

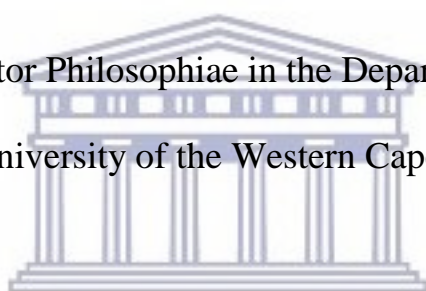
# **Cinematic and Photographic Aesthetics**

## **in the Novels of J.M. Coetzee**

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A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor Philosophiae in the Department of English,

University of the Western Cape.



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## Key Words

J. M. Coetzee

Intermediality

*In the Heart of the Country*

Film

Photography

Screenplay

Narrative

Time

Camera

Projector

Montage

Chiaroscuro

Photographic processes



## Abstract

This thesis will examine the extensive cinematic and photographic visuality inscribed in the fictions of J. M. Coetzee. Coetzee's prose is inflected by a complex intermediality that references media aesthetics, practices, and genres, as well as creating linkages to specific film texts. This study will examine a range of Coetzee's writings but will pay particular attention to his second novel *In the Heart of the Country* (1977), which will be used as a lens to explore the visuality of Coetzee's earlier and later fictions. *In the Heart of the Country*, it will be shown, employs innovative film techniques that reflect the influence of 1960s avant-garde cinema, with strong ties to two films in particular: Andrzej Munk's *Pasażerka* (1963), and Jean-Luc Godard's *Alphaville* (1965). A comparative analysis of the novel with Coetzee's unrealised screenplay adaptation will be used to show that these cinematic influences extend to narrative experimentation and theoretical engagements with time. This will be followed by an intensive exploration of the cinematographic aesthetic in *Life & Times of Michael K* (1983). Coetzee's two Karoo novels, it will be shown, employ film effects to a degree that sets them apart from his other fictions, rendering these texts as cinematographic counterparts. The study of photography will then examine how Coetzee's theoretical understanding of the image enables him to utilise and extend the narrative power of the photographic medium in three ways: by inscribing important narratives within individual images, by employing the photograph as a method of characterisation, and by simulating the photographic processes of capture and development during key narrative events. Although this exploration of photography will reference several of Coetzee's fictions, analysis will focus predominantly on *Dusklands* (1974), *In the Heart of the Country*, and *Slow Man* (2005).

## Declaration

I declare that “Cinematic and Photographic Aesthetics in the Novels of J.M. Coetzee” is my own work, that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged as complete references.

**Iona Gilbert**

**29 May 2017**



## Acknowledgments

This project began in 2014 as an MA thesis. It was initially a comparative study of *In the Heart of the Country* and Coetzee's adapted screenplay. The work gradually expanded as the screenplay provided insightful engagements with the novel. It eventually became clear that the extent to which visual media influence Coetzee's prose was far beyond the scope of an MA thesis. In December 2015, this study was upgraded to a doctoral thesis and quickly expanded to include several of Coetzee's other fictions as well as placing greater emphasis on photography. I am indebted to my external assessors for their support of an upgrade, which enabled me to continue with the research. Their comments have been valuable in helping to shape this thesis.

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## Introduction

In this thesis, I will undertake a comprehensive study of how film and photography have influenced the fictions of J. M. Coetzee by drawing from a variety of texts across media and genres, including films, novels, archival material, critical studies, and Coetzee's screenplay adaptation for his second novel *In the Heart of the Country* (1977). The novel *In the Heart of the Country* forms the primary text of this study, and through a methodology of close reading I aim to identify the presence of visual media in Coetzee's prose by examining the imagery, motifs, phrasing, and structural choices that create connections to cinematic and photographic techniques as well as to specific film texts. *In the Heart of the Country* will then act as a lens for examining the scope and versatility of the cinematic and photographic visuality that is central to Coetzee's early fictions as well as influencing his later works.

The following discussion will begin by identifying the main avenues of visual media study that have yet to be examined in *In the Heart of the Country* and then outline the greater objectives of this thesis. Thereafter, this introductory chapter will be used to give a fuller sense of the substantial influence that film and photography have had on Coetzee's work and provide a more detailed overview of *In the Heart of the Country*. The initial, valuable insights into how visual media have shaped the novel is provided by Coetzee himself.

It is a surprising moment when J. M. Coetzee first reveals the impact of film and photography on *In the Heart of the Country*. During an interview in *Doubling the Point* (1992), when David Attwell questions Coetzee about language and briefly mentions the *nouveau roman* genre, Coetzee responds by shifting focus from the literary to the intermedial, saying of *In the Heart of the Country*: "You are right to see similarities between it and the French *nouveau roman*, but behind both there is, I think, a more fundamental influence: film and/or photography" (59). He then delves into the topic of visual media and for the next page

provides clues as to the nature of this influence, firstly referring to the novel's integration of montage editing techniques and then citing Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1963) and Andrzej Munk's *Pasazerka* 'Passenger' (1963) as "the kind of film whose style imprints *In the Heart of the Country*" (60). These films are prime examples of the innovative aesthetic that characterised independent European and world cinema in the 1960s, when Coetzee was living in London and "went to the cinema often and avidly," experiencing the emergence of the French New Wave film movement and in particular the works of Jean-Luc Godard (Coetzee, "Homage" 5). In *La Jetée* and *Passenger*, Coetzee is particularly drawn to the inventive combination of stills and voice-over, which creates "a remarkable intensity of vision." He repeats his interest in voice-over several times, firstly applauding Godard's use of voice-over in *Le Petit Soldat* (1963) and then recalling how he has personally "pleaded for voice-over and in general for the independence of the voice" when approached by filmmakers interested in adapting his novels (60).

Yet this exposé on visual media then ends as abruptly as it began, and Coetzee makes a clean break from the topic of adaptation into a new paragraph that returns to Attwell's original question. There is no more discussion of intermediality, and film and photography are instead left behind as part of an anomalous interlude. Neither film nor photograph is even listed in the index of *Doubling the Point*.

Several studies have remarked on this discussion in passing. Lindiwe Dovey and Teresa Dovey were the first to respond in "Coetzee on Film," a chapter that examines Coetzee's commentary on visual-media in the context of novel-to-film adaptation. They focus on *In the Heart of the Country*'s approximation of montage and consider how the formal properties of independent cinema are lacking in the only film adaptation of the novel to date, Marion Hänsel's *Dust* (1985). Hermann Wittenberg addresses the influence of independent cinema on Coetzee's prose by examining Godard's *Alphaville* (1965) and Coetzee's own

adapted screenplay of *In the Heart of the Country* (“Godard in the Karoo”). Although Coetzee’s writing has mainly taken the form of prose fiction, he has written screenplays for both *In the Heart of the Country* and his third novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980). In their study, Dovey and Dovey are unaware of both Coetzee’s screenplay and the connection between *In the Heart of the Country* and *Alphaville*, a film which is also not referenced in *Doubling the Point*. Coetzee’s notebook documentation of the writing process, however, suggests that the film was a seminal influence on the novel’s development. In a brief entry he writes, “Fascinated by the counterpoint of light, image, sound, sense in Godard’s Alphaville. Quite possible to work with slide projector and two tape recorders” (29 June 1975). The reference to “light, image, sound, sense” shows that he is responding to several aesthetic elements in the film, and this combination of media effects still needs to be explored in the prose of *In the Heart of the Country*.

Photography too has largely been neglected in the study of the novel. Coetzee speaks of the influence of “film and/or photography,” suggesting that these media have impacted *In the Heart of the Country* both jointly and independently, yet he then focuses on film. Although he mentions the use of stills in *Passenger* and *La Jetée*, these stills are not photographs but rather photographic images placed in the film context and therefore understood within the additional dimensions of sound, motion, and controlled viewing time. In considering the influence of photography on Coetzee’s fictions, it is also important to note that he was himself an accomplished amateur photographer. J. C. Kannemeyer’s biography of Coetzee reveals that the art of taking and developing photographs was an early form of creative expression for him: “In Rondebosch John [from about age twelve] developed into a competent photographer and acquired a small camera. . . . He converted a spare room into a darkroom to develop his photographs” (66). This interest remained, and while “studying at the University of Cape Town, he acquired a better quality camera that he used for many

years” (Kannemeyer 66-67). The extent to which this long-term, practical involvement in analogue photography has extended into his writing is a question that this thesis will consider, especially in the final chapter.

The study of how visual media shapes *In the Heart of the Country* also needs to be placed with a greater intertextual framework that considers several of Coetzee’s other fictions. A strong intermedial influence is already suggested in Coetzee’s first novel, *Dusklands* (1974). In an early review, Peter Temple draws a parallel between Coetzee’s writing style and cinematic form:

The product is lucid, compelling, intensely graphic prose. His images linger, his scenes have a frozen, cinematic quality. He has the ability to halt his story, as it were, in mid-frame, to zoom the narrative in from a great height to capture and hold the single moment. (“J. M Coetzee: Major Talent”)

Visual media plays a strong role in the novel, both stylistically and through the war photographs that propel Eugene Dawn’s narrative. Coetzee also gestures to the importance of photography on the jacket cover of the novel’s first edition when, among his interests, he lists “images, particularly photographs, and their power over the human heart” (Ravan ed.).<sup>1</sup>

This “power over the human heart” is evident across Coetzee’s fictions, from *Dusklands* to the most recent *The Schooldays of Jesus* (2016). In *Dusklands*, Dawn reveals how his dreams are haunted by photographic figures: “Faces from my photographs of Vietnam come floating toward me out of hazy matt backgrounds . . .” (34). In *Age of Iron* (1990), terminally ill Elizabeth Curren unravels while pouring over a childhood photograph of herself standing with her mother and brother, who have since died, and she laments, “Grief past weeping. I am hollow, I am a shell” (112). In *Slow Man* (2005), retired photographer Paul Rayment describes the historical image of a woman and children living in squalor as “the one that haunts him most deeply” (51). *The Master of Petersburg* (1994) begins with a

grieving Dostoyevsky searching for the lodgings of his recently deceased stepson Pavel. In a dark and funereal setting, “a long, low room lit by a single window at head-height,” he pulls out an object wrapped in white and opens it to reveal “a boy, a daguerreotype in a silvered frame” (2). The small light of Pavel enters the gloom, and Dostoevsky keeps this image with him in a shrine when he goes to stay in Pavel’s abandoned room. In *The Schooldays of Jesus*, Dmitri turns himself in for the murder of Ana Magdalena after being confronted by her image in a newspaper article: it is “the photograph whose eyes, as he put it, pierced him to the soul” that ultimately brings him “to his senses” (129). These photographs are only a few of the many, deeply moving images that direct Coetzee’s narratives, and I intend to explore the important ways in which these objects inflect several of Coetzee’s fictions.

In overview, the first chapter of this study will look closely at *In the Heart of the Country*, examining how an avant-garde cinematic style is created through prose simulations of montage editing, camera-eye narration, simulations of film and slide projectors, and chiaroscuro lighting techniques. In addition, several of the novel’s scenes will be considered for their resemblance to *Alphaville* and *Passenger*. Although Coetzee references *La Jetée* in *Doubling the Point*, it is excluded from this study because it lacks the convergence of effects (the collision of imagery and light) that will be observed in *Alphaville*, *Passenger*, and *In the Heart of the Country*. The study of cinematic lighting will furthermore suggest the novel’s stylistic resemblance to the film noir genre.

Lighting and camera effects fall within the domain of cinematography, which will be examined extensively across this thesis. Cinematography represents the intersection of film and photography and is defined by Peter Verstraten as “the technical and artistic way in which a scene is photographed,” which includes decisions about materials, camera speeds, camera angles, lenses, optical effects, and how long a shot is held (65). With the exception of duration, these choices would have been made by Coetzee in his own amateur photography.



The control of lighting is furthermore central to both film and photography. Lighting falls within the film categories of *mise en scène* (“what we see”) and cinematography (“how we see it”) (56), and photography literally means “writing with light.” Coetzee, it will be shown, writes with light, shaping his prose through the interplay of light and shadows.

The second chapter of this thesis will conduct a detailed analysis of Coetzee’s adapted screenplay of *In the Heart of the Country* (published in *Two Screenplays*). The study of Coetzee’s screenplay, it will be shown, allows for a comparative reading that can help to foreground aspects of the novel that have remained unrecognised. This analysis will concentrate on investigating global narrative structures that are paralleled between novel and screenplay as well as considering how cinematic form in both texts shapes an understanding of temporality.

The third chapter will undertake an extensive, cinematographic study of *Life & Times of Michael K* (1983). This text is the only one of Coetzee’s fictions other than *In the Heart of the Country* to receive a dedicated chapter of study. *Life & Times of Michael K*, it will be shown, has a strong cinematographic visuality that represents the continued deployment of camera and lighting effects honed by Coetzee in *In the Heart of the Country*. Analysis will focus on how these techniques are used to focalise K’s inner experience.

The final chapter will then examine how Coetzee extends the narrative capabilities of photography by simulating the technical processes of analogue photography within his prose. Analysis will also demonstrate how Coetzee employs the photographic medium as a mode of characterisation. This study will focus on *Dusklands*, *Slow Man*, and *In the Heart of the Country* while also drawing examples from several of Coetzee’s other fictions.

In this project, the various expressions of Coetzee’s intermediality that will be examined fall within the three categories proposed by Irina O. Rajewsky: medial transposition, media combination (mixed media), and intermedial references (51-52). Medial

transposition considers “the transformation of a given media product (a text, a film, etc.) or of its substratum into another medium” (52). Film adaptation falls within this category. In this study, I will examine *In the Heart of the Country* and its adapted screenplay as well as discussing the film adaptation *Dust*. Rajewsky’s second intermedial category of media combination involves “combining at least two conventionally distinct media or medial forms of articulation,” such as comic books and Sound Art installations (52). The use of stills in film also constitutes media combination, as does Coetzee’s idea to stage a slide show with tape recorders. The third category of intermedial references represents the primary focus of analysis; it includes, as Rajewsky notes, “references in a literary text to a film through, for instance, the evocation or imitation of certain filmic techniques such as zoom shots, fades, dissolves, and montage editing” (52). This category includes references to specific films and “to a specific medial subsystem (such as a certain film genre)” (53). Rajewsky’s study places several other forms of media within these categories, but the above outline only focuses on film and photography because these are relevant to this thesis. In terms of photography, Coetzee’s intermediality can also be understood as the transfer of skills whereby creative practices developed in one medium (analogue photography) are executed in another (literary prose). The greater intermediality underpinning Coetzee’s work will be addressed in this project introduction.

The following discussion will begin by exploring how a conceptualisation of the image and its properties is evident across Coetzee’s prose. The focus will then shift to the primary text of *In the Heart of the Country*, providing an overview of the novel’s plot, formal properties, and the critical approaches to its study. This section will furthermore address the nature of the visual-media influence suggested by Coetzee in *Doubling the Point* and outline how this thesis will explore a more in-depth and varied examination of the novel’s cinematic style. The final part of this introduction will discuss Coetzee’s involvement in novel-to-film

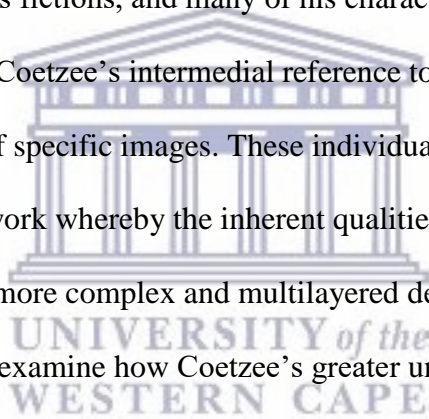


adaptation and explain how the adapted screenplay of *In the Heart of the Country* will be employed for critical analysis.

In summation, the interplay of prose and visual media in several of Coetzee's fictions evinces the multifaceted expressions of intermediality that inflect Coetzee's writings. This project ultimately aims to show that the idea of "film and/or photography" as a fundamental influence applies not only to *In the Heart of the Country* but to his work as a whole.

## **Narrative Photography**

Photographs pervade Coetzee's fictions, and many of his characters are significantly affected by their power over the heart. Coetzee's intermedial reference to photographs, however, extends beyond descriptions of specific images. These individual photographs are connected by a larger intermedial framework whereby the inherent qualities of the medium are referenced, which results in a more complex and multilayered deployment of photographs. The following discussion will examine how Coetzee's greater understanding of the photographic object manifests within his work. Photographs are firstly perceived as narrative objects; secondly, they have an inherent link to the real, which is expressed through descriptions of chance, history, and mortality. The narrative dimension will be explored first, followed by a closer look at how Coetzee's ideas of the real translate into prose. His unique response to the photograph, it will be suggested, emerges in childhood and continues throughout his oeuvre. From an early age, Coetzee identified photography as a valuable means of storytelling.



### *The Narrative Image*

In the semi-autobiographical *Boyhood* (1997), young John immerses himself in photographic narratives and demonstrates an enthusiasm for reading the image that is carried into Coetzee's later fictions. In his copy of *Scott of the Antarctic*, John is drawn to the photographs and follows the narrative through them: "He often looks at the photographs, but he does not get far with reading the book: it is boring, it is not a story" (40). For him, the story is narrated visually. His attitude is reflected in *The Childhood of Jesus* (2013), although with illustrations rather than photographs. Young David pours over the images in his edition of *Don Quixote* and is reprimanded by Simón for "just looking at the pictures and guessing at the story" (163). In *Dusklands*, Dawn too shows a preference for the image. "I respond to pictures as I do not to print," he says and describes how even in his lowest moments his photographs "could be relied on to give [his] imagination the slight electric impulse that is all it needs to set it free again" (13). In *Boyhood*, John's imaginative reading of the image is most keenly observed in his fascination with family photo albums, which David Campany writes "are always acts of narration, whether through captions, selective editing, or the informal oral histories that surround them" (110). "[John] loves to page through his mother's albums" and learn about her life before he was born (34). He reads these images as part of an unfolding narrative in which "he follows her life through the 1920s and 1930s" (34). He and his mother also "page through the albums together" (34), and she shares what Campany labels "the informal oral histories that surround" these volumes. Her eyes well up as she tells John about her dog, who died after eating "poisoned meat" (41). John's parents have a strained relationship, and his mother frequently complains about their difficult financial circumstances. Through photographs, John builds the narrative of a happier past, finding images "that seem to prove" his parents were once in love: pictures of "the two of them

sitting close together at a picnic, for instance” (103). John perceives the “idyll” of her past life “substantiated by photographs” which show her “with other women in long white dresses, standing with tennis racquets in what looks like the middle of the veld” (41). He poignantly pieces together the story of a woman who “no longer has a life of her own” (34).

Unlike the John of *Boyhood*, who spends his time reading photographs, the real Coetzee also used photographs to build his own stories. Many of the photographs he took as a child have recently come to light, and several of these appear to form a fictional series.<sup>2</sup> There are several photographs of model aeroplanes held aloft as if in flight, and perhaps these are intended for a dogfight series. In *Boyhood*, John is fascinated by the photographs in his father’s books of World War Two and recalls how he “pored over photographs of Russian soldiers in white ski uniforms, Russian soldiers with tommy guns” (24). He remembers making drawings of “Russian planes shooting American planes out of the sky” (23). We may speculate that his photographs of model aeroplanes were intended as a way to bring these illustrations to life.

Coetzee’s interest in constructing narratives through photographs is evident in the early development of *Life & Times of Michael K*. Frustrated with the need to find “some inventiveness in form,” Coetzee turns to the possibility of a mixed-media format, combining photographs with graphics and print: “Each [photograph] has an extended explanatory caption, and is overdrawn with arrows, letters, etc. . . . Perhaps the photographs are actually there. Perhaps even better is to leave the pages blank (but for the captions)” (“Notebook,” 9 June 1980). Wittenberg suggests that the use of photographs (either real or implied) was motivated by a need “to let the photographs carry the burden of realist description” (“Film and Photography” 475). Coetzee later considers using “materials: evidences of Sea Point, of the road they travel, etc. (? Photographs)” (“Notebook,” 19 Dec. 1980). It is difficult to know what these “materials” would be apart from photographs. Perhaps he envisioned using train

tickets, fliers, legal documents (permits), and other such paraphernalia. The mixed-media suggestion is reminiscent of John's father's albums in *Boyhood*, which contain "fascinating pamphlets interspersed among [photographs], pamphlets dropped on the Allied positions from German aeroplanes" (34). During the writing process of *Life & Times of Michael K*, the photograph is treated as a narrative resource that has the potential to provide the innovative form which Coetzee is struggling to grasp through prose.

