” (141), across which Friday rows and is safe. “To us he leaves the task of descending into that eye,” Foe tells Barton (141). Barton contributes: “it is for us to descend into the mouth (since we speak in figures). It is for us to open Friday’s mouth and hear what it holds: silence, perhaps, or a roar” (142). This is an uneven act of authorship. Foe does most of the talking, and as such, the final product of their labours (intertextually, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxana*; intratextually, the final chapter) will contain more of his voice than Barton’s. Following this, Foe commands Barton to teach Friday his letters, a

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<sup>59</sup> Of course, Barton’s copulation with Foe is not *merely* an act of prostitution—her sexual aggressiveness and later reference to Foe as her “wife” (152) are attempts adopt a typically male-gendered form of agency. However, I think the material component of this exchange is equally important because it harks back to *Roxana* in suggesting that Barton, like Defoe’s heroine, has been excluded from the labour market *except* through acts of sexual trading.

task she carries out with little success. This results in the moment in the text when Friday's wilful silence is most palpably expressed.<sup>60</sup>

Part IV sees an unnamed narrator enter Foe's attic, twice. Each time, the corpse of Barton's daughter guards the doorway to Foe's attic (153, 155). *Roxana* is barely present as an intertext here, but with each visit the narrator must stumble over the girl's body<sup>61</sup> in order to enter Foe's attic—in this sense, then, the daughter serves as the guardian of the margin to *Foe's* final pages. The second time, the narrator finds Barton's abandoned castaway narrative crumbling in a dispatch box—thus, we can assume, Defoe has appropriated Barton's story for his own authorial purposes despite her objections. Nevertheless, *The Female Castaway* is not entirely forgotten: the narrator enters the manuscript and carries us back to the novel's beginning with the words “with a sigh, making barely a splash, I slip overboard” (155). The narrator makes her way down to the wreck beneath the waves, a place described as “the home of Friday” (153). Spivak notes that the novel's final scene “knits itself into Susan's scene of strange fathering, leaving Friday's writing lesson apart” (17). She describes this scene as “easy reading” (17), “written lovingly” (18), but concedes that it cannot be held within the same narrative space as Friday's withheld writing slate (18). Spivak thus prioritizes Friday's writing lesson as the scene in which Friday is shown to be the “unemphatic agent of withholding” in Coetzee's novel (16). But what of the fact that this final section is the result of Foe and Barton's authorial and sexual

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<sup>60</sup> Friday's refusal to occupy the position of ideal colonial subject is demonstrated by the moment wherein Barton finds him drawing rows of “open eyes, each set upon a human foot” (147). When Barton commands Friday to give her the slate, he instead “put[s] three fingers into his mouth and wet[s] them and rub[s] the slate clean” (147). For Spivak, this withholding confirms Friday's guardianship of the margin (16).

<sup>61</sup> The body in the doorway isn't stated to be Barton's daughter, but we suspect it is her because she wears a “long grey dress” (153)—which matches the “grey stuff” (90) of the dress the girl wears to Epping Forest.

copulation? That this section is the result of their conversation is clear, not just from the reference to the *kraken* that may lurk beneath the seaweed (156) but because a phrase that Foe utters (“gay little fish”) is directly transposed to the final section—although here, it is a detail omitted, as the narrator notes that there are no “gay little fish” to be found in the depths (156). Here, Barton lies with her Portuguese sea captain, both “fat and dead” (156)—her narrative and concomitant claims to authorship not only deleted, but reimagined in the space of imperial conquest, beneath the decks of (what may be) a slave ship, the final home of Friday. While *Roxana* as an intertext guards the final section of Coetzee’s novel through the girl’s position in the doorway, *Foe* ends with Friday, at home in a place without words, his mouth issuing a “slow stream” which is “soft and cold, dark and unending” (157).

In June 1985, as he was completing a final draft of the novel, Coetzee wrote in his *Foe* notebook: “now that the story is more or less drafted, the criticism can be foreseen: Friday is seen too much from the outside. The response to this is not to give Friday a life of his own but to articulate the fact that Friday’s ‘inside’ is closed off” (Green notebook 101). Nowhere is this insistent insularity more purely expressed than in the novel’s final paragraph, wherein Friday opens his mouth and releases a slow, *wordless* stream, “without breath, without interruption” (157). Just as he articulated Michael K’s decision not to join the guerrillas as a gap, so too is Friday’s silence represented as an unsolvable puzzle: *Foe* ends not with the native learning to speak, but with a continuous, unarticulated stream—a stream which may be meaning, but which may also be empty pockets of air. Friday’s position at the ethical core of *Foe* is clear from this final sentence, but in considering this ethical core, we cannot forget the scene of authorship that precedes it, or the contradictory fantasy that this wordless stream enacts: despite the fact that the home of Friday is a place without words, we are reading a book composed of them. Therein lies

the inherent contradiction of representing unemphatically resistant silence: in order to truly do so, *Foe* could not exist.