Through this enthusiasm for the narrative dimension of photography, Coetzee breaks away from conventional notions about the image. Jan Baetens and Mieke Bleyen discuss how "the narrative dimension or power of photography" is often neglected because of "the idea of photography as being 'essentially' about carving out a single moment of time in the real flux of life" (165), which overlooks the "many images and photographic practices that follow a completely different, less 'mainstream' agenda" (166). The "real flux of life" here refers to a documentary value that negates the acceptance of fictional photography, and the idea of "carving out a single moment of time" excludes serial photography because the event is considered to be isolated. This furthermore denies the narrative of the individual image by severing it from the events before and after the act of capture (discussed later). Coetzee's interest in serial and fictional photography therefore resists the limiting snapshot ideology described by Baetens and Bleyen. Apart from his use of fictional photography in practice, Coetzee's critical writings also reveal how his understanding of the real can be applied in a fictional context. In an essay on Arthur Miller's film *The Misfits*, he writes, "What is represented on celluloid was actually done at some time in the past by actual people in front of a camera. The story in which the moment is embedded may be a fiction, but the event was a real one . . ." (*Inner Workings* 226). These are "actual people" who perform a real act in a fictional context. The real is a substance; it is the material of life that is then photographed and can be used to construct narratives.

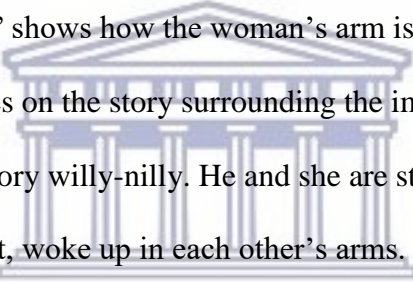
The use of serial photography furthermore complicates preconceptions about the photographic tense. In *Camera Lucida* (1980), Roland Barthes famously proclaims the essence (the *noeme*) of photography as “That-has-been” (77). For Barthes, the defining quality of the photograph is that it shows something that “has been absolutely, irrefutably present, and yet already deferred” (77). Baetens and Bleyen, however, draw attention to the way in which the photonovel contests this belief. In Marie-Françoise Plissart’s photonovel *Aujourd’hui* (“Today”), they identify “a new, narratively inspired vision of photography” which foregrounds the present:

In its emphasis on duration . . . it takes a critical stance toward the snapshot ideology of mainstream photography. Through its insistence on the present (“today” is neither yesterday nor tomorrow), it rejects the Barthesian interpretation of photography as thanatography (photography as the essential expression of “what has been,” Barthes 1982). (178)

Barthes overlooks the role of serial photography which foregrounds the photograph as part of a continuing series of events. By breaking away from such preconceptions of “mainstream photography,” the narrative potential of the image comes to the fore. Rather than showing a single moment isolated in the past, the image represents a continuing narrative. This perspective of the image, as expressed in serial photography, is evident throughout Coetzee’s prose in his descriptions of individual photographs.

In Coetzee’s fictions, the act of being photographed is envisioned as part of a continuing sequence of events. In *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), Elizabeth pictures “women in those intimate, over-intimate photographs from the European war, . . . who knelt naked at the lip of the trench into which they would, in the next minute, the next second, tumble, dead or dying with a bullet to the brain” (178). There is a sense of expectation as these women teeter on the verge of death, and for Elizabeth the image is inextricably tied to what will happen “in

the next second,” as if barely a moment passes before this scene continues. Elizabeth Curren similarly thinks of the labourers standing “outside the picture [of her family], leaning on their rakes, leaning on their spades, waiting to get back to work” (*Age of Iron* 111). When Rayment looks at the haunting photograph of immigrant settlers, he pictures “the stranger with the newfangled picture-machine who a moment before this moment plunged his head under the dark cloth” (52). In *Diary of a Bad Year* (2008), JC looks at a famous photograph by Robert Doisneau that shows a young couple in an embrace on the streets of Paris. Through JC, one sees how the photograph represents a dynamic scene: “A rush of feeling has overtaken the pair in mid-stride: the woman’s right arm does not (not yet) return the man’s embrace but hangs free . . .” (173). The couple were “overtaken” by emotion only moments before, and the phrase “not yet” shows how the woman’s arm is not static but rather about to embrace him. JC then elaborates on the story surrounding the image:

  
 One puts together the story willy-nilly. He and she are students. They spent the night together, their first night, woke up in each other’s arms. Now they have lectures to attend. On the sidewalk, in the midst of the morning crowd, his heart suddenly wants to burst with tenderness. She too, she is ready to give herself to him a thousand times.  
 And so they kiss. (173)

He places the photograph within a fuller narrative, envisioning how this scene occurs after “their first night together” and after they “woke up in each other’s arms.” Within the present moment (“Now”) is an urgency and anticipation as “they have lectures to attend” yet cannot help but immerse themselves in this embrace. For JC, like John in *Boyhood*, there is a vivid story to be gleaned from the photograph.

This type of deep engagement with the photographic narrative will be examined closely in the main chapter on photography. In *Dusklands*, *In the Heart of the Country*, and *Slow Man*, it will be shown, the narrative dimension of the photograph draws Magda,



Rayment, and Dawn into a dialogue that affects their understanding of themselves, their lives, and their past. This engagement with the image can furthermore have traumatic effects. The narrative dimension of photography is a consistent influence on Coetzee's fictions, as is the inherent link between the photograph and the real, which will be discussed next.

### *Accessing the Real*

The first way in which Coetzee's fictions reference the reality of the photograph is through mortality. A photograph shows living figures, yet often the observer is overtaken by knowledge that they have since died. The *living* are therefore perceived simultaneously as the *dying*. The photograph's link between death and reality is theorised by Jacques Derrida in *Copy, Archive, Signature* (2010). Derrida separates characteristics of photography into two categories: art and *technê*, and nonart (the real). In order to isolate the real, he theorises a point where art no longer intervenes in the creation of the image:

[H]owever artful the photographer may be, whatever his or her intervention or style, there is a point where the photographic act is not an artistic act, a point where it passively records, and this poignant passivity would be the chance of this relation with death. . . . (9)

The passive moment of nonart, the "point where the photographic act is not an artistic act," is the nexus of reality and death. Death is tied to the fact that, as Coetzee writes, "actual people [stand] in front of a camera" (*Inner Workings* 226). By observing this event, the photograph sets these individuals along a path to the inevitable end of life. Susan Sontag expresses a similar position: "Photographs state the innocence, the vulnerability of lives heading toward their own destruction, and this link between photography and death haunts all photographs of people" (*On Photography*, "Melancholy Objects"). For Sontag, photographs reveal "lives

heading toward their own destruction,” and this is a position adopted in Coetzee’s fictions when the photographic subject is perceived through the prophecy of death. As Elizabeth Curren looks at her brother in the photograph, she sees herself holding “his hand when he was going,” telling him that he would see their deceased mother (*Age of Iron* 111). Magda longs for “photographs of the dead woman [her mother]” (sec. 84). In *Boyhood*, John learns of the death of a family acquaintance and “stares hard into the face of the dead Bob Breech” (33-34). For Rayment, his nineteenth-century photographs are all “images of the dead” (*Slow Man* 51), photographs of people he has outlived.

Yet this signification of death that attaches itself to the real does not negate the life of the image. The photograph shows a present, continuing narrative that, although perceived through the lens of death, depicts living figures. As Marijana tells Rayment, “Photograph is not the same as just name, is more living. Otherwise why save photographs?” (*Slow Man* 50). The life of the image was noted early in photography’s history. The daguerreotype was particularly lifelike, and in his influential essay “A Short History of Photography” (1931), Walter Benjamin quotes nineteenth-century photographer Carl Dauthendey’s observations about how people were afraid to look at the image: “They were embarrassed by the clarity of these figures and believed that the little, tiny faces of the people in the pictures could see out at them . . .” (8). Benjamin is well known for his theory of “the aura,” which Coetzee explains as “an inter-subjective relationship of a kind . . . between an artwork and its viewer: the viewer looked and the artwork, so to speak, looked back” (*Inner Workings* 48). In *Dusklands*, Dawn engages the aura partially, theorising that the photographic figures know “that from somewhere they are being waved to” (17). A direct path to these figures is opened between them and Dawn, although they are unable to see him. The suggestion that the figure in the frame is alive and moving will be explored in detail in the photography chapter of this thesis. The life of the image is a prevalent trope in Coetzee’s prose, and thus the concept of



mortality is referenced frequently as either life or death, and often these associations are both linked within a single image.

The photographic property of the real is also expressed in Coetzee's prose through the search for the passive act which is independent of art. Derrida acknowledges that ultimately one can never truly separate art and nonart because the mere decision to initiate photographic capture alters (although does not negate) the real: "If technics intervenes from the moment a view or shot is taken, and beginning with the time of exposure, there is no longer any pure passivity, certainly, but this does not simply mean that activity effaces passivity" (12). Nonart is therefore viewed by Derrida as a form of *acti/passivity* (12). Rather than pure passivity, the real is identified to the degree that it resists art. In Coetzee's short story "Nietverloren" (2002), for example, the narrator is elated to discover the threshing floor of his family farm "[i]n the background" of an old photograph (30). The image also shows a man and two donkeys, who are "not supposed to be part of the photograph." The narrator is drawn to elements captured by chance rather than the setup in the foreground (men posing before a hunt), which has been staged (an operation of art). In the photographs sent by her daughter, Elizabeth Curren too seeks the spontaneous, "looking at the backgrounds, at all the things that fell willy-nilly within the frame at the instant [her daughter] pressed the button" (*Age of Iron* 194). Elizabeth is also drawn to the gesture made by her childhood self in the garden photograph. She is shown "reaching toward the camera" while her mother "restrains [her] by some kind of rein that passes over [her] shoulders" (110). The little girl, not yet two years old, is unfamiliar with photographic conventions and thus needs to be restrained; but she nevertheless resists the photographic pose (art) through her instinctive gesture. The little girl in Rayment's photograph similarly breaks her pose: "On the hand that the smallest child brings to her mouth the light exposes what might be jam but was more likely mud" (52). The

mud also evinces Coetzee's interest in the spontaneous because the girl has not been cleaned and dressed for the occasion.

In the above examples, several of Coetzee's characters are drawn to the background of the image, and it should be noted that apart from the focus on human subjects, the real is also inscribed in photographic references as an expression of historical contexts. In a critical study of Cees Nooteboom's *The Longing for the West* (1985), Coetzee identifies the value of photographic reference in establishing historical foundations: "The book comes to life only when he is able to read small-town Wisconsin against an opportunely discovered collection of turn-of-the-century photographs of the same sites, which bring back the dimension of historical depth . . ." (*Stranger Shores* 55). The use of photographs is a narrative strategy that creates "the dimension of historical depth." Coetzee similarly establishes the backdrop of nineteenth-century Australia in *Slow Man* through Rayment's collection of images. Among these are photographs attributed to Antoine Fauchery, who was a real photographer. When Marijana tells Rayment that in her homeland of Croatia many regard Australia as having "Zero history" (49), he looks to the photograph of a woman and children in squalor and wants to say, "Not zero history. Look, that is where we come from: from the cold and damp and smoke of that wretched cabin . . ." (52). In "Nietverloren," the photograph of the threshing floor reveals a lost way of life to the narrator: the image shows him that "this had been a self-sufficient farm, growing all its needs" before being turned over for sheep farming (33). This past is evidenced through the photograph, which frames this scene in a historical context.

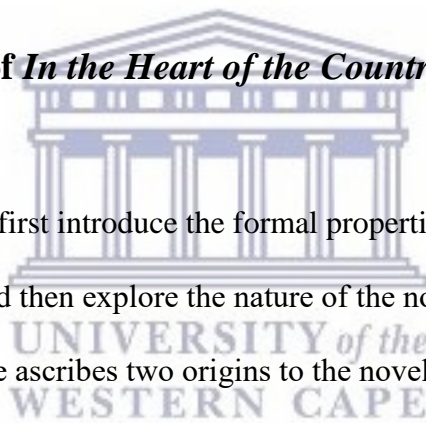
In summary, the multiple examples of photographs in Coetzee's work are organised according to a higher-order intermedial reference system that draws from the nature of the medium itself. The photographs in Coetzee's texts are shaped by a narrative purpose, and the details of their composition convey the underlying reality that is quintessential to the

photographic image. In the chapter on photography, I will extend these qualities into an analysis of photographic analogy.

But the examination of photographic influences is not isolated to the final chapter, and photography will play an important role throughout this thesis as part of cinematographic references. The lighting and camera effects that will be explored in *In the Heart of the Country* and *Life & Times of Michael K* represent the continuing impact of analogue photography on Coetzee's work as well as being an expression of cinematic influences. In the next section, I will discuss the origins of Coetzee's cinematic form in *In the Heart of the Country*.

### **The Cinematic Origins of *In the Heart of the Country***

The following discussion will first introduce the formal properties and critical associations of *In the Heart of the Country* and then explore the nature of the novel's cinematic influences. In *Doubling the Point*, Coetzee ascribes two origins to the novel's cinematic form: the 1960s avant-garde films represented by *Passenger*, *La Jetée*, and the early works of Godard; and a modernist writing style that was itself shaped by early twentieth-century montage editing techniques, which showed writers "how rapidly narration could be carried out" (59). Susan Hayward also labels montage as *collision editing* and notes how it emerged from the innovative practices of 1920s Soviet cinema; the technique involves "a rapid alternation between sets of shots whose signification occurs at the point of their collision," and these conspicuous effects run counter to the seamless editing of Classical Hollywood Cinema (122). James Monaco notes that montage can also refer to film editing in general (ch. 3 "Montage"), but Coetzee's emphasis on rapidity and interest in independent cinema suggest that he uses the term in the same manner as Hayward.



Considering Coetzee's remarks in *Doubling the Point*, the discussion on film will first explore how *In the Heart of the Country* is influenced in part by prior literary developments. The influence of montage on literary form, however, will be considered as representing a foundational, cinematic style from which *In the Heart of the Country* then departs into a more specific resemblance to 1960s avant-garde cinema. Finally, I will outline the specific intermedial references to film form that will be examined in this thesis.

### *Novel Overview and Critical Context*

*In the Heart of the Country* was the first of Coetzee's novels to be published abroad (in Great Britain), introducing his writing to a wider international readership than *Dusklands*, which had been published locally. It was awarded the CNA Prize, a prominent South African literary award at the time. The text is narrated through the intensive, first-person voice of thirty-something spinster Magda, who "hover[s] ever between the exertions of drama and the languors of meditation" (sec. 122). Set entirely on an isolated sheep farm in the Karoo, *In the Heart of the Country* takes place in a world far removed from the 1960s cinema behind it. Although the time of the story is unspecified, the screenplay adaptation begins around 1910 and ends around 1930 (Coetzee, *Two Screenplays* 28). This historical period is also suggested in the novel through several references to daguerreotypes, which Roger Watson and Helen Rappaport observe became the dominant form of portraiture circa 1840s (183). The novel's narrative is highly unconventional, and Magda often repeats events from several perspectives. She also changes her story and dismisses scenes as fantasy retrospectively. From the start of the novel, one is aware of her unreliability as a narrator.

The story begins with Magda picturing the arrival of her father and his new wife, a scene she openly admits is imagined "for [she] was not watching" (sec. 1). Her immediate

hostility towards this woman becomes homicidal, and she soon murders the couple brutally with a hatchet. Magda then fixates on how to dispose of the bodies, wondering whether they should “be burned or buried or submerged” (sec. 34). The following entry in Coetzee’s notebook reveals that the aftermath of these murders was influenced by the film *Deliverance* (1972): “Perhaps the true theme is not killing . . . but disposing of the corpse. (Suggestion from Deliverance)” (21 Dec. 1974). In the film, three men on a rafting trip are assaulted and kill one of their attackers. After some debate, they decide to bury the corpse. They subsequently weigh down two more bodies and sink them in the river. But Magda’s father returns, and the past narrative of his wife now seems imagined. The farmhand Hendrik then brings his young bride Anna to live on the farm. Magda’s father is instantly infatuated and coerces her into a sexual relationship. When he takes her into his bedroom one night, Magda fires a rifle through his window in anger, wounding him fatally. She cleans the corpse and buries it haphazardly in “a porcupine hole” (sec. 175), an event that is described in detail, thereby leaving no doubt as to the reality of her father’s death. Ensuing conflict between her and Hendrik over money culminates with her brutal rape. She, Hendrik, and Anna then live together briefly and unhappily until a visit from neighbouring farmers spurs Hendrik and Anna to flee. Time skips forward suddenly and Magda is at once an “old woman” (sec. 237) who hears voices coming from “machines that fly in the sky” (sec. 240), and she attempts to contact these beings by building stone images and poems. Her father then reappears without explanation as an invalid who “sees and hears nothing” (sec. 261), and the novel ends with Magda refusing to “tie up the loose ends” of her story (sec. 266). Although she previously expresses a desire for a story with “a beginning, a middle, and an end” (sec. 89), she ultimately rejects the possibility of a conventional, explicable narrative. “As Aristotle famously observed,” writes Tim Whitmarsh, “every story needs a beginning, a middle and an

end (even if, as Jean-Luc Godard is said to have opined, ‘not necessarily in that order’)” (40).<sup>3</sup>

This ending is a final expression of the self-conscious style of narration that together with the novel’s structure constitute the text’s aesthetic counter to the seamless continuity of literary realism. Firstly, in terms of structure, *In the Heart of the Country* stands apart from Coetzee’s other fictions because of its division into 266 numbered sections of varying lengths, ranging from a single, five-word sentence (sec. 111) to a sweeping three pages (sec. 122). These are arranged as independent, chronologically numbered blocks of text and thus come to resemble the screenplay format. Coetzee, however, suggests that this similarity is incidental as “*In the Heart of the Country* is not a novel on the model of a screenplay” (*Doubling* 59). He then articulates this format as a break away from literary realism:

[The sequences] are numbered as a way of pointing to what is not there between them: the kind of scene-setting and connective tissue that the traditional novel used to find necessary – particularly the South African novel of rural life [the *plaasroman*] that *In the Heart of the Country* takes off from. (59-60)

The novel furthermore subverts realist conventions by foregrounding the act of narration.

Attwell observes how these numbered sections and “the episodic repetitions . . . serve to focus attention on Magda herself as the narrating subject” (*Doubling* 58). Magda also continually calls attention to her role as narrator by pointing out ellipses in her narrative.

When her father is dying, she begins a new section by saying, “A day must have intervened here. Where there is a blank there must have been a day during which my father sickened irrecoverably . . .” (sec. 149). The word *blank* additionally calls attention to the literal blank space between the blocks of text. Similarly, the day after she buries her father in the porcupine hole, she says, “All at once it is morning. It seems to lie in my power to skip over whole days or night as if they did not happen” (sec. 186). Such remarks together with the



novel's structure and contradictory narrative create a striking, innovative text that opposes dominant modes of literary representation.

This antirealist aesthetic of *In the Heart of the Country* is often considered for its ideological interrogation of formal properties of literature. Teresa Dovey's psychoanalytical readings of Coetzee's early fictions seem to have started this pattern of inquiry. She situates her work as a departure from the then common practice of reading Coetzee's novels "as offering a critique of the South African situation" and instead focuses on them as "a critique of various modes of writing," which in turn draws attention to discourses that sanction "representations of various phases of imperialism" (11). Caroline Rody follows a similar framework by reading Magda as a feminist heroine who rebels against patriarchy and its associate literatures: her vociferous opposition to the narratives available to her as a colonial daughter (like marriage) is a protest against both "the tyranny of literary plot" and her "confining social position" (161). Rody discusses the novel as a revision of the *plaasroman* specifically, noting how Hendrik and Anna are placed "at the very center of [Magda's] life," whereas they would have been largely excluded from the traditional farm novel (168).

A commonality in such readings is the theory that the novel's subversions of various literary forms is an ethical exercise in writing against patriarchal power structures. Both Clive Barnett and Nicole Devarenne identify this pattern in critical texts. Barnett writes that "Coetzee's novels are often valued to the extent that they escape the received conventions of politically committed literature" (290). Devarenne makes a similar statement in reference to the *plaasroman*: "*In the Heart of the Country* is often described as parodying the *plaasroman* or farm novel, whose influence on Afrikaans literature and usefulness for apartheid thinking has been discussed extensively by Coetzee and others" (66). Such studies often reference Coetzee's critique of the "the silences in the South African farm novel, particularly its silence about the place of the black man in the pastoral idyll, and the silence it creates when it gives

the black countryman a voice of his own, then censors that voice” (“Farm novel” 17). (Both Devarenne and Rody draw from this text.) The anti-pastoral reading adopted by Coetzee attempts to find the “gaps, inverses, undersides; the veiled; the dark, the buried, the feminine; alterities” (“Farm Novel” 17). This concept of “the gap” is of particular import in staging a formal resistance to patriarchal modes of representation.

Gaps function as places where oppressive power structures cannot go. In *In the Heart of the Country*, the motif of the O contextualises the gap as a form of gendered resistance. Magda alludes to this signification when she broods on lost opportunities in life and says, “If I am an O, I am sometimes persuaded, it must be because I am a woman” (sec. 87). Her O is both a bawdy sexual reference and an expression of her yearning for purpose (to be made whole). In his essay on Achterberg’s poem “Ballade van de gasfitter,” Coetzee summarises the position of the O as follows: “The 0, the circle, the hole are symbols of that which male authoritarian language cannot appropriate” (“Achterberg” 296). He draws this feminist discourse from Monique Wittig’s *Les Guérillères* (1969), and quotes the following passage (abridged below) from Wittig:

[Language] is made up of signs that rightly speaking designate what men have appropriated. Whatever they have not laid hands on . . . does not appear in the language you [women] speak. This is apparent precisely in the intervals that your masters have not been able to fill with their words of proprietors and possessors, this can be found in the gaps, . . . in the zero, the O, the perfect circle that you invent to imprison them and to overthrow them. (“Achterberg” 296)

The gap is uninhabited by “proprietors and possessors,” and thus by extension it is a place without the polarisation between owner and property, meaning the women are not forced into the role of the possessed. This place of freedom is therefore where the women “imprison” and “overthrow” their masters. Magda’s language too is patriarchal – a “father-tongue” (sec.



195). Magda formalises her own textual resistance by creating gaps in her narrative that she controls and will not accede to any form of representation. These gaps are then highlighted visually through the blank spaces between the novel's numbered sections.

*Les Guérillères* employs a similar, structural methodology. It too is divided into blocks of text separated by blank spaces, but unlike Coetzee's novel these are unnumbered. Coetzee was drawn to this form when constructing *In the Heart of the Country*, writing in his notebook: "Seriously consider a structure like that of Les Guérillères – an assemblage of metamorphosing paragraphs" (24 June 1975). The third-person narration of Wittig's novel, however, reads more like a series of oral tales and monologues. *In the Heart of the Country* is more concrete, with its taut and graphic prose as well as the focus on a central character and storyline. In both texts, however, one can theorise the structural gaps as a mode of linguistic resistance.

The idea that language automatically sets up divisions of "proprietors and possessors" can be extrapolated into the novel's context as the division of master and servant. Magda speaks "a language of hierarchy, of distance and perspective" (sec. 195). This hierarchical structure precludes her from establishing reciprocal connections with Hendrik and Anna. Her inability to engage with them in an authentic way provokes her into questioning the value of her language in social exchange, and through her failure to find "words of true exchange" (sec. 203) she exposes its intrinsic inequality. Mike Marais explores the idea that Magda's use of language precludes her from "alter[ing] the master-slave relationship through achieving some form of mutual recognition" (20). Because she "identif[ies] Hendrik as a servant . . . Magda's language, and the code it bears, negates him" (16). Marais also considers that through speech she is simultaneously defined in opposition to Hendrik, and therefore she is rendered "linguistically and discursively separated from what she *might* be" (19). Neither she nor he is an authentic self, and thus they remain in a stalemate of mutually defined

alienation. Such linguistic failings are also represented in the framework of the signifiers *I* and *You*, explored in Coetzee's Achterberg essay but adapted by him to Magda's situation in an interview with Stephen Watson. Magda's speech, he observes, renders Hendrik and Anna as inferior (objectifying *You* as *It*): Magda is thus unable "to transform that 'It' into a 'You', to, so to speak, create a society in which reciprocity exists" (qtd. in Clarkson 55). Ultimately, Magda must assent to the limitations of her language, and in this way the novel takes an ethical stance. Derek Attridge writes that because language both creates and occludes the other, "the force of the other can be most strongly represented" through language that is "aware of its ideological effects . . . [and] its own capacity to impose silence as it speaks" ("Ethical Modernism" 669). By affirming that the other is beyond her language, Magda is acknowledging the other's power to resist representation. She disables her language from silencing the other by preventing it from adopting the pretence of realism.

*In the Heart of the Country* further considers linguistic alienation by juxtaposing two categories of language, which are similarly described by Stéphane Mallarmé in his 1897 essay "Crisis of Verse." Both novel and essay set up an opposition between language in everyday discourse and a purer form of language that captures essence. According to Mallarmé's framework, the first category excludes literature and functions like economic exchange: "To tell, to teach, and even to describe have their place, and suffice, perhaps, in order to exchange human thought, to take or to put into someone else's hand in silence a coin . . ." (210). The second category represents language that can grasp "the pure notion" (210). Verse, he proposes, has the ability to make a word "entirely new, foreign to the language," and thus "the object named is bathed in a brand new atmosphere" (211). In order to grasp the object's essence, the word is transformed into that which negates the inherent distance of everyday discourse. Coetzee refers to the category of pure notion in passing while commenting on Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator," noting how Benjamin draws on

“the example of Mallarmé and a poetic language set free of its communicative function” (*Inner Workings* 52). Like Mallarmé, Magda theorises a language of “pure meaning” (sec. 241) that will remove the distance between her and Hendrik and Anna, but instead of finding “words of true exchange” (sec. 203), she is left with her alienating father-tongue. Magda too equates this everyday discourse with monetary exchange when she struggles to describe Anna. “Words are coin,” she complains, “Words alienate. Language is no medium for desire. Desire is rapture, not exchange” (sec. 50). She is denied the ecstasy of desire and must instead grapple with the frustrations of exchange. In the words of Coetzee, she is unable to free her language from “its communicative function.” The signification of “coin” is furthermore linked to ideas of patriarchy and language because money represents the master’s economic power which (like language) drives the secular society on the farm. When Magda’s father pursues Anna, he accordingly places a coin “in her palm” (sec. 69), which is both a gift and a reminder that she and Hendrik rely on him for their livelihood.

Coetzee also challenges the bounds of language through ideas of visuality. *In the Heart of the Country* contests the separation of image and word, which is an outmoded and restrictive discourse that Kamilla Elliott, in her seminal study of media relations, refers to as the dogma of “the unbridgeable word and image divide” (4). Carrol Clarkson observes that “throughout Coetzee’s writing (both fiction and non-fiction) there is an appreciation of language as material substance – an appreciation that it is something that is seen and heard, as much as it is understood” (67). She provides several examples from Coetzee’s fictions, such as Magda’s stone words to the sky-creatures. This interest in the visual dimension of language is in part influenced by the Cantos of Ezra Pound. Coetzee admires Pound’s arrangement of “text in blocks or patches over the page” as well as his use of “odd-looking words in odd-looking orthography” (“Homage” 6). In the semi-autobiographical *Youth* (2002), John similarly observes how the “dark typeface is interrupted now and again, like

strokes of a gong, by huge Chinese characters” (159). The reference to blocks of texts recalls the structure of *In the Heart of the Country*. Like Pound, Coetzee also engages with the visual aspect of the written text through typography. Magda’s stone words are written in uppercase letters, underscoring their heaviness, while the voices from the sky-creatures are written in italics. Their soft appearance complements the ephemerality of this speech. Coetzee also follows Pound’s example of using superscript.<sup>4</sup> In *Foe* (1986), the ship that rescues Susan Barton, Crusoe, and Friday is called the *John<sup>H</sup> obart* (38). These experiments in the visuality of language are tied to his interest in intermediality, with both operating in the space between the myth of pure word and pure image (between prose and visual media).

Although the next section on film will focus on intermedial references to cinematic form, there is also a broader parallel between Coetzee’s fictions and avant-garde cinema worth noting. Dovey and Dovey observe a correlation between form and ideology in the works of Marker (*La Jetée*), Munk (*Passenger*), and Godard, whose films investigate “the nature of power in particular contexts, not least in the context of filmmaking itself” (66). They then call attention to Coetzee’s own commentary about “the affinity of his work with critical cinema” (66). In a 1980 interview with Alan Thorold and Richard Wicksteed, Coetzee discusses the need in South Africa for what he terms a *critical cinema*. The following section of the interview highlights the ideological relation between independent cinema and his work:

C: [B]y a critical cinema I don’t mean cinema that is in the first place critical of conditions in South Africa, but a cinema that is in the first place critical of its own formal assumptions, which are reflections of an ideological position.

Q: That seems fairly clearly also to be an intention of your novels.

C: Well, yes, I try to be aware of my own assumptions and the assumptions that I make in plugging myself into a particular form. (“Grubbing” 5)

Coetzee's description of critical cinema recalls Hayward's account of how montage breaks away from Classical Hollywood Cinema. In alignment with what Coetzee describes above, montage can be considered as a formal resistance to the cinematic conventions (the formal assumptions) of the Hollywood corporate system and by extension its ideological stance. Godard's films similarly perform this function. Like Coetzee, Godard was interested in foregrounding the act of narration, and Roger Crittenden describes how "he deliberately used mismatched shots to jolt the audience from their conventional screen hypnosis" (28). Film editor Agnès Guillemot (*Le Petit Soldat, Alphaville*) recalls how Godard first approached her after asking one of her former students whether "she knew somebody who was not deformed by traditional films who could edit his film [*Le Petit Soldat*]" (14). Godard believed that "a truly radical cinema" must make the audience "conscious of the artifice on the screen" (Crittenden 27). One can therefore consider (to a degree) the simulation of disruptive film effects within Coetzee's prose as an extension of the novel's greater break from realist modes of representation.

In summation, *In the Heart of the Country* challenges conventional notions of literary form and even interrogates language itself. Coetzee's ideological approach to form can be expanded into the cinematic context as the numbered sections of the text represent both a literary and cinematic departure from formal conventions. Although I will not repeat the conclusions of the previously discussed critical studies in a film context, the intermedial references to avant-garde cinema can also be understood to contribute to the creation of a self-reflexive, critical text that calls into question the assumptions of its medium.

*Cinematic Form: From Modernism to the 1960s*

European independent cinema and modernist literature were both part of a formative creative period in Coetzee's life when he lived in London and attended "the cinema often and avidly" ("Homage" 5) while also immersing himself in literary exploration. In "Homage," he discusses the writing lessons he absorbed from the works of Pound, T. S. Eliot, Samuel Beckett, James Joyce, and other writers of the modernist period, noting, for example, how he "learned about slowing down the reading eye" from the works of Pound (6). These authors are also read with enthusiasm by John in *Youth*. John meanwhile experiences a cinematic awakening as "his eyes are opened to films from all over the world, made by directors whose names are quite new to him" (183). Unlike the jaded child of *Boyhood*, who "finds that films have lost their "hold on him" (39), the adult John is captivated by the screen. He is deeply touched by Satyajit Ray's *Apu Trilogy* (1955-59), a coming of age story that he watches "on successive nights in a state of rapt absorption," seeing in the characters a reflection of his own parents (222). Ravi Shankar's original score "catches at his heart, sending him into a mood of sensual melancholy that lasts long after the film has ended" (222). John takes a date to see "Godard's *Bande à part*, which he has seen before but could see many times more, since it stars Anna Karina with whom he is . . . in love" (251). Karina acted in several of Godard's films, including *Le Petit Soldat* and *Alphaville*. Film and modern literature thus both played a role in shaping Coetzee's artistic sensibilities during his early adulthood. In *Doubling the Point*, he suggests that both impacted his prose through a montage style.

The development of cinematic form in modernist literature has been examined extensively since the seminal, intermedial studies of Keith Cohen and Alan Spiegel in 1970s film criticism. These works draw strong parallels between literature and film and propose several ideas of origin rather than just a directly causal link such as Coetzee implies (films inspiring writers). Spiegel proposes that cinematic narration in prose (montage and its accompanying point of view) emerged from two developments in nineteenth-century



literature: firstly, the focus shifted “away from the object and toward the eye of the observer;” and following from this, the observed object was apprehended “only intermittently and as a fragment,” thus in the disjunctive form of montage (39). He identifies a distinctive, modern narrative movement which has “a gap between its phases” (165). This is particularly evident in the way Joyce shifts between scenes: rather than choosing “to fill in this gap [which] would be to show us a literary space that was solid, continuous, and stable,” Joyce constructs “a characteristically modern space, a dynamic, discontinuous space that seems quite literally to twitch and jump before our eyes” (165). The reference to gaps recalls those of *In the Heart of the Country* which also evince the type of dynamic movement described by Spiegel. Cohen suggests that both literary and film montage emerged in part from the modernist zeitgeist. Rather than stating a direct influence (writers educated by film), his approach adopts a stance “toward literary artists who observe, absorb, react to, and handle the external reality of a given period in ways strikingly similar to their fellow film artists” (108). Cohen asserts that film quickly rose in the beginning of the twentieth century into becoming the pinnacle of “the reconstituted patterning (montage) of fragmented narration,” and therefore he uses it as the entry point for uncovering montage in literature (108). Although Cohen and Spiegel are generally conservative about positing a causal influence between writers and filmmakers, their studies illuminate how a strong, literary equivalent of cinematic montage is embedded in several seminal works of the high modernist period.

Of modernist writers, Beckett and Joyce are likely candidates to have imparted the formal properties of cinematic montage to Coetzee. Joyce and Beckett both have direct links to filmmaker and pioneer of Soviet montage editing Sergei Eisenstein. J. M. B. Antoine-Dunne analyses the aesthetic influence of Soviet montage on Beckett and notes “that Beckett had a passion for film and for the works of Sergei Eisenstein” (317). He adds that Beckett even wrote a letter to Eisenstein, who was unfortunately unable to reply because of the

political climate under Stalin. Joyce famously met with Eisenstein in Paris, and Eisenstein would later write that “the immortal ‘inner monologues’ of Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses*” are literature’s greatest achievement in approximating film’s ability to convey “the whole course of thought through a disturbed mind” (104). Unsurprisingly, Joyce is a central figure in intermedial studies and both Spiegel and Cohen focus on *Ulysses* (1922) as a quintessential example of cinematic form in modernist literature. Coetzee is very familiar with *Ulysses*, which he discusses in “Homage” and quotes from in his Achterberg essay. The John of *Youth* is also a great admirer of the novel, and “he can even recite passages from *Ulysses* by heart” (199). Significantly, Beckett’s English fictions were the subject of Coetzee’s doctoral thesis at the University of Texas (Kannemeyer 151). Kannemeyer describes how already during his London years “Coetzee had started devouring the prose of Samuel Beckett, developing great admiration for his frugal, even stingy use of words, and deriving near-sensual pleasure from this prose” (150). Several studies have discussed the affinity between Beckett’s work and Coetzee’s. Paul A. Cantor, for example, proposes that “of all [Coetzee’s] novels, *In the Heart of the Country* comes closest to Beckett in style and substance” (85). Because Coetzee was so immersed in prime examples of literary montage long before writing *In the Heart of the Country* it is likely that the novel’s cinematic structure was inspired, in part, through this avenue.

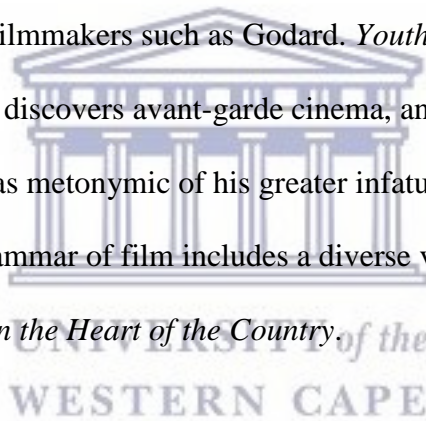
But for Coetzee the influence of film aesthetics extends far beyond montage, and he is critical of an approach to film theory that limits itself to this influence. This position is expressed in his commentary on what he perceives as Benjamin’s restrictive, montage-centred approach to film appreciation and theory:

He overvalued the practice of montage, where he followed Sergei Eisenstein and Eisenstein alone, underestimating the rapidity with which a more extensive grammar of film narrative would be mastered by cinema audiences. Nor had he any way of



speaking about visual pleasure: to him cinema was about being jolted by startling montages into new ways of seeing. . . . (*Inner Workings* 48)

To Coetzee, Eisensteinian montage alone is insufficient when compared to “a more extensive grammar of film narrative.” Coetzee’s own cinematic appreciations show how he is drawn to a variety of formal strategies. In *Passenger* and *La Jetée*, he admires the combination of stills and voice-over, which achieve “a remarkable intensity of vision . . . together with great economy of narration” (60). He also articulates the dynamic nature of these effects, which create “a rapidity, even a forward-plunging quality” (60). In *Alphaville*, Coetzee is taken by “the counterpoint of light, image, sound, sense” (29 June 1975). He furthermore critiques Benjamin’s neglect of “visual pleasure” – a remark that also gestures towards Coetzee’s appreciation for the works of filmmakers such as Godard. *Youth* is replete with effusive outpourings of delight as John discovers avant-garde cinema, and one can consider his infatuation with Anna Karina as metonymic of his greater infatuation with the cinematic arts. In independent cinema, the grammar of film includes a diverse visuality, which ultimately informs the intermediality of *In the Heart of the Country*.



### *Aesthetic Scope*

The study of cinematic form in *In the Heart of the Country* will consider how a far-reaching deployment of film aesthetics aligns the novel stylistically with the innovative style of 1960s film. Within this broader examination of the novel’s approximations of film techniques, I will consider how certain sequences link the novel strongly to *Passenger* and *Alphaville*. The novel’s intermedial references to cinema, it will be shown, include montage, accelerated motion, the simulation of optical devices (camera and film projectors), and lighting. Camera and lighting techniques fall within the field of cinematography, which will be examined

closely in both *In the Heart of the Country* and *Life & Times of Michael K* (in the third chapter). Analysis will demonstrate how Coetzee's imagery is shaped significantly through the control and manipulation of light. Apart from Coetzee's interest in film, his own practice as a photographer would have attuned his sensibility towards lighting qualities, conditions, and effects. These skills are evident in his prose through approximations of chiaroscuro lighting, which Herbert Zettl describes as having three, central characteristics: the use of "selective illumination;" a dark background with an overall, low level of light; and "distinct, dense attached shadows" (39).