The narrator who travels to Mr. Foe's attic in the novel's final section has been identified as a version of Coetzee himself—a valid argument given that these pages seem to also account for the inescapable murkiness of the writing process, a lyrical articulation of the frustrations Coetzee recorded in his working notebook and drafts. Yet as Tisha Turk points out, “the narrator is represented not as a writer but as a reader, someone who is, quite literally, *moved* by Susan's narration” (308). After all, the narrator dives into the wreck of a slave ship, but does so *through* the pages of Susan Barton's narrative—so she (or he) creates *through* (literal) absorption in a text. So while we may read this scene as a metaphor for the process described in *Foe*'s notebooks and drafts—as a narrative of creation with Friday at its centre—I think the value of the foretexts lies in their potential to make us see beyond biographical designations in Coetzee's fifth novel. For one, it allows us to view *Foe*'s occluded intertext in an altered way, as one that contains the kernel of a critique of female authorship that is more fully realized in Coetzee's text. In this respect at least, Coetzee's novel is a feminist text. *Robinson Crusoe* undoubtedly remains significant to any interpretation of *Foe*, but my analysis of *Roxana*'s significance to the novel demonstrates that this intertext also guards the margins of Coetzee's transformative narrative, and must therefore be considered in light of the ethical imperative to account for silencing that author imposes on reader through Friday's uninterpretable stream of expression.

## Chapter 4 | Conclusion

This thesis has shown, through the examination of foretextual documents, how J.M. Coetzee employed occluded intertexts as a means of negotiating positionality throughout the composition of *Life & Times of Michael K* and *Foe*. In doing so, I have attempted to construct a reading practice that both accounts for the writing process and explicates the interrelation and interdependence of text, archive, and intertext. Needless to say, this project has only touched the surface of the research potential that exists in the Ransom Center archive. I chose to examine *Life & Times of Michael K* and *Foe* because they are instances of a particular form of practice that does not seem to occur in Coetzee's later or earlier works: as far as I can tell at this stage, none of his other works exhibit the same kind of concern with *occluded* intertextuality that the above books do. Coetzee's 1994 novel *The Master of Petersburg* is another apparently intertextual work, although its foretexts are distinct from *Michael K* and *Foe* in two key ways. First, Coetzee does not appear to have kept a separate working notebook for this novel. Instead, the J.M. Coetzee Papers contain two folders of handwritten drafts. In these early versions, rough sections of the novel are interspersed with plot mappings and reflections on the writing process. Secondly, Coetzee appears to have employed *The Possessed* as the primary intertext from the early stages of composing *Petersburg*, meaning that this work does not contain an occluded intertext that Coetzee turned away from at some point during the writing process, as the earlier novels do.

Despite these technical differences, a study of *The Master of Petersburg* would be a logical next step in a project of this kind because Coetzee undertook a form of intertextual practice when he composed this novel. In the case of *Petersburg*, Coetzee employed intertextuality to navigate the writing process during a time that was, for him, both personally

and politically turbulent. Coetzee's son Nicolas fell to his death from a Hillbrow balcony in 1989, and *The Master of Petersburg* is the first work of fiction Coetzee wrote following this event. Furthermore, when Coetzee began the novel, apartheid was rapidly approaching its end, and *Petersburg* was released just seven months after South Africa's first free elections in April 1994. The drafts of *Petersburg* show how Coetzee used Dostoevsky's novel *The Possessed* to navigate these personal and political challenges. The early drafts, written between February and June 1991, are narrated in the first person past tense by a man named Dostoevsky whose son has died.<sup>62</sup> The narrator's son in these early drafts is not Pavel Isaev, the name of the historical Dostoevsky's stepson that Coetzee gave to the dead boy in the published novel, but is Nikolai Fyodorovich Stavrogin, a nominal hybrid of Coetzee's deceased child and the child-rapist whose story was censored from the original published pages of *The Possessed*.<sup>63</sup> First-person reflections about the narrator writing his son into immortality (*Petersburg* Version 1A.8 2) further confuse the distinction between narrator and author in the early drafts of this novel. Here, as with his earlier texts, Coetzee also uses intertextuality as a means of conceptualizing his positionality during South Africa's time of transition. In November 1991, he reflects:

I have been left behind by South Africa as it enters Africa. Horror of irrational violence, of a vision I can all too easily believe in but can't afford to believe in because my self-culture rests on a denial. FMD in the same position. Pavel-

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<sup>62</sup> Coetzee switched to third person narration in June 1991 (*Petersburg* Version 1.8 4). A note from November 1991 clarifies his earlier intentions. He writes, "set the whole thing one further frame back, as may have been the original intention. That is to say, not a vague present self writing about Dostoevsky, but Dostoevsky in the process of writing a story about a man much like himself" (*Petersburg* Version 1.15 8). It appears that Coetzee originally intended *The Master of Petersburg* to be much more apparently biographical, but later shifted the emphasis to Dostoevsky and intertextuality.