This pattern of selective illumination is observable in several of Coetzee's novels. In the final pages of *Foe*, an anonymous narrator navigating the dark house trips over corpses. He strikes a match, saying, "By the light of a match I make out a woman or a girl . . ." (153). He sees them within the small pool of light cast by this flame. He then enters a room on the landing and watches the fall of light as "[t]hrough a solitary window moonlight floods the room." The *mise en scène* resembles Magda's view from inside her father's bedroom. While he and his wife are asleep, Magda observes the interplay of light and dark: "Through the open curtains stream the rays of the full moon on to her shoulders, her full ironical lips. In the shadow of her haunch lies the man asleep" (sec. 20). In *The Childhood of Jesus*, while exploring the main storehouse, Simón watches as "[l]ight filtering through gaps between wall and roof reveals sacks stacked metres high, mountain upon mountain of grain" (111). In *Life & Times of Michael K*, as K lies on his bunk in a dark hut, he looks up to see a man in silhouette: "Against the dazzle of light from the doorway he could not make out the face" (74). Later, sitting around the campfire, he looks over at a tent, "lit from within by a candle" and watches as "figures moved in silhouette against the walls larger than life" (79). When Matryosha suggests to Dostoevsky that they light a candle in Pavel's shrine "[s]o that he won't be in the dark," Dostoevsky envisions a boy thrown overboard in a stormy night sea:

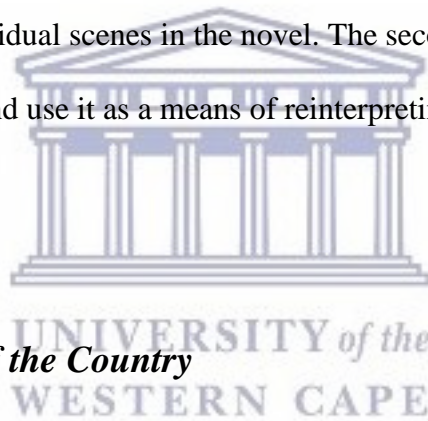
“There is a lantern at the stern [of the ship] on which he fixes his eyes, a speck of light in a wilderness of night and water. As long as I can see that light, he tells himself, I am not lost” (*Master of Petersburg* 78). The vision creates the impression of Pavel looking towards the candle from beyond the grave, seeing the “speck of light in a wilderness of night” that fills the underworld. Such chiaroscuro effects, it will be shown, are central to creating the cinematic visuality of *In the Heart of the Country*.

Apart from lighting, the study of cinematography will examine the simulation of camera techniques (zooms, shifts in focus) and point-of-view shots. In film, a point-of-view shot is presented from “a specific character’s perspective” and is therefore “guided by an internal, psychological rather than an external [directorial] point of view” (Zettl 212). Spiegel identifies how a camera perspective (a camera eye) is similarly inscribed in prose: in these “literary equivalents of camera vision,” the observer occupies a “limited position in space,” and the visibility of the object is accordingly determined by that position (77). The observer’s location therefore dictates how the object of his gaze will be apprehended. A clear example of such camera-eye focalisation is evident in Coetzee’s *Achterberg* essay. During analysis, Coetzee places himself in the gasfitter’s position and visualises a camera point of view: “There is I and there is You [the woman] (whom I see, as in a tracking shot, in every window)” (“*Achterberg*” 288). The scene is pictured through a tracking shot, which mimics the gasfitter’s gaze as he follows the woman’s movement. The voyeuristic nature of the shot (an uninterrupted gaze) enhances the impression of the speaker’s fascination with this woman. Such focalisations, it will be shown, are used frequently in *In the Heart of the Country*.

In addition to this literary camera eye, I will also examine how Magda’s mind’s eye functions like a film projector, shifting imagery across her gaze as she hears the mechanical sounds of the device. Analysis will furthermore demonstrate how this projector eye is

simulated through the suggestion of optical effects that manipulate and distort (defocus) Magda's mental projections.

In *In the Heart of the Country*, intermedial references to film are diverse and extensive. These, it will be shown, reveal the prominent influence of 1960s independent cinema as well as Coetzee's photographic practices. In the first chapter of this thesis, I will focus on identifying approximations of film techniques and styles (a cinematographic visuality that will again be analysed in the third chapter on *Life & Times of Michael K*). In order to gain a fuller appreciation of how media effects function in the prose of *In the Heart of the Country*, I will adopt a comparative study of the novel and its adapted screenplay. In the first chapter, the screenplay will be referenced in part in order to elaborate on the aesthetic composition of individual scenes in the novel. The second chapter will then focus on analysing the screenplay and use it as a means of reinterpreting narrative and temporality in *In the Heart of the Country*.



### **Adapting *In the Heart of the Country***

The field of novel-to-film adaptation has been fraught with difficulties and disappointments for Coetzee. He has been involved in several projects to adapt his novels into feature films, but these have yielded little success for him. Dovey and Dovey observe that throughout his interactions with filmmakers, Coetzee has insisted on a degree of control, whether from “offering to write the screenplay, insisting on having the right of veto over the screenplay, or providing commentary on successive drafts” (57). Apart from adapting *In the Heart of the Country* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Coetzee also began work on a screenplay for *Life & Times of Michael K*, but it was never completed. The multifaceted, industry-related complications and disagreements that have hindered these projects have been discussed

extensively in other studies.<sup>5</sup> To date, only three of his fictions have been adapted into films: *In the Heart of the Country* was made into *Dust* (1985), *The Lives of Animals* (1999) became a 2002 television film, and *Disgrace* (1999) was adapted into a 2008 film starring John Malkovich. For seventeen years (1985-2002) no films materialised from Coetzee's novels despite his continued efforts. Coetzee was disappointed with *Dust* (outlined later), and the adaptation of *Lives of Animals* has somewhat disappeared unnoticed. For *Disgrace*, Coetzee approved the changed "ending, which switches the final and the penultimate scenes from the novel, but said that he preferred his own ending" (Dovey and Dovey 77). At present, there are plans to adapt *Waiting for the Barbarians* (perhaps using Coetzee's own screenplay), and academy award winner Mark Rylance (*Bridge of Spies*) has been marked to play the Magistrate.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps this film will finally encapsulate the cinematic potential of Coetzee's writing. Considering that Coetzee was first approached to adapt *In the Heart of the Country* "[s]oon after the publication of the novel in 1977" (Wittenberg, *Two Screenplays* 11), it has now been almost thirty years since his initial foray into the field of adaptation. In the following discussion, I will provide an overview of the screenplay's development, introduce *Dust* (which will be used in this project to explore the screenplay), and outline the role of the screenplay in the study of *In the Heart of the Country*.

Coetzee entered a contract with director Clive Levinson shortly after he began drafting the screenplay, but several disputes ultimately led to the termination of their agreement. They clashed particularly over the use of voice-over, "which Levinson wanted drastically reduced" (Wittenberg, *Two Screenplays* 12). Although the films Coetzee admires (such as *Passenger* and *La Jetée*) embrace voice-over, the film industry has a long-standing prejudice against the technique.<sup>7</sup> Coetzee alludes to this contentious issue when he speaks of his advocacy "for voice-over and in general for the independence of the voice," which was unsuccessful because voice-over is often "branded as 'literary' and therefore old-fashioned"

(*Doubling* 60). At the time of this remark, he was involved in one of many attempts to bring *Waiting for the Barbarians* to the screen (his screenplay of *Barbarians* would have no voice-over).<sup>8</sup> When Levinson then suggested using Karoo folk wisdom (thinking of the successful film *Days of Heaven*), Coetzee flatly refused, voicing his objections in a way that stressed “his concern for the proper realisation of his work, in this instance the screenplay, and on his vision of the novel” (Kannemeyer 306). His relationship thereafter with filmmaker Francis Gerard was quite productive. Coetzee incorporated several of Gerard’s suggestions but ultimately “rewrote the screenplay in line with his own ideas” (Wittenberg, *Two Screenplays* 13). The final text is a streamlined version of the novel’s narrative. According to the general screen-time rule of “one page per minute” observed by Bonnie O’Neill (294), the screenplay’s sixty pages would make it little more than an hour. But Coetzee did add new material that was not in the novel, such as several establishing shots of the vast Karoo setting, and the end product is a unique expression of his enthusiasm for the cinematic medium. But the project ultimately remained unrealised, and after several years of struggle to have the film made, Coetzee signed the film’s rights over to Belgian director Marion Hänsel.

*Dust* was awarded the prestigious Golden Lion at the Venice film festival but received several negative reviews in South Africa because of its Europeanness. In her review of the film (“Cost Settled *Dust* Site”), Molly Green outlines the various financial and other factors which prohibited Hänsel from creating a more authentic South African feel. Green notes how casting choices were influenced by the Belgian government who subsidised the film: British actress Jane Birkin (Magda) was considered a good financial choice because of her popularity in France, and they furthermore “wanted at least one Belgian.” Rwandan-born Nadine Uwampa was therefore cast as Anna because of her Belgian citizenship. Due to cultural boycotts, *Dust* could not be filmed in South Africa and was therefore shot in Spain in “the same location that was used for *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Dr Zhivago*.” In an interview,



Hänsel explained to Jacqueline Aubenas that she was attracted to the novel because of the relationship between Magda and her father: “I had a strong desire to explore a bond of hate and of love between a father and daughter” (“*Dust: The Director’s Approach*”). She furthermore recalls her difficulty in working with Coetzee: “Everything was a struggle. First, to obtain the rights, then to prove to him that he had been right to give them to me.” Coetzee, however, was involved in the pre-production process: he made corrections to her drafts, “arranged for her to travel to the Karoo” (but she fell ill), and “spent a great deal of time showing her photographs and books of the Karoo” (Dovey and Dovey 61). Coetzee also offered Hänsel his screenplay, but she declined because she considered the text “unsuitable for fundraising and, moreover, incompatible with her own vision” (Wittenberg, *Two Screenplays* 15). Coetzee was ultimately critical of the film and would later tell Joanna Scott that Hänsel read the novel “as a retelling, in other terms, of her own life story,” a resemblance that he failed to see: “It wasn’t as though the events of Magda’s life recalled the events of her life. It is rather that there was something in the voice that she took as her own” (“Voice and Trajectory” 92). Coetzee also criticised the film for “retain[ing] virtually none of the sequence divisions and indeed none of the quite swift pacing of the novel” (*Doubling* 60).

Although *Dust* was a disappointment to Coetzee, it remains an important text in intermedial study, and during analysis of Coetzee’s screenplay the film will be used in a supporting role to illuminate Coetzee’s own approach to structuring a film narrative. By contrasting Coetzee’s formal choices with Hänsel’s, it will be shown, one can gain a better understanding of how his screenplay would appear on screen.

The study of the screenplay will be used to highlight the novel’s cinematic form (in chapter one) and to rethink its narrative strategies and approach to temporality (in chapter two). There is an intrinsic tension between autonomy and intertextuality in adaptation that allows for a diverse re-engagement with the source novel. Linda Hutcheon identifies two



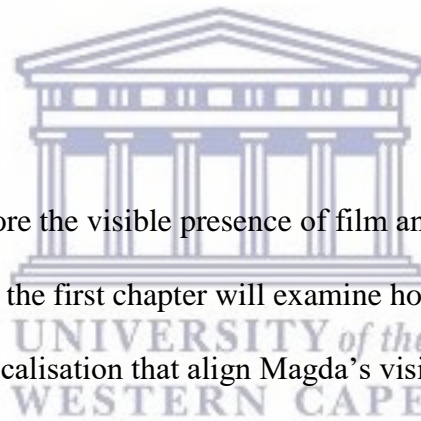
definitive qualities of the adaptation process that encapsulate this relationship: “the act of adaptation always involves both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation,” and it allows for “extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work” (8). The screenplay is simultaneously a unique text (creation) and a reflection of its source novel (recreation). As an autonomous text, it expands the knowledge of Coetzee’s cinematic repertoire. Claudia Sternberg explains how a screenplay anticipates a film’s “concrete cinematic presentation,” and therefore many “structural elements, ranging from costume and body language to colour schemes and filmic narrators, can be prefigured in the script” (520). Such aesthetic choices are deployed by Coetzee in his screenplay, and the text therefore offers a rich sampling of his approach to writing in a cinematic context. An awareness of the cinematic choices and strategies employed in the screenplay can therefore reinforce the cinematic visuality of *In the Heart of the Country* by showing how the novel’s intermedial references to film techniques are repeated in a cinematic text (repeated “on screen”).

The comparative study of novel and screenplay in the second chapter will then focus on how the screenplay can provide a new perspective of the narrative structure of *In the Heart of the Country*. Because of the strong intermedial connection between these texts, the screenplay can be considered, in part, as a reconfiguration of the novel’s narrative in the cinematic context. The potential way in which an adaptation can be used to analyse its source novel is highlighted in critical studies that enter adaptation solely for this purpose. Marilyn Hoder-Salmon suggests that both critics and students can “use the process of adaptation as a critical methodology itself, undertaking the adaptation as an interpretation of the original source” (x).<sup>9</sup> Dovey and Dovey employ this methodology, visualising a film adaptation of *In the Heart of the Country* as “a gesture towards an interpretation of the novel that ‘re-stages’ the text” (70). Their film takes inspiration from the experimental aesthetic of *La Jetée* and *Passenger* and is similarly unconventional, comprising film effects such as voice-over, stills,

“black leader between segments” (74), and accelerated motion (within the novel itself, however, they examine intermedial reference to montage only). Such projects call attention to the interpretive nature of the adaptation process and highlight the type of reciprocal dialogue available between an adaptation and its source text.

Even though Coetzee’s screenplay was never filmed, it remains a valuable text that provides insight into how Coetzee approaches film on a practical level and can therefore act as a lens for interpreting the cinematic style of *In the Heart of the Country*. By extension, then, the screenplay becomes central to understanding how film and photography have influenced Coetzee’s prose.

## Summation and Outline



The following study will explore the visible presence of film and photography in Coetzee’s prose. Through close analysis, the first chapter will examine how *In the Heart of the Country* employs modes of narrative focalisation that align Magda’s vision with optical devices (the camera and projector) and furthermore conveys her subjectivity through lighting and editing techniques. In this thesis, I employ the term *optical subjectivity* to refer to subjectivity that is conveyed through optical channels – the eyes (camera point of view) and the mind’s eye. By extension, lighting too can function as a form of visual subjectivity by being the external manifestation of an interior state (in addition to or combined with its symbolic, emotive, or temporal meanings). The study of lighting will also suggest the novel’s stylistic resemblance to the film noir genre, as represented by *Alphaville*. This chapter will explore a range of intermedial effects across the text. In addition, analysis will demonstrate how distinctive visual effects from both *Alphaville* and *Passenger* are inscribed in the novel’s prose, suggesting that these films in particular have strong ties to *In the Heart of the Country*.

The second chapter will analyse the adapted screenplay of *In the Heart of the Country*, considering how media aesthetics function globally to structure narrative. These observations will be used as a basis for reinterpreting the novel's narrative. A comparative study of the screenplay with *Dust* will also be used to illuminate the effects of Coetzee's formal choice. Analysis will show how *Dust* adopts a conventional interpretation of Magda's father's reappearance in the end of the story by dismissing his murder as part of an imagined sequence. Coetzee's screenplay, it will be shown, uses antithetical narrative strategies that prevent the viewer from making this conclusion. An argument will also be developed in this chapter to show that the influence of film extends to thematic engagements with time, thereby placing Magda's individual experiences of time within a broader, theoretical approach to temporality.

The third chapter will then analyse cinematographic form in *Life & Times of Michael K*, looking at how the use of the literary camera eye, mental projections, and lighting techniques convey K's subjectivity. This will be contextualised as an additional way to read K's interiority. K is a mostly silent character, but the novel's cinematographic elements, it will be shown, allow insight into how he understands himself and his relationship to others, thereby communicating K's estrangement, confusion, and ambivalence as he appears torn between the need for isolation and for companionship.

The final chapter of analysis will examine how technical aspects of photographic processing and capture are encoded into the narratives of *Dusklands*, *In the Heart of the Country*, and *Slow Man*. In *Dusklands* and *Slow Man*, the staging of photographic capture will be incorporated into a broader analogy whereby a flash of light cues a transition into a new state of being, rendering these characters as reflections of the figures in their photographs. Photographic characterisation will then be investigated in *In the Heart of the Country* as part of an elaborate metaphorical construction that depicts Magda's father as a

photographic negative and her mother as a photograph (positive). Magda is then threatened with her mother's fate in a scene modelled on photographic development.

In conclusion, Coetzee's prose is inflected by a diverse and multifaceted intermediality that developed over many years. The foundational influence of photography began in childhood and broadened through new stylistic interests in early adulthood. This study will endeavour to understand how film and photography operate in several of Coetzee's novels, thereby demonstrating the extensive presence of cinematic and photographic visuality within his prose, beginning with the primary text of *In the Heart of the Country*.



# Chapter 1: The Cinematic Style of *In the Heart of the Country*

## Chapter Overview

This chapter will examine the far-reaching intermedial references to cinematic form in *In the Heart of the Country*. Through close analysis, I will explore how camera-eye modes of narration, projector analogies, montage editing, and chiaroscuro and other lighting techniques are configured in the novel's prose. Inscriptions of the literary camera eye and general literary montage represent a broad, foundational cinematic approach from which the novel then departs into the innovative use of projector simulations, special lighting effects, and a more disruptive style of montage (characteristic of Godard's films). These aesthetic choices align the text stylistically with 1960s European Arthouse cinema. Within several of the novel's scenes, the combination of lighting effects and editing also indicates the influence of *Passenger* and *Alphaville* specifically. This chapter will furthermore suggest that the extensive patterning of chiaroscuro lighting in *In the Heart of the Country* references the film noir genre. *Alphaville* too draws inspiration from noir, and I will use examples from the film to highlight how the treatment of lighting in *In the Heart of the Country* expresses a similar generic aesthetic. The way in which both *Alphaville* and *In the Heart of the Country* use high-contrast lighting effects to craft claustrophobic spaces and symbolise deviance and danger gestures towards this shared cinematic heritage.

*Alphaville* is technically a genre hybrid that brings together science fiction and film noir into what can be termed a *neonoir*. Although Vincent LoBrutto suggests that this term

applies to the introduction of colour noirs in the 1980s, *Alphaville* also fits within his description of the movement: “[I]n the neonoir the content and aesthetics of film noir are applied to a narrative taking place in the present or . . . in the future. The neonoir story has an emotional basis in the cultural past, but the visualization reflects recent aesthetic trends” (41). Godard’s film similarly draws from this cultural past (particularly the noir detective stories of the 1940s) while using the formal strategies of then contemporary filmmaking. *Alphaville* takes place on another planet in the dystopian city of Alphaville. The citizens are controlled by the supercomputer Alpha 60, who conditions them into being mindless, predictable drones. Those who fail to adopt Alpha 60’s dehumanized protocols are summarily executed. In resemblance to the Holocaust, people are killed en masse as whole theatre audiences are electrocuted while watching a performance and their bodies dropped into large, underfloor garbage bays. Public executions are also staged at an indoor swimming pool. Editor Agnès Guillemot recalls how this location at Orly airport was one of several that shaped the film into a science fiction, which was not Godard’s original intention (12). *Alphaville* has no special effects, and Guillemot suggests that rather “the daily routine . . . creates the science fiction” (13).

The narrative follows undercover agent Lemmy Caution (Eddie Constantine), who infiltrates the city under the guise of a journalist in order to find a missing secret agent. Constantine was famous for playing the role of Caution in several noir films prior to *Alphaville*. Harun Farocki explains that although Lemmy is technically a secret agent, “he has no apparent institution backing him” and is therefore more like the lone private eye: “He becomes a topos for film noir cinema, and here mutates into the old-fashioned hero sent . . . to battle the forces of computer technology” (60). His hard-boiled, old-school attitude is seemingly out of place in this futuristic city, as is evident when he utters the typical tough-guy movie line “Yes, I am afraid of death. But for a humble secret agent it’s an everyday

thing, like whiskey, and I've been drinking all my life.” Lemmy meets Natasha Vonbraun (the daughter of Alpha 60’s architect). Natasha is played by Anna Karina, who John is infatuated with in *Youth*. Lemmy triggers an awakening in her, and she is ultimately released from Alpha 60’s control. The hero destroys the villainous computer, frees the damsel in distress, and as they flee the city Natasha is able to speak the words “I love you.”

Lemmy’s fight against Alpha 60 and Natasha’s inner struggle for enlightenment are demonstrated through characteristic noir lighting effects, which I will also isolate in *In the Heart of the Country*. Unlike *Alphaville*, however, Coetzee’s novel does not draw from familiar noir narratives and character tropes. In this chapter, I will suggest that *In the Heart of the Country* and *Alphaville* have a shared noir visuality. But I also propose to demonstrate that there are specific scenes within the novel that show more direct linkages and lines of influence to *Alphaville*. The film’s importance to the novel is identified in Coetzee’s notebook entry which responds to the arrangement of several aesthetic elements in the film. Analysis will examine how a similar convergence of light and image through montage can be located in both *Alphaville* and *In the Heart of the Country*. The notebook furthermore suggests that Coetzee was envisioning a way to replicate these effects through allusion to a “slide projector and two tape recorders” (29 June 1975). (Lemmy and Natasha, it should be noted, also attend an actual slide show presented by Alpha 60.) This device, coupled with a voice-over projection, it will be shown, is simulated in *In the Heart of the Country*.

The influence of *Passenger* on the novel will similarly be identified by examining the interplay of special lighting effects and montage editing. The film is already notably similar to *In the Heart of the Country* as both texts present contradictory, open-ended narratives while simultaneously drawing attention to the gaps created by this structure. Director Andrzej Munk was killed in a car accident before completion of the film, which was then assembled



from available footage and stills by his colleagues. In the opening sequence, filmmaker Wiktor Woroszyński's voice-over announces their decision to leave the narrative unfinished:

We have no intention of adding what he had no time to say himself. We are not searching for solutions which might not have been his, nor seeking to conclude the plots which his death left unresolved. We merely wish to present what was filmed, with all the gaps and reticence. . . .

He then introduces a cruise ship (shown only in stills) as “an island in time” where passengers are considered “free, without a biography,” yet he swiftly refutes this illusion by declaring, “But we will not observe this idyll with such cheerful indifference.” The film then follows the story of Liza, a passenger returning to Europe after many years. She has kept her past as a former Auschwitz guard hidden from her husband, but her secret is soon exposed when a woman resembling the inmate Marta boards the ship. Through a rapid and brief series of images, the film then depicts the atrocities of the camp. Among other disturbing scenes, the first flashback shows prisoners forced to run naked for the guards' amusement, men performing hard labour in icy weather, and a man caught in agony against a barbed-wire fence. Liza confesses to being a guard but then tells her husband a story to mitigate her guilt. After this second, longer flashback sequence (shown through moving images), the narrative returns to the cruise ship where Liza watches the woman intently. “Under such tension,” Woroszyński narrates, “Liza recalls the truth well enough,” and the viewer is shown the story that “she will keep to herself.” This flashback then reveals her sinister control and manipulation of Marta, but the sequence is left incomplete. Yet rather than judging her, Woroszyński's voice-over says, “Justifying oneself is only human.” Liza is then released to live a life of secrecy: “Liza won't be challenged by truths buried in the mud of Auschwitz. Nothing can disturb Liza's life among people, indifferent to yesterday's crimes, who even

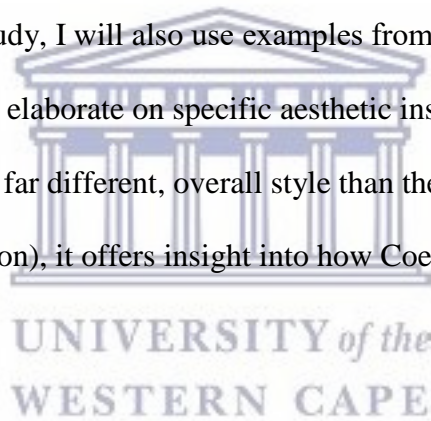
today” (sic). The film ends with this unfinished sentence, leaving the viewer to imagine what will happen to yesterday’s crimes.

Beneath all the gaps in the narrative remains the heavy, irrefutable reality of the Holocaust. The first flashback sequence, which will be the focus of comparative study in this chapter, is significant as it shatters both Liza’s and the viewer’s silence about the past.

Although today stories about the Holocaust are well known, in a 1964 review of the film James Price writes that “Europe has not yet accepted the fact of the death-camps, and perhaps it never will” (42). For Munk, these stories were a part of his student life in Łódź (Poland), and he heard them directly from Auschwitz survivors.<sup>10</sup> *Passenger* is therefore centrally important because it exposes these crimes at a time when the world chose to look away. As Price observes, “It is the camp, as an historical fact, which Munk forces upon us. . . . The audience, like Lisa, has to grapple with that reality” (46). The second and third flashback sequences are less dramatic formally, but Bolesław Michałek and Frank Turaj suggest that this understatement intensifies the impact of the setting: “There seems to be no affection, no sympathy even, as [Munk] depicts the appearance of the camp, the daily routine, the suffering. It is a calculated coldness that by its very nature horrifies more than a portrayal in which the director’s sympathies are apparent” (127). The performers were also “not allowed . . . to express feelings and emotions” (Price 46). Munk thus prevents these scenes from being overshadowed by the personal drama between Liza and Marta, and in a way these characters become the background to a greater story. The first flashback, however, is a sensory assault of bright light and fast editing, and I will examine how similar effects are simulated in *In the Heart of the Country*.

In summation, this chapter will undertake an intermedial study of how cinematic form shapes *In the Heart of the Country*. The first section will examine montage, initially discussing how the text employs a succinct scene-setting technique that is necessary for this

structure (one that resembles the screenplay format). This analysis will also look at how *Alphaville* influences the text's montage style. Afterwards, I will discuss how camera-eye focalisations and projector analogies are inscribed in the text. This section will focus predominantly on the novel because the camera effects do not suggest links to specific films but are rather part of Coetzee's general deployment of intermedial reference. The simulation of stills, however, is perhaps inspired by his interest in replicating *Alphaville*'s style as well as his general appreciation for stills with voice-over commentary. Afterwards, analysis will focus on identifying the more direct influence of *Passenger* and *Alphaville* on *In the Heart of the Country* by exploring how visual effects and editing convey shifts in consciousness. The final section of this chapter will then explore cinematic lighting within the context of the film noir genre. Throughout this study, I will also use examples from Coetzee's screenplay adaptation to either identify or elaborate on specific aesthetic inscriptions in the novel. Although the screenplay has a far different, overall style than the novel (as will be observed in the next chapter on adaptation), it offers insight into how Coetzee envisions specific media aesthetics on screen.



## Montage

The simulation of montage in *In the Heart of the Country* is made possible because of a terse approach to scene-setting that resembles the screenplay format. In order to recreate abrupt transitions, the novel's sections need to establish a clear image quickly so that the reader experiences a visual clash when scenes change. Although "*In the Heart of the Country* is not a novel on the model of a screenplay" (Coetzee, *Doubling* 59), the brevity of scene-setting employed by Coetzee creates a resemblance between the first lines of the novel's numbered sections and a screenplay's sluglines (scene headings written in capital letters). O'Neill

explains that all sluglines specify “whether the scene is interior (INT.) or exterior (EXT.), where it takes place and whether it is day or night” (300). In the screenplay of *In the Heart of the Country*, Coetzee also uses more precise temporal markers such as NOON and MID-MORNING, and he occasionally specifies point-of-view camera angles. Many of the novel’s first lines compress this same information. Time is also indicated in the novel through descriptions of light, which act as visual temporal markers.

It is noticeable that the opening sentences in the sections of the novel frequently mimic or approximate the sluglines of the screenplay format. This resemblance is made apparent because several of the sluglines in Coetzee’s screenplay have direct counterparts in the novel. The setting for the shooting, for example, is specified in the screenplay slugline “EXT. THE FARMHOUSE. MOONLIT NIGHT” (sc. 68). This same information heads two sections in the novel, one before and one after the shooting: the first reads, “The yard is awash with silver-blue light” (sec. 117); and the second reads, “Hendrik stands in the moonlight in the middle of the yard watching me” (sec. 121). Both lines use moonlight to convey time and both are set in the yard (EXT. THE FARMHOUSE). This close approximation in the language of the novel to the slugline format is also evident when Magda and her father listen to Hendrik playing his guitar. The novel sets the scene “on the stoep” during “the last of the sunset” (sec. 55), and the screenplay relays this information as “EXT. THE FARMHOUSE STOEP. EVENING” (sc. 37). The slugline “EXT. THE AREA IN FRONT OF THE HOUSE, FROM THE STOEP. LATE AFTERNOON” (sc. 108) matches the first line “Hendrik sits with his young wife on the bench [FRONT OF THE HOUSE] in the shade [DAY] of his cottage” (sec. 174). When Magda’s father rides home, the slugline “EXT. BEFORE THE FARMHOUSE. DUSK” (sc. 21) also finds its parallel in “Coming over the rise past the dam [EXT. BEFORE THE FARMHOUSE], my father gathers about his head . . . the haloed sunset display [DUSK]” (sec. 62). And when Magda, Hendrik, and Anna share dinner in “THE KITCHEN. EVENING” (sc. 118), the same scene in the novel

begins with them sitting “around the kitchen table [INT. THE KITCHEN] eating by candlelight [EVENING]” (sec. 214).

Because the novel establishes new locations with such brevity, the shift in imagery from one section to the next happens quickly, and therefore images can be brought into collision within the mind’s eye of the reader.

Transitions between the numbered sections of *In the Heart of the Country* often resemble the jump cuts associated with Godard’s films, which juxtapose “mismatched shots to jolt the audience from their conventional screen hypnosis” (Crittenden 28). For example, the fight sequence between Lemmy and one of Alpha 60’s enforcers (a burly man in a dark suit) is broken into several disjointed images. From inside the car, Lemmy grabs the man by the hair; the film then cuts abruptly to three shots of them fighting in front of the car (the scene is further disorienting because they mimic slow motion). Lemmy next holds the man in a headlock, and in the following shot he is suddenly back in the car as he drives over the man.

This use of montage is simulated in *In the Heart of the Country* when Magda initiates the confrontation with her father that will lead to his shooting. The narrative jumps instantly from inside Magda’s bedroom to “outside the door of” her father’s bedroom, where she taps on the wood while he and Anna keep quiet inside (sec. 101). This short scene ends with her calling out to her father, and the narrative then switches to another location with her in motion: “I trail back to the kitchen. Moonlight strikes thorough the uncurtained window on to the bare table” (sec. 102). This image of a moonlit table then clashes with the first line of the following section: “I caress the white doorknob” (sec. 103). As Spiegel notes, editing conveys “the speed, flexibility, and transforming power of human thought and feeling” (166). Here montage fragments Magda’s experience, giving a sense of her disorientation as she tries to understand her next course of action. It also hurries along the pace of narration, which creates a tension in the build-up to the shooting. Although Magda initially feels empowered

outside her father's room, saying, "The air is alive with my presence" (sec. 101), his unresponsiveness confuses her, and she now meanders back and forth. The gaps created by these edits suggest an incomplete perception and thus emphasise her inability to comprehend her situation. The absence of connective tissue between sections furthermore creates uncertainty as to what has happened. It is unclear whether she leaves the passage and then returns or whether she remains with her hand on the doorknob the whole time and instead imagines retreating to the kitchen. Through this structure, the text communicates her disorientation mimetically by placing the reader in a similar, confused position.

Throughout the novel, one is uncertain as to the veracity of events because several scenes are either revised or repeated from alternative perspectives, and this narrative strategy reflects the influence of *Alphaville*. The film depicts three versions of Lemmy entering his hotel room. All are filmed from inside the room, where Natasha is secretly waiting for him. In the first, she is pressed against a large, dark, wooden door that is framed by curtained glass panes, and the camera faces it directly (medium shot). Lemmy enters without seeing her, and she slowly closes the door behind him. In the next shot, Natasha is again waiting for him to enter, but the door is different: it is a light, narrow door with no glass panes beside it, and it opens in a different direction. This new door is filmed in a close-up, with the camera facing it directly. Lemmy again enters without seeing Natasha as she slinks behind the door. This scene then repeats, but Lemmy and Natasha are now filmed at an angle from across the room (long shot).

*In the Heart of the Country* also repeats and alters events within a sequence. This technique is employed when Magda confronts her father about the sudden departure of the servants Jakob and Old Anna. At first Magda is in the kitchen alone, still reeling after being indisposed with a migraine. This brief scene ends with sunlight glinting "on the rows of copperware" (sec. 78). A jump cut then places Magda "behind [her] chair," speaking to her



father (sec. 79). The following two sections present different versions of this scene, each beginning with “Or perhaps” to signal a change in perspective: in the first, he is already speaking as she enters the kitchen; and in the second, “there is only the empty kitchen” with its “rows of gleaming copperware” (sec. 81). Magda thus returns to the same position she was at the beginning of the sequence. These alterations ostensibly suggest her control over the narrative (her ability to revise an event), but from a visual perspective the use of montage also conveys a psychological disturbance. The series is disjointed, representing her confusion and uncertainty as she is trying to readjust after her illness and process the truth of her father’s actions.

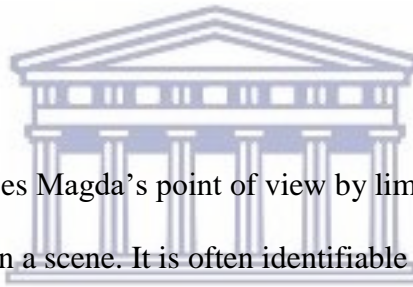
Such alternative variations also occur when Magda’s father approaches Anna on horseback. He at first rides up to Hendrik’s cottage and gives her a packet of sweets. She remains there “holding the packet while he rides away” (sec. 67), but in the next section she is on “her way homeward” as Magda’s father approaches her (an alteration cued by *or*) and gives her the sweets (sec. 68). This time she “walks on” while he stays behind. The final version then shows him “talking to the girl, trying to soothe her” as he gives her a coin (sec. 69). One can again read the editing as either a demonstration of Magda’s narratorial control or an expression of her troubled mind. It is furthermore unclear whether the latter scenes are retakes of the first or whether these sections depict three separate events. In the first scene, Magda uses the habitual, iterative tense to say that while Hendrik is away “[her] father visits his wife.” This implies more than one encounter, and perhaps the use of *or* in the next section refers to a variation of this routine rather than a revision of a single incident. There are at least three possible explanations for this series: perhaps all of these scenes happened, perhaps only one is real, or perhaps all are imagined by Magda. It is difficult to separate fantasy from actuality (that which Magda does visualise through her mind’s eye). This uncertainty underscores Magda’s struggle to grasp what is happening around her.



The above examples are just a sampling of the novel's extensive use of montage. The more disruptive effects created when multiple perspectives of an event are juxtaposed suggest a direct link to *Alphaville*, but intermedial references to film editing extend beyond this single film. The simulation of optical devices is similarly widespread in the novel's prose, and the following section will investigate how these projector and camera analogies are inscribed in *In the Heart of the Country*.

## Optical Subjectivity

### *The Camera Eye*



The literary camera eye focalises Magda's point of view by limiting her line of sight according to her position within a scene. It is often identifiable by such terms as *see*, *watch*, and *eyes*, which show that the narrative is being conveyed through her vision. For example, when she watches Anna in the dry riverbed, "[Magda's] eye is unfailingly drawn to her scarlet kerchief, bobbing among the trees" (sec. 56). The bright colour stands out in the distance, and Magda's gaze, like a camera panning sideways, is *drawn* towards the girl. This point of view is also used in the screenplay when Magda looks out from the kitchen doorway and "sees the red kerchief move among the trees" (sc. 44). In the novel, Magda furthermore pictures Anna's point of view, imagining that the girl is trying to accustom herself to "the view from the front door and the great whitewashed farmhouse that lies at the centre of that view" (sec. 56). Magda earlier remarks, "I . . . have never beheld myself in the equal regard of another's eye, have never held another in the equal regard of mine" (sec. 18). Her choice to picture a matching line of sight therefore gestures towards her need to reach out to Anna and

open up a channel between them that might one day lead to a genuine connection (a matched gaze). The “great whitewashed farmhouse,” however, occupies the centre of Anna’s view. The Cape Dutch homestead can be considered metonymic of the extreme social hierarchies created by the colonial system, and its looming presence is therefore a reminder of the inequality between Magda and Anna which will never allow an equal gaze.

The camera eye often gestures towards such tensions underlying interpersonal relationships. Magda’s estranged response to her father’s wife, for example, is conveyed through a camera-eye focalisation that suggests Magda’s power struggle with the woman, who is unaware of these tensions directed towards her. When Magda’s father and his wife return from an unspecified outing, Magda narrates, “Through a chink in the curtain I watch them” (sec. 22). She remains hidden while they dismount from the cart and then ascend the steps to the front door. By keeping them in her gaze, Magda is attempting to control the situation: she can watch them unguarded, perhaps learning something to her advantage, and avoid meeting them if she chooses. The angle of vision (looking down on them) also asserts dominance because physical elevation “immediately distinguishes between inferior and superior” (Zettl 212). The wife is at a disadvantage as her happy eyes “do not notice fingers at the lace curtains.” The camera-eye perspective is furthermore evident through the limited field of view as “[t]hey pass through the door and out of sight.”

This same point of view is used in the screenplay when Magda’s father’s companion first arrives and is watched “FROM POINT OF VIEW INSIDE HOUSE, THROUGH A CURTAINED WINDOW” (sc. 23). Although Magda is not yet identified as the watcher, the camera’s position is strongly subjective, and one already feels a human presence behind it. As the Woman neatens her appearance and waits for Magda’s father, it is revealed that “Magda . . . is watching through the window,” suggesting that Coetzee envisioned revealing her by

cutting to a shot from below, which would reiterate her position of superiority by having the camera look up at her.

A more acute representation of power relations through the camera eye occurs during simulations of the cinematic male gaze. In her seminal essay on the subject, Laura Mulvey describes how the male gaze aligns the narrative with a male point of view that propagates an established gender inequality: “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female” (203). The woman is traditionally exhibited “as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator” (203). Anna is similarly objectified by Magda’s father as he watches her in a voyeuristic close-up while she waits outside Hendrik’s cottage. The novel imitates a camera zoom by focalising Magda’s father’s point of view through his binoculars: from the stoep, he “sees through his heavy field-glasses the red kerchief, the wideset eyes, the pointed chin, the sharp little teeth, the foxy jaw, the thin arms, the slender body of Hendrik’s Anna” (sec. 49). The text mimics optical magnification by describing Anna’s features (her eyes, chin, and teeth) in close detail. These are also listed in succession, coming into view as his gaze slides downward from her kerchief to her chin and then to her body; she meanwhile remains static as the passive, erotic object of his gaze. His voyeuristic objectification is also paralleled linguistically by the use of *the* rather than the possessive *her* to describe her features: he sees *the* chin rather than *her* chin. Through language, she is stripped of possession of her body. At present, she is “Hendrik’s Anna,” but the camera-eye perspective suggests that she will soon be possessed by Magda’s father. The same point of view is written in the screenplay as “THROUGH THE BINOCULARS: ANNA’S FACE” (sc. 34). The camera zooms in on Anna to simulate Magda’s father’s gaze, and this shot is perhaps envisioned as a vignette, with the edges of the screen clouded or blacked out to suggest the field of vision of the binoculars.

This scene consists of only the slugline, and it is perhaps envisioned as being held for an uncomfortably long time to emphasise Magda's father's growing fixation on Anna.

The aggressive nature of this male gaze is reiterated in a new scene written for the screenplay. Anna brings Magda's father a cup of tea as he is sitting alone on the stoep, but rather than taking the cup he "stares at her fixedly," causing her "to tremble" (sc. 50). She is powerless to leave, held fast as the object of his stare. In the novel, Magda is ambivalent about the nature of their relationship. She questions whether Anna submits to him "because he is the master" or whether she is "intoxicated" by his gifts and attention (sec. 99). In *Dust*, Anna flirts with Magda's father and even embraces him during their first sexual encounter. Coetzee's screenplay, however, makes it clear that Magda's father victimises Anna. When he undresses her (something Magda only speculates on in the novel), "[s]he stands naked before him, hanging her head, crossing her hands in front of her" defensively (sc. 53). She is small, petrified, and trapped.