<sup>63</sup> See Attridge, Chapter 5, for a more lengthy discussion of the role Dostoevsky's censored chapter plays in Coetzee's novel.

Nechaev call up a vision of casual and even genial killing to which he has a twofold reaction. (a) denial, abhorrence, wish that the offenders should be locked up, (b) retreat into the past, into old age, as he sees that this is what the new world is and wants. (*Petersburg* Version 2A.16 4)

Here, Coetzee aligns himself with FMD, Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky. Just as Dostoevsky views Nechaev's critique of poverty in Tsarist Russia through the eyes of a "dedicated conservative" (Attridge 119), Coetzee appears to have found himself incapable of engaging in the revolutionary fervour of pre-transition South Africa and abhors the violence that has brought it about. This pessimistic view of the author's limited ability to intervene in politics, presented here through the figure of Dostoevsky, gestures to the connection between fatherhood and revolutionary politics that is fully realized in the published novel. The above sketch therefore reveals the potential for a study of the intersection of intertextuality and positionality in *Petersburg*'s foretexts. The archive also possesses rich potential for biographical criticism on Coetzee, as the extensive collection of documents from his childhood and youth will surely yield new angles on his fiction. Further work can also be done on the role intertextuality plays in earlier or later novels: what of the classics in *Age of Iron* or Romanticism in *Disgrace*? Did Coetzee intentionally employ these motifs as a means of negotiating his own positionality through the mid-1980s stifling of apartheid resistance or mid-1990s post-apartheid nation-building? The archive will surely augment Coetzee studies for years to come.

Despite the seemingly endless potential of the archive, using it extensively in any kind of project carries certain risks. After encountering Coetzee's notebooks and drafts, it becomes difficult *not* to think about them as the key to the author's work, since they so clearly demonstrate what his thought processes were when he was writing these novels. Of course, there



is much more to criticism than trying to retrace processes of composition. But the tendency to treat Coetzee's notebooks and drafts as the interpretive key to his novels is a strong one, given that he articulates his intentions for *Michael K* and *Foe* on the pages of the notebook. This is magnified, but perhaps also rectified, by the fact that Coetzee himself has publicly refused to act as an interpretive key to his works and, specifically relevant to intertextuality, has insisted that it is not his place to answer questions of influence on his novel-writing (*DP* 105). Yet if Coetzee's public self is not the source of authority, then many other forms of text are available for use as interpretive aids—including the archival material, as long as we conceive of it as another text, and not as the final word. I focused on occluded intertexts in this thesis in order to illuminate how the influence of *Michael Kohlhaas* and *Roxana*, which is so evident in *Michael K* and *Foe*'s drafts, remain on the published pages of those novels in the form of traces and gestures. As such, the reading strategy developed here carries the potential limitation of flattening a text for the sake of illuminating instances of occluded intertextuality. If we attempt to find intertextuality on every page of a text, then we might shut down other productive forms of reading. For instance, if we consider the possible return of Susan Barton's daughter in *Foe* to stem from a reference to *Roxana*, we risk reading it as only that at the exclusion of other essential thematic components not derived from the courtesan narrative, including (but not limited to) Friday's alterity. Intertextual reading has to be balanced with the acknowledgement that each text is an event in itself and not *merely* a product of a hypotext.

This reading process tries to account for the act of reading Coetzee's work (or, more broadly, any literary work) as an *event*. Attridge argues for a form of textual engagement that views the work not as static or fixed but that "recognizes, and capitalizes on, its potential for reinterpretation, for grafting onto new contexts, for fission and fusion" (10). His work seeks to

open Coetzee's novels to a sustained form of meaning-making from the reader's perspective, one that acknowledges the "singular fashioning of the codes and conventions of the institution of literature, as they exist and exert pressure in a particular time and place" (9). This project has examined the other side of the continuum of meaning-making by reopening Coetzee's works to their unique processes of composition. In other words, if we can view the literary work as changing and in flux through the act of reading the published novel, this thesis has asked: how does an account of the creative process also influence the act of reading? At the conclusion of *Palimpsests*, Genette anticipates an objection to the study of hypertextuality, "that this 'bookish' literature, which leans on other books, is the means whereby...contact is lost with 'true' reality, the reality that is not to be found in books" (400). His response is that one does not preclude the other, and rather that the "specific merit of hypertextuality is that it constantly launches ancient works into new circuits of meaning" (400). This account has demonstrated that, rather than insulating us from reality, intertextuality can also be a tool—for the writer, as a means of negotiating positionality, and also for the reader, in the expanded event of ethical reading.

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### Abbreviations:

*MK*            *Life & Times of Michael K*

*Petersburg*    *The Master of Petersburg*

JMC            J.M. Coetzee Papers, MS-0842, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.

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