In the novel, the camera eye furthermore stresses Magda's father's dominance by casting Magda as the silent watcher. Rather than hiding his interest, Magda's father leers at Anna blatantly when she does her housework: he "stands over her, watching" while Magda remains tense and quiet (sec. 65). "It is not privacy that he truly wants," she notes, "but the helpless complicity of watchers" (sec. 72). Watchers sustain his desire through a semblance of opposition that by its weakness, its inability to intervene, upholds his authority. Magda is placed in this position when she observes her father ride up to Anna. Through a camera-eye point of view, she watches him speaking to Anna in front of the cottage, but she is unable to hear his words. As he soothes Anna and gives her sweets, "[Magda] cannot see" if he is smiling (sec. 67). In the second account when Anna is walking home, Magda is able to see him smile but still cannot hear him. In the third account, she then watches him give Anna a coin. "I catch a flash of silver," she says as he brings his hand from his pocket (sec. 69), but

from this distance she is unable to tell whether it is “a shilling or even a florin.” The screenplay too presents this event (shown once) from her point of view, beginning with a shot of “THE ROAD, SEEN FROM THE HOUSE” (sc. 51). Their words are inaudible in the wind. In both novel and screenplay, Magda is relegated to the role of the silent, powerless watcher.

The screenplay also depicts a similar setup earlier in the narrative when Anna is first brought to work in the house. This kitchen scene is in the novel but it has been extended in the screenplay to include Magda’s father. As Magda leaves Anna with Old Anna, she nearly walks into him as he stands in the doorway, “watching Klein Anna intently” (sc. 49). He acknowledges Magda’s awareness by meeting her eyes. “Then, provocatively, he turns his eyes back to Anna,” and Magda looks down meekly as she passes him. Through his domineering gaze, Anna is objectified and Magda is subdued.

Within the context of Coetzee’s work, the voyeuristic camera eye takes on a greater significance: the structure of this point of view can be read as an expression of the same distance inscribed in linguistic relations directed by historical inequity. Magda cannot prevent her language from rendering Anna and Hendrik as inferior (*It* instead of *You*) because of the master-servant dialectics that govern her interactions. Coetzee studies the roles of *I* and *You* signifiers closely in his Achterberg essay. Within this text, one also finds the basis for suggesting that the I-You(*It*) structure is paralleled visually through the voyeuristic gaze. Coetzee firstly envisions a cinematic point of view, writing that the speaker of Achterberg’s poem (the *I*) sees the woman (the *You*) “as in a tracking shot, in every window” (288). He then describes this relationship as that between “the voyeur and his desire” (290), with the *You* (the woman) “present only passively, as an object of the awareness of the *I*” (287). The situation demonstrates the male gaze of film as the woman becomes the passive, desired object of the male voyeur’s gaze. The primary position of the voyeur (*I*) renders the woman as object (*It*). This parallel of visual and linguistic subjective positions (the *I* and the *eye*) can

also be applied to the social divisions between Magda and the servants. Just as Magda can never find a language of equal exchange, she will never be able to achieve “the equal regard of another’s eye” meeting “the equal regard of [hers]” (sec. 18).

Coetzee explores such ideologies of vision in a discussion of Catharine MacKinnon’s attack on pornography. He writes of Mulvey being influenced indirectly by a broader philosophical critique of “the look,” and he in particular turns to Jean-Paul Sartre: “The relation between the one who looks and the one looked at is to Sartre fundamentally nonreciprocal because part of a power struggle” (sic; *Giving Offense* 70). Coetzee suggests the division between the active watcher (“the one who looks”) and the passive participant (“the one looked at”). He then analogises the nonreciprocal gaze to the camera’s one-sided gaze: “The camera is obviously incapable of entering into relations of looking and recognition such as Sartre describes: when it is not itself looking, it can be looked at only as inert glass and metal. It is, so to speak, an eye rather than a look” (70-71). Then, placing Sartre’s theories in a cinematic context, Coetzee suggests that “to claim the privilege of seeing without being seen . . . is, to claim the camera position” (71). Through its physical body, the camera reiterates the extremity of the one-sided, voyeuristic gaze. It can only hold an active role in the situation of the gaze (it can only *see* and never be *seen*). The cold, mechanical nature of the device furthermore implies the hardness of the look – the unfeeling nature of the voyeur who is unsympathetic to the object of his gaze (as observed with Magda’s father). If one furthermore thinks of “a look” as having an interpersonal dimension – as being the conduit for recognition – then Magda too is such “an eye.” She can only see (look at) Hendrik and Anna rather than being seen, being known, by them. Magda’s approximation of a literary camera eye therefore gestures towards the nonreciprocal gaze of the camera and becomes part of a greater ideology of looking.



In summation, readings of the camera eye in *In the Heart of the Country* can be significant within isolated scenes as well as commenting on broader theoretical concepts. The camera eye is used to focalise Magda's subjectivity when she is participating in the narrative as a character (when she puts aside her role as narrator). In contrast, the projector eye that will be examined next appears when Magda demonstrates her narratorial control over events. In these situations, the artifice of the projector device comes to represent the artifice of her imagination.

### *The Projector Eye*

The projector eye is represented as a mechanical device that controls and distorts images within Magda's imagination. The suggestion that her mind is a machine is supported by the novel's frequent descriptions of her as like a machine – an idea that she both courts and refuses. She resists seeing herself as “a machine with opposed thumbs” (sec. 85) but then considers that as a child she was “a little corporal machine trotting about the yard” (sec. 86), and she imagines a second, ghostly self that like a camera captured “the snapshots” of her memories (sec. 86). After shooting her father, she feels disconnected and wonders whether her body (like an automaton) is “propelled along a track by sinews and body levers” (sec. 122), but when she is left alone on the farm she declares that she is not “a machine planted by a being from another planet on this desolate earth” (sec. 230). The mechanistic projector eye can therefore be considered as part of this pattern.

The suggestion of Magda's mind as either a film or slide projector will be examined first during approximations of optical effects such as shifts in focus. Although one tends to associate focal adjustments with a camera (a camera eye), both slide and film projectors also need to be adjusted for focus. While camera-eye narration is used to focalise Magda's



perspective in scene, the projector eye shows Magda watching events within her mind's eye. The camera eye is restricted according to her physical location, such as when Hendrik sprints past and she sees “brown on grey on black, the space discomposing and recomposing itself before [her] eyes” (sec. 227). Her vision blurs into an indistinct jumble of colours as he rushes past, and she must wait for her eyes to refocus (recompose) the space before her. With the projector eye, however, she controls how the image changes. This is firstly observable when she pictures the unfolding drama of her father's relationship with Anna.

While Magda lies incapacitated by a migraine, she distorts mental projections of her father, Hendrik, and Anna. She pictures her father alone with Anna while Hendrik has been sent away on an errand, and as she succumbs to pain and pity, she forces her inner eye to unfocus the images:

I screw my eyes tight against the pain and wait for the three figures to dissolve into streaks and pulses and whorls: Hendrik playing his mouthorgan beneath a far-off thorn-tree, the couple clenched in the stifling hut. There is finally only I, drifting into sleep, beyond the reach of pain. Acting on myself I change the world. (sec. 76)

Magda screws her eyes as if twisting a lens to change focus, causing the three figures to blur “into streaks and pulses and whorls.” Each image is broken apart into shapes and pulses as the picture loses solidity; the term *pulses* then implies the flickering light of on-screen images. Although the term *dissolve* refers to a specific film technique, this effect does not seem to be the intention here. A dissolve employs “a gradual transition from shot to shot in which the two images temporarily overlap” (Zettl 287). There is no such transition in Magda's narration but rather the dissolution of images. Her “drifting into sleep” is then evocative of a cinematic fade out, which ends in a blank screen. The final statement calls attention to her control over this narrative imagery: by twisting her eyes, she is able to “change the world” she visualises.

There is also a converse example of Magda trying to bring mental projections *into* focus when she claims to have spent “her nights pressing her knuckles into her eyes, watching the rings of light cascade and spin, waiting for visions” (sec. 32). She lies in bed “waiting for visions,” as if trying to focus the swirling mass of light she sees behind her closed eyes into a clear image. The “rings of light [that] cascade and spin” are reminiscent of the “streaks and pulses and whorls” of the image she pulls out of focus, and she again presses her eyes as if twisting a lens. This ability to alter focus through optical manipulation also becomes part of a far more complex projector simulation that is used when Magda’s father first returns from the dead.

The projector eye reveals that the murder of Magda’s father and his wife was merely part of a daydream. This analogy is built up gradually, with Magda first admiring the clarity of her mind which works “like the mind of a machine” (sec. 34). When she is then cleaning the murder scene, she considers that her actions are “played out within the macabre theatre of [herself]” (sec. 35). The word *theatre* alludes to a cinema. By combining this term with the image of a mechanical mind, the novel sets the context for a projector-eye construction. Magda then steps back from the murder scene and places herself as the viewer of these events:

Have I, the true deepdown I beyond words, participated in these phenomena any more deeply than by simply being present at a moment in time, a point in space, at which a block of violence, followed by a block of scrubbing . . . rattled past on their way from nowhere to nowhere? (sec. 35)

Like a projectionist, Magda is “present at a moment in time, a point in space,” as she watches the images rush past her eyes. The rattling sound is an onomatopoeic suggestion of the whirring of a film projector. Like rushing strips of film, these scenes move “from nowhere to nowhere,” coming into existence on screen before returning to darkness. This setup could

also be interpreted as a slide projector analogy, with the rattling noise referring to the sound of the device shifting and changing slides. The phrases “block of violence” and “block of scrubbing” could accordingly be viewed as references to actual slides, which are block-like objects. The setup recalls Coetzee notebook entry for *Alphaville* when he considers duplicating the film’s effects as a slide projector and two tape recorders. The term *block* furthermore gestures towards the appearance of the novel’s blocks of text, thereby suggesting that one can see the novel’s sections as analogous to slides.

The novel’s sections are numbered and arranged in a way that makes them particularly suited to this internal projector analogy. The typography of the novel was clearly important to Coetzee, and he reacted strongly when his editor at Ravan tampered with the numbering: “When Coetzee received the proofs of the novel, he was incensed to find that the section numbers had been removed,” and he demanded their restoration (Wittenberg, “The Taint of the Censor” 145). Rather than being placed above the text (or offset to the side), the numbers are written into the sections, and this tight arrangement creates defined borders with blocks of text framed squarely by blank spaces (sections with direct speech appear less rectangular because of open spaces). This shape is also maintained by a justified font alignment (perhaps an incidental observation as this appears the norm for novels). The blocks of violence and scrubbing that Magda sees could therefore also refer to sections from the novel which, as the page is turned, move past the reader’s gaze like slides in a projector.

This idea of removing blocks from her narrative – to send them back into the source of daydreams – is furthermore significant if one looks at the novel’s development. Wittenberg details Coetzee’s concern before publication that the novel would be censored. When asked by his editor at Ravan to prepare a cut version, “Coetzee suggested three major deletions (Sections 206, 209 and 221) but asked [Peter] Randall to go ahead with the original text, leaving the possibility open at the last minute to make changes” (Wittenberg, “The Taint of

the Censor” 142). These sections all contain explicit material showing Magda’s rape. In the novel, then, Magda’s decision to expunge the violent scenes from her narrative represents a choice Coetzee was almost forced to make.

Magda rejects parts of her narrative by choosing to recontextualize them within an imagined sequence. The scenes of the murder that rattle past Magda’s inward gaze can be understood as projections of her mind rather than real events. She considers that if she were to walk away from the murder the “whole bloody lamplit scene” might “dwindle down the tunnel of memory, pass through the gates of horn,” and leave her alone in her bedroom, “grinding [her] knuckles in [her] eyes.” The term *scene* suggests the cinematic context, and the grinding sound can again be understood as an onomatopoeic reference to a mechanical device. The murder scene is revealed as a fantasy because it will return through the gates of horn, which is one of the origins of “unsubstantial fancies” (dreams) in Homer’s *Odyssey* (Book 19). These violent events will therefore reside in her memory as part of a daydream that never materialises. The act of grinding her eyes furthermore resembles previously described optical effects when Magda twists and presses her eyes to change focus. As with those other scenes, Magda returns to the familiar recumbent position on her bed from which she conjures her visions. This also creates the impression that the narrative is now returning to the first scene of the novel, where she lies in her shuttered bedroom “with a damp towel over [her] eyes,” imagining her father’s wife arrive (sec. 1). After visions of murder, Magda appears to return to this place, disappointed because killing is “a story drearier than” her usual narrative (sec. 32).

This setup of Magda’s lying in her bedroom, looking into her mind’s eye, suggests a larger structural division whereby the narrative is separated into two levels that are defined according to her narratorial control: a main narrative that can be regarded as the real or actual (that which is outside of her influence), and various embedded sequences that are imagined

by her from her position within the main narrative. Technically no narrated event can be outside of her purview because she is the narrator, but the text creates the illusion that she has an external reality through formal cues, such as by using the projector eye to convey that the narrative sequence depicting Magda's father's wife is part of Magda's mind's eye. The projector analogy thereby helps one to navigate the different levels of the real in the novel.

After Magda watches the blocks of violence and scrubbing, the projector analogy then ends with the simulation of a fade out as she pictures her father's face darkening until it disappears. The light fades, and his dark features become more pronounced and fuse together: first his "eyebrows . . . coalesce, then the black pools beneath them, then the cavern of the mouth." The fade out signifies that these events are disappearing, dissolving before her like a dream fading away, and in the next section she underscores that her father's murder was a mere dream by saying that "he does not die so easily" but rather "rides in out of the sunset (sec. 36).

His reappearance also draws humorously from the familiar cinematic paradigm of the outlaw riding off into the sunset. William Indick describes this convention in Westerns as signifying death: "Riding off into the sunset . . . is only a more glamorous and romantic depiction of death, as we can only assume that the gunfighter/outlaw will continue to ride on his path of violence, which can only end in his own demise" (58-59). *In the Heart of the Country* provides a humorous counterpart to this model: rather than the outlaw riding *off into* the sunset and death, he rides *in out* of the sunset, returning to life.

The above configuration of a projector eye allows one to identify other possible projector analogies in Magda's narration. In the same way that she refers to blocks of narrative that emerge from nowhere, she says, "Out of the blankness that surrounds me I must pluck the incident after incident after incident whose little explosions keep me going" (sec. 89). This description too resembles a film or slide projector mechanism that pulls (plucks)

images from the blankness outside the screen and shifts them into view. The term *explosions* additionally alludes to the bursts of energy created as the mechanism is activated to change slides. The projector lens is also implied after the narrative skips ahead many years and Magda considers that she is “a dot of light moving erratically from one point in space to another, skipping years in a flash, now a frightened child in the corner of a schoolroom, now an old woman with knobbly fingers” (sec. 237). The dot of light evokes the image of a projector lens – a condensed circle of light that projects a beam onto the screen. The description “skipping years in a flash” suggests the instantaneous shift in images made possible by a projector, with the term *flash* referring to both a flashforward and, in the case of a slide projector, the flash of light that accompanies a slide transition. As she reflects on Anna’s journey to the farm, Magda is similarly able to “bring to life” the image of Hendrik’s home town “with no effort at all,” even though she has never seen it (sec. 38). She then declares her “determination to burst through the screen of names into the goatseye view” of this scene. The phrase “screen of names” suggests a film screen. The resemblance to a cinematic projection is then furthered as “the lamp gutters,” evoking the sound of a rattling projector.

With the projector eye, Magda demonstrates her ability to conjure and manipulate imagery. But within her mind’s eye, she also experiences visions that are presented as beyond her control. Under intense strain, she is placed at the mercy of her mind. In these instances, she is thrown from her present reality into a fantasy space, and the cinematic treatment of two such events, it will be shown next, reveals the influence of *Passenger* and *Alphaville*.

## **Suspending Consciousness**



The following discussion will consider how *Passenger*, *Alphaville*, and *In the Heart of the Country* all interject mind's-eye focalisations within experiential reality. When Magda, Liza, and Natasha are placed under extreme stress, these texts simulate shifts in consciousness that distort time and clash subjectivity against external reality. The influence of *Passenger* and *Alphaville* on *In the Heart of the Country* during such incident, it will be shown, is identifiable through Coetzee's manipulation of editing and lighting effects.

### *Passenger*

The first flashback in *Passenger* compresses several scenes into an energetic sequence (of about forty seconds) that confronts both Liza and the viewer with the disturbing reality of the Holocaust. The film builds up tension to this moment. As Liza watches in terror while the woman resembling Martha ascends the gangway, the encounter is fractured into a series of point-of-view shots that rapidly alternate Liza's perspective from the railing with the view from below. These edits are choreographed to ominous beats that accelerate until Liza clenches her fist and shuts her eyes. The camera moves into an extreme close-up of Liza's face, signalling the shift into her mind, and the image turns completely white as her face is struck by a blinding light that then diffuses just enough for faint shadows to suggest her facial features (much like the flash of a camera). The screen's aspect ratio widens to accommodate the moving footage of Auschwitz. When the still of Liza is juxtaposed against the dynamic footage of the flashback, the relative motion makes it appear even more static. In addition to using moving images, the flashback shows high-energy events. Furthermore, the stills on the cruise ship have a lower resolution that makes them seem flat. The past therefore looks more real, more detailed, and more three-dimensional than Liza's present, thereby emphasising the disparity between the superficial world of the cruise ship and the reality of the camp. The

flashback ends by showing the iconic Auschwitz prison tattoo on a woman's arm. The narrative then returns to the cruise ship as Liza's husband touches her unmarked arm (evidence of her guilt). The woman resembling Martha is now gone, and it is unclear how much time has passed.

Throughout the flashback, jarring music and rapid editing create a sensory shock that intensifies the import of these images. The film is also overexposed to give it a severe look: prisoners run beneath a stark sky, silhouetted guards march along the fence, and black dogs stand out against a bright background. Because of the winter setting, the white light also becomes part of a double signification of the term *white-out*, firstly in reference to the "loss of colour vision . . . often prior to a loss of consciousness" ("White-out," def. 3). Liza's face is cast in white light as she loses awareness of her surroundings, and she is near collapse when her husband revives her. A white-out is also "[a] weather condition in which the features and horizon of snow-covered country are indistinguishable due to uniform light diffusion" ("White-out," def. 1.1). In the Auschwitz scenes, the snow creates varying degrees of visibility, and at one point men pushing a large roller are almost indistinguishable in a heavy blizzard.

*In the Heart of the Country* similarly uses light, montage, and a white-out to dissociate Magda from her surroundings. During the build-up to shooting her father, she is distraught when he violates their home by taking Anna into his bedroom. She stations herself in the dark passage and after several minor scuffles with him decides to ring a bell loudly outside his bedroom door. She is suddenly struck by her father and staggers backwards disbelievingly, unable to remember if she has ever "been struck before" (sec. 112). She begins to lose grasp of reality, disorientated by "shouts that make no sense to [her]," and she collapses against the wall. During this moment of distress, Magda too is engulfed in whiteness:

The shouting still hangs in the air, like heat, like smoke. If I want to I can reach up and wave my hand in its thickness.

Over me looms a huge white sail. The air is dense with noise. I close my eyes and every other aperture I can. The noise filters into me.

The effect is that of synaesthesia, a condition in which the simulation of one sense triggers “a sense impression” in another (“Synaesthesia”). Here the scream triggers Magda to see white as the sound becomes a thick “smoke,” and the dark passage is smothered in a “huge white sail.” According to Richard E. Cytowic, the image triggered during synaesthesia “is regarded by the synesthete as real, often outside the body, instead of imagined in the mind’s eye” (1). Magda too *sees* the white before closing the “aperture” of her eyes. The term *aperture* also suggests a camera-eye point of view because it can refer to “the variable opening by which light enters a camera” (“Aperture,” def. 1.1). Under the “huge white sail,” Magda becomes “hazy, even languorous,” waiting for thoughts that she says might be a “dream.” The white noise then “filters into” her mind.

Magda sees a winter world where “it is always snowing” and diffused light occludes visibility: “Though it may be midday the light is so dim that it could be evening. The snow sifts down endlessly. Otherwise there is nothing as far as the eye can see.” As in *Passenger*, the novel suggests the double signification of white-out: Magda loses colour vision prior to her shift in consciousness; and she witnesses a hazy, snow-covered scene. A winter dream is similarly envisioned in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. In his sleep, the Magistrate sees a snow-covered landscape: “From horizon to horizon the earth is white with snow. It falls from a sky in which the source of light is diffuse and everywhere present, as though the sun has dissolved into mist, become an aura” (9). He passes through the gate and, like Magda, observes how the snow hides the surroundings as “houses have dwindled, lost their solidity,

retired over the rim of the world” (9). In both novels, the white-out creates an otherworldly space as it fills the mind’s eye.

In the next section, Magda stands at the front door arming herself with the rifle. The sudden flashforward creates the impression that Magda went into a fugue state and is only now becoming aware of her surroundings. The gap between the two sections (the absence of text) then comes to represent the absence of consciousness. As with Liza, there is no way to know how much time passed while Magda was seized by visions of a faraway place.

Although similar to *Passenger*, this scene in *In the Heart of the Country* lacks the speed of the film’s flashback. The novel, however, also stages a rapid, mind’s-eye sequence during another stressful event. When Magda first hears her father and Anna in the kitchen, she is overcome by weakness and cowers silently against her closed door as he moves towards her room to check if she is asleep. His approach is broken into a series of close-up images that show him as a monstrous personality: “The boots, the thud of the boots, the black brow, the black eyeholes, the black hole of the mouth . . .” (sec. 97). She then sees a quick succession of images as she feels herself degenerate into “a child again, an infant, a grub, a white shapeless life with no arms, no legs,” helpless as his “boot is raised over” her cowering body. The narrative rushes through these images, mimicking the fast-paced editing observed in *Passenger*. The imagery intensifies her feelings of helplessness by showing her as a tiny grub crushed easily underfoot. This too suggests her father’s brutality by implying that to him she is little more than an insect. The narrative then returns quickly to Magda’s bedroom as she says, “Though I am leaning against the door he has only to push and I will fall.” As in *Passenger*, Magda is overcome by a surge of images and teeters on the point of collapse. She loses control over her mind’s eye, which pulls her gaze inward and assaults her with disturbing visions. Magda similarly plunges into her mind’s eye when she watches Anna’s

arrival on the farm, and in the following section analysis will suggest that the visual effects of this scene are inspired by *Alphaville*.

### *Alphaville*

Natasha's perceptual shift centres around the signification of darkness. In the film's opening sequence, the camera pans right over a bleak, night-time cityscape as the sinister voice-over of Alpha 60 begins. A car then pulls over and inside Lemmy lights a cigarette, illuminating his face and signifying his impending ideological struggle against the darkness of Alphaville. Kaja Silverman write of Lemmy in mythic terms, interpreting this scene as his being like Prometheus bringing "the sacred origins of light" to Alphaville (60), which "is less another planet than a state of mind" (77). Its citizens lack creativity, compassion, and any understanding of love, but Lemmy catalyses a change in Natasha. She is first shown in a close-up, leaning against the doorframe of his hotel room (facing screen left). The light inside the room spills across her face and then dims abruptly as her dark hair blends into the black background (screen right), placing her in the liminal space between light and dark. Lemmy's hand reaches into the frame as he lights her cigarette, symbolically offering her the freedom of the outlands (Earth).

Natasha's nascent awakening is shown through a fantasy sequence. In Lemmy's well-lit hotel room, she confesses to him that she is changing, saying, "Now that I've seen you I'm no longer normal." She reads from his copy of Paul Eluard's poetry collection *Capital of Pain*, and he coaxes from her the memory that she was born in New York. Their conversation ends with Natasha holding the book while standing at the window beside Lemmy. They see a police car pull over and three men jump out, but with a sharp beeping sound the film cuts to an extreme close-up of her right eye surrounded by total darkness.

Light pulses rhythmically, flashing and then slowing with music, creating intermittent glimpses of her alone and then her with Lemmy (they are mostly shown as isolated figures against a bland background). With each illumination, one is unsure what will appear next: Natasha is alone, she and Lemmy embrace, or they dance slowly, or they face the camera directly as the light slips from his face to hers and then back. The sequence ends with them walking around the dark room while the city lights are visible through the window (inside, a lamp glows but casts little light). Her voice-over again recites Eluard's verse, saying, "I move towards you as if towards the light." The pulsing light shows a mind beating against darkness, trying to break through into the light of understanding. The film cuts back to the daylight scene in the hotel room, and Natasha is still at the window, holding up the book (filmed from outside). She and Lemmy speak for a moment but then the three policemen seen before burst into the room to arrest them, and it seems that very little time, if any, passed during the imagined sequence.

Natasha's struggle for enlightenment is staged in a place where time is suspended. This is significant because of Alpha 60's association with the present. The computer propagates the idea that only the present exists, yet it uses this as a means to control the future: "Through planification, the technocracy of Alphaville seeks to make the future something which can be controlled from the present, and thereby its simple extension" (Silverman 71). Alpha 60 wants to replicate the present continuously so that the future will be the same. Natasha must therefore reach outside the present in order to escape Alpha 60's grasp. During the suspension of time, her resistance to Alpha 60's control becomes possible.

A similar configuration is used in *In the Heart of the Country* to show Magda's escape from her present reality as she plunges into a vision of darkness where figures appear seemingly at random as they are illuminated by a roving light. This occurs during the third depiction of Anna's arrival on the farm. In the first account, Magda reflects on the event six



months later, and in the second the narrative switches to the present tense, focalising Magda's father's point of view through the binoculars as Anna stands before Hendrik's cottage. The next section then skips back in time and shows Magda watching Anna descend from the cart. As her gaze falls on Anna, time stops:

The great beam of my vision swings and for a spell Hendrik's child-bride is illuminated, stepping down from the donkey-cart. Then, like the lighthouse-keeper strapped into his chair against the treacherous seventh wave; I watch the girl slip back into the dark, hear the grinding of the cogs that turn the lamp, and wait for Hendrik, or my father, or that other woman, to swim into view and glow for a spell with a light that is not their own but comes from me and may even be not light but fire. (sec. 50)

Anna is briefly illuminated "stepping down from the cart" but then slips into darkness.

Magda loses perceptual control and is pulled away from the present. As in *Alphaville*, daylight turns to darkness and images are brought into view by a moving light (represented through the lighthouse metaphor) that first slides over the girl and then "glow[s] for a spell" over "Hendrik, or [her] father, or that other woman." There are no descriptions of the setting, suggesting that the light offsets these characters from a dark background. These figures also appear randomly as Magda "must wait for" an image "to swim into view" while she sits back and listens to "the grinding of the cogs that turn the lamp." She appears to surrender control over her mind because, although she could pull "the lever ready to [her] hand for the cogs to stop grinding and the light to fall steady on the girl," she feels too cowardly and instead "the beam swings on," illuminating "the stone desert or the goats or [her] face in the mirror."

With this last series of images, the pace changes. Whereas before the images of Hendrik, her father, and the other women were separated by commas, the writing now adopts a quicker pace, switching between "the stone desert or the goats or [her] face" without pause. The rhythmical effect created by *or* (the desert *or* the goats) also mimics a pulsing light.

Coetzee is adjusting light and rhythm, counterpointing these elements as Guillemot does for *Alphaville*. The beam of light initially swings slowly, its machinery labouring away, but then accelerates as Magda refuses to halt the device. The pictures that come into view have a static quality because no actions are described, yet there is an intensity to the sequence that encapsulates the idea of “a forward-plunging quality” that Coetzee attributes to films like *Passenger* and *La Jetée* which combine stills with voice-over (*Doubling* 60). Coetzee furthermore states that “Jean-Luc Godard was right . . . to make it his aim to liberate the sound track from the image” (*Doubling* 60), calling attention to the energy created by voice-over in Godard’s early work. Magda’s voice too appears to operate independently of the images brought before her, as if she is speaking in voice-over. Her roaming voice and the moving light thereby give the scene a pressing energy.

This sensation continues as she begins to awaken to her surroundings. “A hot gust lifts and drops a flap of ochre dust” as if the momentum of her voice bursts into the setting, but this energy then dissipates when “[t]he landscape recomposes itself and settles,” calming the scene. “Then Hendrik hands his bride down from the donkey-cart” and time continues. The adverb *then* also stresses the return to chronicity. Anna’s halted motion resumes and she completes her descent. The narrative then resumes where the previous section ended: with Anna “under the lenses of the field-glasses” as she approaches the cottage.

The cinematic treatment of Anna’s descent is firstly used to depict Magda’s difficulty in grappling with representation. She is pulled away from the present to be “suspended in this cool, alienating medium of [hers].” While in this dark space, Magda holds “the entire farm and even its environs,” and she busies herself by “exchanging them item by item for [her] word-counters.” Yet when she leaves this realm and tries to describe Anna, “words again begin to falter,” and she is left to struggle with the language of “coin.” Her mind’s eye is an escape – a place where she feels more in control of words. A similar situation is shown in

*Elizabeth Costello*. In the postscript letter, Elizabeth (Lady Chandos) writes of being unable to articulate her experiences of what she terms *rush* and *rapture*:

[They] are not the same, but in ways that I despair of explaining though they are clear to my eye, *my eye* I call it, *my inner eye*, as if I had an eye inside that looked at the words one by one as they passed, like soldiers on parade, *like soldiers on parade* I say). (229)

This scenario too describes how words are clearer within the mind's eye, which watches as they pass by its inner gaze. Yet to leave this "*inner eye*" renders both Elizabeth and Magda incapable of articulation. For Magda, Anna eludes her grasp and is presented as someone beyond appropriation by words. Anna, it is suggested, is not part of the mind's eye and therefore does not belong in the space where Magda has more authority over representation.

Magda's temporal suspension also becomes synecdochical of her failed relationship to Anna. After several attempts to connect with her while they are living together, Anna continues to cringe silently and Magda realises the impossibility of befriending her. As Anna is cutting Magda's hair, Hendrik suddenly sprints past then, spurred to flight by the unexpected arrival of Magda's neighbours, and Anna bursts "from stillness into motion without transition as if all her life with [Magda] has only been an instant frozen, abstracted, stolen from a life of running" (sec. 227). Anna's entire time on the farm is signified through this frozen moment, as if her feet never truly touch this soil. Perhaps this means that Anna is merely a figment of Magda's mind. Or perhaps, since Anna is placed outside of the mind's eye's grasp, it means that Magda never exists (matters) to her.

Both *Alphaville* and *In the Heart of the Country* stage inner darkness through mind's-eye visions. For Natasha, this darkness represents the ignorance imposed on her by Alpha 60, yet she has an innocence that Lemmy is able to reach. She is often accompanied by a beautiful musical motif that signifies her true nature, which is actualised by the end of the

film. Magda's tenebrous interior, however, is complex, dangerous, and fixed within her. While Natasha reaches out towards the light, Magda is pulled into darkness.

## Novel Noir

### *The Noir Aesthetic*

Noir films are characterised by a dramatic visual style that creates menacing, enigmatic worlds. Foster Hirsch explores this aesthetic closely in his study of seminal noir works, which he describes as “addicted to shadows, and to high contrasts between light and dark;” these films present “a cornucopia of patterns of chiaroscuro, as pools of shadow surround and sometimes over-take small centers of light” (ch. 4). The same chiaroscuro effects, I will show, are detailed in *In the Heart of the Country*, which also presents a world weighted by darkness and styled by shadows that heighten tense moments and convey a complex symbolism.

Shadows are central to noir, and *Alphaville* shows how they can contort a location into the type of ominous space that is characteristic of the genre. When Lemmy finds him, agent Dickson is in a wretched state and has almost forgotten the outlands completely. They converse privately in a narrow stairway, positioned beside a hanging lightbulb (centre frame). Lemmy stands directly behind the bulb with his face lit, but Dickson leans against the wall, the side of his face heavily shadowed. Lemmy pushes the bulb, and its pendulous effect animates the scene with shifting shadows that intensify the contrast on Dickson's face. As with many noir characters, the onslaught of shadows portends that he is “about to be attacked or to crack up” (F. Hirsch, ch. 3). He has the look of a doomed man, and soon after this

conversation he collapses dead in his hotel room. The texturing of shadows also disrupts visibility so that only parts of the set can be seen, and this suggests Dickson's fractured understanding of reality as he is succumbing to the influence of Alphaville. Within noir, visual perspectives are highly distorted, and Shulamit Almog suggests that in this respect the highly-stylized aesthetic paradoxically reflects reality: "The perception that what we see is always segmental, and that justice, fairness, and clear vision of reality are basically unattainable, are among the main properties of the genre. In this respect, the film noir is considered 'realistic'" (169). Within the fantasy worlds of noir, one finds the darker side of the human condition.

Coetzee also works with animated shadows to convey alienation and uncertainty in his screenplay. In a new scene written for the screenplay, Hendrik eats his supper outside his cottage and is illuminated "[b]y the light of a paraffin lamp and the embers of a fire" (sc. 10). This scene was originally written to take place indoors but was likely changed because "Coetzee would have realized that the light conditions and the problems associated with setting up the camera in a confined, dark space of the single-room cottage would pose constraints" (Wittenberg, *Two Screenplays* 208). In the outdoor setup, the two sources of light flickering from different positions would texture Hendrik's face and cast shadows around the scene. He would therefore look much different than during the day, and his enigmatic appearances substantiates the words of Magda's voice-over, which says, "I know nothing of Hendrik." He is furthermore alienated through selective illumination. The description that he "throws the scraps into the darkness" shows that Hendrik is walled in by darkness. The visual signification is ambiguous as her voice-over claims, "He keeps his station, we keep our distance." On the one hand, the darkness separates him from the rest of the homestead, maintaining his distance from them, but on the other hand, her voice is

violating this private space. Although he is sitting outside, the area around him is restricted by a pool of light, making him seem trapped.

In noir, chiaroscuro lighting is used extensively to augment the type of claustrophobic spaces typical of these films. These are “closed worlds from which a sense of the flow of life has been rigorously excluded” (F. Hirsch, ch. 1). Lemmy’s car, the hotel stairway, and Dickson’s room are prime examples of the types of locations chosen as “visual metaphors of enclosure and entrapment” because they “can quickly become traps” (F. Hirsch, ch. 4). Selective illumination then furthers this impression by isolating figures, for example, when Lemmy’s face is visible in the glow of the cigarette lighter he appears trapped by the oppressive darkness that engulfs this small flame. The screenplay also uses chiaroscuro to constrict an already confined space during the build-up to the first murder. When Magda carries her lamp down the “long windowless passage” that leads to her father’s bedroom, she is approached by the Woman, who “emerges into the lamplight” (sc. 27). The absence of a window seems to cut them off from the outside world, and this claustrophobic feel is enhanced by the small pool of light that limits the space around them visually. The position of the lamp would furthermore create eerie facial shadows through below-eye-level lighting – a recognisable generic convention from cinema. Illumination from below inverts facial shadows vertically to create a disorienting effect “which translates into surprise, suspicion, or fear,” and it is thus “sometimes called horror lighting” (Zettl 31).

Like noir stories, *In the Heart of the Country* is also set in a closed and dangerous world. The farm is a single estate “fenced in with miles of wire” (sec. 8) where the few inhabitants are isolated from greater society. Most scenes take place indoors, often in small spaces like Magda’s shuttered bedroom, and her intense frustrations and laments likewise give the feeling that her home lacks “the flow of life.” This claustrophobic feel heightens the impression of an implosive setting: the house stands on “a turbulence, a vortex, a black hole”



(sec. 85), and Magda too is an unstable “vacuum towards which all collapses inwards” (sec. 6). The pervasive, suffocating mood is furthered by the novel’s taunt prose and first-person narration, as observed by Jarad Zimble who writes that “there is no escaping the enclosure of the first person narration and its almost monotonous repetition of words, phrases, figures and, indeed, events,” an effect which is then heightened by the brevity of the numbered sequences (69). In an early review, Paddy Kitchen also articulates this partnership of prose and setting when he describes how struck he was by “[the novel’s] intensity of imagery and language, and its vivid, self-enclosed territory” (“Death”). The prose of *In the Heart of the Country* is wound tightly into itself, which creates an immense underlying tension. The study of chiaroscuro can then expand on this foundation, showing that cinematographic visuality is also essential in shaping the text’s distinctive intensity.

In noir narratives, “deliberate visual styling enhances the kind of transformation from reality to nightmare that the narratives dramatize” (F. Hirsch, ch. 4). The chiaroscuro lighting of *In the Heart of the Country*, it will be shown, also accentuates a descent into nightmare when the precarious balance maintaining interpersonal relationships is broken and the characters are thrown into a downward spiral resulting in murder, rape, and desolation. In typical noir fashion, sex and sexuality are destructive forces that catalyse violent events:

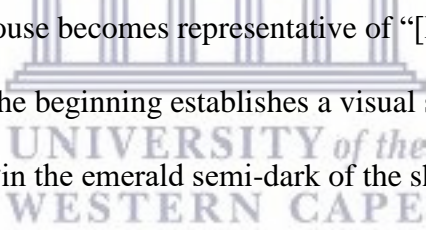
Sex in noir is usually poisoned, presented characteristically not in a romantic context but a psychotic one. Characters are enslaved, victimized, by it. . . . Sexual interest fans psychosis, leading to extreme jealousy, possessiveness, and often crime. “Love” in noir is typically a disease, an affliction. (F. Hirsch, ch. 7)

Magda twice kills her father because of sexual relationships. She firstly imagines killing him and his wife in bed, and she is later provoked into shooting him when he takes Anna into his bedroom. Magda’s father is overcome by his desire for Anna and ultimately pays with his life. Magda also believes that her mother died in childbirth because she had been “afraid to

deny the man his detested relentless pleasure in her” (sec. 83). The strongest conflation of sex and violence though is Magda’s rape. Sex, as Hirsch observes, quickly turns psychotic.

The following analysis will examine how the haunting and dramatic interplay of light and dark dramatizes the unravelling of their lives during three sequences: the scenes leading up to the hatchet murder; the scenes before and after the shooting; and the scenes of Hendrik, Magda, and Anna breaking into the locked room. This analysis will end by considering a final, intermedial connection between *Alphaville* and *In the Heart of the Country*, examining how Natasha and Magda perform a similar gesture to signify their entrapment in their respective dark worlds.

### *Implosion*



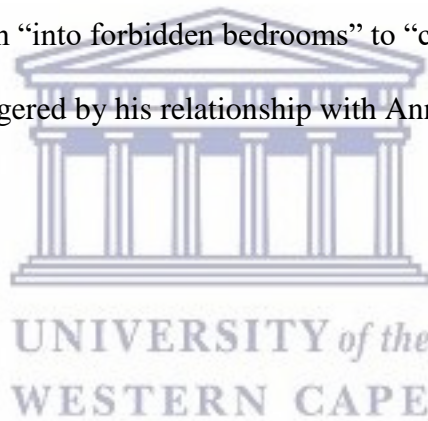
The darkness inside the farmhouse becomes representative of “[Magda’s] inner darkness” (sec. 87). As with *Alphaville*, the beginning establishes a visual symbolism that will pervade the text. Magda is introduced “in the emerald semi-dark of the shuttered late afternoon,” where she cultivates hostility towards her father and his new wife, referring to herself and them as “the antagonists” (sec. 1). Within her is an unknowable force “that shrinks from the light” (sec. 14). She is “a sphere quivering with violent energies, ready to burst upon whatever fractures [her]” (sec. 85), and this volatility is triggered by the presence of her father’s wife. As Magda hears them in bed together, she is deeply confused by this relationship. She senses the feel “of loving flesh” and struggles against “the deep darkdown desired” within her that she is unable to articulate (sec. 19). She instead stations herself in their “doorway, naked,” seeming to unravel under the strain of inner conflict. Her disturbed state of mind is then heightened by cinematic lighting.

Magda's instability is inscribed in the *mise en scène* during her night-time intrusion into her father's bedroom. Haunting chiaroscuro effects fragment the scene visually as she watches her father and his wife: "Through the open curtains stream the rays of the full moon on to her shoulders, her full ironical lips. In the shadow of her haunch lies the man asleep" (sec. 20). The woman is partly visible while strong shadows obscure Magda's father. The darkness swarming around them is a familiar noir omen: "As the characters are menaced by a hostile world, so sources of light within the frame are attacked by an invading, pervasive darkness" (F. Hirsch, ch. 4). Unable to see the woman's eyes, Magda desperately wants to know whether the "cryptic hand" raised to her mouth carries a message, perhaps directed at "[Magda's] candid body," and Magda vacillates between seeing the woman as either awake or asleep. "The room is in darkness, the sleeping figures" seem like ghosts to her. This unsettling mood is intensified when Magda is suddenly clothed again (time has skipped backwards); she now strips naked and exposes herself, saying, "In the glare of the moonlight she goes over my poor beseeching body." Magda then hides her eyes in shame, ending this tense, baffling scene in a disturbing tableau of humiliation that cannot bode well.

The next time Magda sneaks into her father's bedroom, she is armed with a hatchet and looms threateningly over the sleeping figures. "By the light of a storm-lantern," she says, "I see that they sleep the sleep of the blissfully sated . . ." (sec. 25). She focuses intently on her father and his wife without mentioning the rest of the room. In contrast to the previous intrusion, the wife's body is now subjected to Magda's gaze as she lies with "her nightdress rucked about her hips," and Magda's father is "face down" in a defenceless position. The pool of lamplight traps them into a small space, intensifying the sense of imminent danger as Magda stands so close to them that she is "breathing with their breath." There is no escape for these doomed figures who are walled in by darkness. The jump cut into the next section, where Magda's father is now suddenly lying on his back, reiterates her distorted perception.

This escalating tension erupts into a frenzied attack as Magda hacks at their bodies in an exaggerated pulp style. Although the lighting is unspecified, in the context it is likely envisioned in either total or partial darkness (with the lamp placed nearby). In the screenplay, Magda leaves the lamp in the doorway as she enters the bedroom to commit the same, brutal attack. The screenplay additionally works with two hues of light: the blue (perhaps silver) “MOONLIGHT” falling through the window (sc. 29), and the yellow lamplight in the doorway. This would likely create an additionally dramatic effect, with her bloodied nightdress looking dark in the moonlight and then red in the lamp’s warm glow as she leaves “the tableau of violence.”

When her father returns afterwards, Magda resumes a life of repressed hostility, and the part of herself that is drawn “into forbidden bedrooms” to “commit forbidden acts” (sec. 28) remains dormant until triggered by his relationship with Anna.



### *A Moonlit Murder*

In the scenes surround the shooting, chiaroscuro lighting effects become more complex to accompany Magda’s descent from the sublime into fear and then guilt. When she first steps outside with the rifle, her anger and resolve momentarily dissipate as she is taken aback by the beautiful setting: “The yard is awash with silver-blue light. The whitewashed walls of the storehouse and wagonhouse shine with a ghostly pallor” (sec. 117). Moonlight gives the scene an otherworldly appearance, tinting the walls of the buildings with a cool blue glow. In the distance, “the blades of the windmill glint” like shimmering stars. Magda is entranced by the setting, saying, “The beauty of the world I live in takes my breath away,” and she compares her experience to that of “condemned men” who feel “a moment of great purity,” lamenting death and yet able to express gratitude “for having lived.”

Magda's attention is soon drawn away from the light as her reverie is interrupted by an awful noise like "the sound of a distempered dog whining and growling and panting" (a harsh counter to her transcendental contemplations). She circles the wagon house and finds darkness: "All along the wall of the house is a bank of shadow." The shadow cast by the house is a dense bank that slices into the light, and in it lies Hendrik. With this descent into darkness, Magda's sympathies disappear. In the light, she is able to walk in a condemned man's place and feel compassion, but she now watches dispassionately while Hendrik struggles to stand, collapses, and lies crying. As she passes him, she remarks coolly, "There is nothing I can do for him."

When Magda then fires the rifle through her father's window, Coetzee takes a more unconventional approach to lighting as Anna's scream triggers Magda's synaesthesia: "It fills the dark chamber with its brilliance and glares through the walls as if they were glass" (sec. 119). The scene is flooded by a dazzling light, but unlike her previous experience with synaesthesia, Magda remains aware of her surroundings. This effect resembles the recurring simulation of the film negative in *Alphaville* when the image switches instantly from positive to negative, reversing areas of light and dark to create a hard contrast (the negative image also lacks the clarity of a positive print). This occurs shortly before Lemmy's fight in the underground parking garage: the well-lit space suddenly turns dark, and Lemmy's dark hat changes into a bright white. This brief effect is then repeated as Lemmy passes the burly man, whose dark suit becomes white while the smoke from his cigarette drifts up in black puffs. *In the Heart of the Country* similarly reverses areas of light and dark as "the dark chamber" is filled suddenly with a brilliant glare. This scene furthermore resembles a negative in a material, literal sense because the walls become transparent (like glass). A film negative similarly has a glassy, see-through surface. The striking effect heightens the drama of the moment as this act of violence is accompanied by an assault on Magda's senses. Time also

slows as Magda focuses intently on reloading the rifle, describing each stage of this act in succession: “The bolt comes back, the spent case tinkles at my feet, the second cartridge, cool, alien, slips into the breech.” The event is prolonged because it is separated into three close-up images, and one can almost hear the distinct sounds of the heavy bolt, the tinkling case, and the new cartridge sliding into place. The lack of connectors (asyndeton) furthermore slows the reading eye by giving the sentence a halting rhythm. Magda appears to be in shock, and she experiences each act in finite detail through her heightened senses. “I elevate the barrel, close my eyes, and pull the trigger,” she says; time then accelerates as in “the same instant the rifle” is snatched from her hands. She then leaves the scene feeling dazed.

Fear soon sets in when she passes Hendrik in an ominous setting: “Hendrik stands in the moonlight in the middle of the yard watching [her]. There is no knowing what he thinks” (sec. 121). Rather than being a whimpering, pitiable being, he is now a steely figure dominating the space as he fronts her menacingly. He sways silently like a floating phantom, “his face shadowed by his hat.” The hat casts a sharp shadow that renders his expression inscrutable, and this uncertainty troubles Magda. Anna’s screams still echo in the background as a reminder of Magda’s crime, making Hendrik’s stance seem accusatory. Although Magda responds to him with “cool, well-formed words,” her composure belies her unease as she circles him and walks away, noting that “[her] back feels vulnerable.” Hendrik’s appearance is both threatening and portentous: the shadow hanging over him suggests that he has been marked by Magda’s actions and is now a doomed man. Although his fate is ultimately unknown after he and Anna flee, it is unlikely that he will escape the repercussions of this event. Magda considers several ugly scenarios for his future. The one used in the screenplay depicts him dragged back to the farm, standing dramatically on the back of a horse



cart, “his hands tied to the rails at either side” (sc. 131). “Magda drops her gaze” meekly and implicates him with a nod, and he is taken away, likely to be executed (sc. 132).

Magda’s fear then turns to guilt as she reflects on the incident and describes herself fleeing with “the moon’s rays bearing down on [her] like bars of silver, the nightbreeze growing chilly” (sec. 122). These “bars of silver” recall the link between Magda and the condemned men she associates herself with when she first steps into the yard. Unlike the liberation she feels prior to the shooting, lighting now suggests that she is trapped, captured in a cage of moonlight. She questions the “half-hearted” nature of her actions and chastises herself for not “hurling open the curtains and flooding the guilty deed with light, the light of the moon, the light of firebrands.” Rather than using light to reveal her father’s crime, it now exposes hers, and she too is marked visually by the event.

In the above scenes, the novel’s chiaroscuro effects are richly detailed and continually adjusted to express Magda’s changing moods. The sequences examined so far revolve around overt acts of violence, but the next section will focus on a slighter transgression as Magda, Hendrik, and Anna break into the locked room. Through lighting and staging, however, this event is transformed into a dark omen.

### *A Deathly Space*

After Magda’s father dies, their lives disintegrate. There is a brief respite when she, Hendrik, and Anna strip apart his room and clean all evidence of his death, but when this task is finished, Magda is struck by a sense of futility. As Hendrik and Anna stand “waiting for instructions,” she begins to ramble about the weather and insects and how her lips are tired of speaking (sec. 163). Her aimlessness and gloom gesture towards the uncertainty of their

future, and when they break into the locked room, the *mise en scène* intensifies this sense of foreboding.

The room is depicted as a suffocating and enigmatic space. Magda has never been inside (her father dismissed it as a storeroom), and there is a sense of expectation “in the dim passage” as Hendrik pounds the door with a large hammer (sec. 164). It bursts open dramatically and “a cloud of fine dust” rises from the floor. Anna brings a lamp, and the dark interior is revealed gradually through a camera-eye point of view. Objects are described in succession as they become visible under the moving light: “In the far corner, we see twelve cane-bottomed chairs piled neatly. We see a wardrobe, a narrow bed, a wash-stand with a pitcher and basin on it.” The repetition of *see* iterates that this scene is shown through their eyes. Apart from the stacked chairs and dust, this seems like an ordinary bedroom (not a storeroom), and it has the ghostly look of a space waiting for someone who will never return. Magda then pats the neatly-made bed and watches as “dust rises from the grey pillows, the grey sheets.” In this windowless room, the dust enhances the breathless feel of stale air by thickening the space around Magda. The room is tomb-like, and in the wardrobe they find artefacts of the dead: clothing from “bygone times” (sec. 165). One would assume these clothes belonged to Magda’s mother, yet Magda mysteriously does not mention her. Coetzee describes a similar scene as a tomb in his discussion of Achterberg’s poem, envisioning the gasfitter fixing a leak while “the sunlight fades, vision dims, [and] the room, bursting or saturated as if with gas, becomes a grave” (“Achterberg” 289), heightening the gasfitter’s anxiety as he stands near the woman of his fixation.

*In the Heart of the Country* likewise presents a deathly space that is heady with tension which then lingers when they leave the room. The lamp is placed on the floor while Magda helps Anna to undress. Anna lowers her eyes as “[t]he light glows on her bronze flanks and breasts” (sec. 165), foregrounding her naked body. “[Magda’s] heart quickens” as

she helps Anna into the dress and notices that she has no underclothes. The uneasy association of eroticism and death creates an underlying anxiety that continues afterwards when Magda and Hendrik watch Anna tottering up and down the stoep. Despite being outside, the narrative retains the confined atmosphere of the room because Magda focuses on the magnetic air between herself and Hendrik: she thinks of being “in the pocket of air that is his own private space,” sharing his breath (sec. 166). When Anna turns to smile, Magda imagines how husband and wife lie together at night “and talk about [her]” (sec. 167). She invades the privacy of their dark bedroom linguistically, entering the intimate space between him and Anna as the signifier *I* (“He tells her that I . . .”). The scene ends with them having sex, and the narrative returns to the stoep as Anna turns to smile (sec. 168). The first line of this section is identical to the previous section’s, suggesting that the text is repeating the same scene. Magda then imagines a different daydream of her and Anna as friends, “whispering and giggling” as they set off on their Saturday jaunt. She imagines them being sisters but then thinks of peeping at Anna while she undresses (her mind again returning to a dark and closed space). Magda then abruptly invites Hendrik and Anna to sleep in the farmhouse that night, thereby changing the dynamics of their relationship.

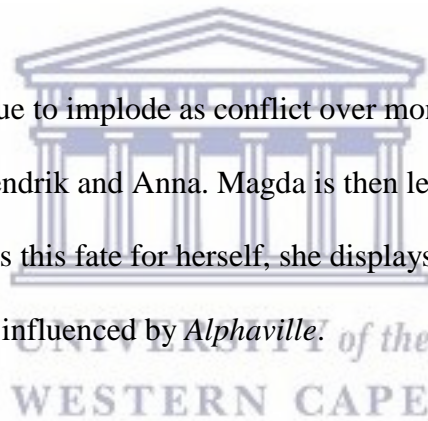
The ghostly bedroom marks a turning point in their lives as it signifies the violation of social boundaries, which are expressed spatially. Magda earlier establishes the connection between distance and civility in her relationship to Hendrik by noting:

“[A]ll our years together on the farm has kept his station while I have kept my distance; and the combination of the two, the station and the distance, has ensured that my gaze falling on him, his gaze falling on me, have remained kindly, incurious, remote. (sec. 48)

The dynamics of looking again come into play. By keeping a distance (both literally and through formality), Magda and Hendrik have adopted a civil gaze towards one another. The

violation of this distance would therefore have the converse effect (a hostile gaze). When they enter the locked room, Magda is drawing both Hendrik and Anna into her father's private space, which had been locked even to her, and she soon suffers the repercussions of breaking these spatial boundaries when Hendrik places her under his aggressive gaze. Shortly after the scenes in the room, conflict ensues because Magda is unable to pay Hendrik. The shift in their roles is then evident when Hendrik takes her father's good clothing against her wishes (unlike in the bedroom, when she gives away clothing). She confronts him as he is descending the loft stairs and says, "My eyes are level with his boots" (sec. 196). He occupies the dominant position and forces her into an appropriately submissive state by threatening to expose himself. Under his hateful glare, Magda bursts into tears and bows her head, retreating meekly.

Their lives then continue to implode as conflict over money leads to Magda's rape and eventually the flight of Hendrik and Anna. Magda is then left behind in isolation on the farm. When she earlier predicts this fate for herself, she displays her feelings of entrapment through a gesture that appears influenced by *Alphaville*.



### *The Glass Pane*

Natasha and Magda are both trapped in oppressive worlds, and they convey this through the same, distinct gesture of helplessness. Because of her involvement with Lemmy, Natasha is taken captive and held in a glass booth at the heart of Alpha 60's headquarters. Lemmy finds and destroys Alpha 60's control panel, causing its widespread malfunction. The citizens of Alphaville begin to flail about haphazardly, with many squeezing their bodies against walls as if inching their way around a great precipice. Natasha is similarly affected, and she presses her body against the glass pane separating her from Alpha 60. From outside the booth, the

camera watches her place both hands on the glass (all ten fingers splayed) and slide them slowly upwards until her chin is pressed against the pane with her head tilting backwards. Lemmy appears and pulls her away; she collapses into his arms, and he half carries her to his car. The effect on Natasha wears off as they leave the city and she is finally free of Alpha 60's influence.

Magda similarly presses her hands against a window pane as she laments her feelings of isolation and captivity. The scene takes place shortly before the murder of her father and his wife. In a melancholic state, she looks through the window "as the shadows first lengthen then cover everything" (sec. 23). Night falls, and in her acute loneliness she asks, "Does a woman looking through a window into the dark mean anything?" Like Natasha, Magda "place[s] all ten fingertips on the cool glass" and "stare[s] out through a sheet of glass." She imagines that if she were to "press harder the glass will break." The night setting intensifies the impact of this gesture as the darkness outside separates the house from the rest of the world. (In *Alphaville* the room is lit). Magda restrains herself from breaking the window and instead surrenders to her plight, saying, "I live inside a skin inside a house. There is no act I know of that will liberate me into the world. There is no act I know of that will bring the world into me." The flow of life between her and the world is barred, and the unbroken window pane thus signifies her inability to escape from her circumstances, both personal and social. The hierarchy of the farm places her in a lonely space beneath a domineering father but above the servants. Whereas Natasha is saved by Lemmy, Magda has no one to rescue her.

Coetzee adapted this scene into his screenplay in a way that creates a stronger resemblance to *Alphaville*. The event takes place later in the narrative, after Anna's arrival. Magda's father leaves the dinner table following a strained, silent meal between him and Magda. She then approaches the dining-room window and leans against it. In the novel, she is

visually isolated by a wall of darkness; the screenplay achieves this separation by turning the window into a mirror: “The table lamp is reflected in the pane, as is the rest of the room” (sc. 48). The outside setting is obscured by this reflection as if only this room exists. “She places both hands on the pane and with all ten fingers begins to press harder and harder against it” as if trying to break the glass. While in the novel it is unclear whether she is moving her hands (like Natasha) or merely leaning into the window, the screenplay shows her press against the window forcefully, and there is a sense that she might break through. In *Dust*, the glass breaks dramatically but is then almost immediately restored to show Magda pressing against the intact window. In Coetzee’s screenplay, Magda “rests her head against the pane with her eyes shut,” and her voice-over repeats (slightly paraphrased) the words from the novel: “I live inside a skin inside a house. There seems to be nothing that will bring me into the world, or the world into me.” The scene ends as she “presses her hands on the pane once more,” thereby signifying that she will never overcome her separation from the world.

In summation then, *In the Heart of the Country* dramatizes a descent into darkness that is expressed visually through benighted and claustrophobic spaces. These scenes are pervasively negative, conveying volatility, danger, perversion, and an underlying eroticism that in noir is intricately linked to violence. Magda is an implosive character living in an implosive world. Yet although the text imparts a strong feeling of entrapment, she ultimately claims to “have chosen at every moment [her] own destiny, which is to die here in the petrified garden” of her home (sec. 266). In the end, she is the final enigma in this story – the last fragment of an inscrutable, broken world.

## Chapter Summary



*In the Heart of the Country* employs a range of media aesthetics, from the more conventional camera eye to the inventive use of projector simulations, lighting effects, and montage techniques that associate the text stylistically with the European independent cinema of the 1960s. These techniques furthermore confirm how *Alphaville* and *Passenger* in particular were central influences on the text. Coetzee draws together several sensory experiences, envisioning optical devices in a physical way: the machinery of the mind grinds and rattles; Magda twists and presses her eyes; images are deconstructed into blurs and colours; light assaults dark and vice versa. Coetzee choreographs the rhythms of shifting lights, the drifts in consciousness, and the visual collisions created by montage. As in *Alphaville*, his writing counterpoints images, sounds, and sense impressions.

All of these cinematic techniques comment to some degree on Magda's subjectivity, conveying how she interprets and responds to the events of her life. The dynamics of her camera eye gesture to the social hierarchies that direct her life and leave her in the alienating position of being unable to establish an equal gaze (a reciprocal look). Her misguided attempts to bridge the distance between her and Hendrik and Anna fail disastrously. The scenes examined in this chapter focus on predominantly negative emotions, such as hostility, confusion, inner turmoil, and fear. In true noir style, chiaroscuro lighting heightens these sensations, creating a sense of suffocation and menace as the nightmare in Magda's life unfolds. This diverse array of media aesthetics begins to show the extent of the novel's intermedial influences, which extend far beyond the few comments in *Doubling the Point* and the single notebook entry that references *Alphaville*.

One question remains: how do these intermedial references impact the narrative structure of *In the Heart of the Country* as a whole? Analysis has shown how film form shapes the interpretation of the first murder. The projector analogy suggests that the act was merely a dream – a block of violence shifting across the screen of her mind's eye. The next

chapter will step back to consider the global textual implication of these media aesthetics by undertaking an intensive study of Coetzee's screenplay adaptation, suggesting that the screenplay's structure has a counterpart in the novel, even though they are quite different stylistically.



## Chapter 2: Rethinking Narrative and Temporality Through Adaptation

### Chapter Overview

This chapter will examine Coetzee's screenplay adaptation of *In the Heart of the Country* closely in order to reinterpret the novel's narrative structure. Through the adaptation process, Coetzee has selected and accentuated certain elements of the novel that are otherwise less noticeable in the extended prose version, and an analysis of these adaptive choices allows for a new perspective on the text. In addition, I will consider how film aesthetics in both novel and screenplay function within a broader temporal framework that juxtaposes conceptualisations of universal time against cinematic manipulations of time (this includes the larger narrative structures created by film form). This study is both an exploration of how Coetzee works in the screenplay genre and a way to interpret the global textual effects of the cinematic techniques observed in the previous chapter. The analysis of media aesthetics, it will be shown, provides a new way to grapple with the contradictory events and loose ends of Magda's story. Throughout the novel, it is unclear which events are considered real (outside of her control) and which are imagined by her. She admits that in her loneliness she needs her imagination "to make the mundane glow with an aura of self-transcendence" (sec. 32), and one is never sure how far this propensity reaches. Yet the study of cinematic visuality can provide additional analytical tools for navigating the different levels of the real. As discussed more fully in the previous chapter, cinematic effects are used extensively in the novel, and these influence how one interprets the narrative. In this chapter, I propose to show that the

screenplay's structure reflects and thus supports a specific narrative framework suggested through cinematic form in the novel. Before focusing on the screenplay and how it will be approached, this introduction will provide an overview of how the novel's structure is directed through cinematic references.

In *In the Heart of the Country*, projector simulations place certain events within Magda's mind's eye, thereby allowing one to discern the real from the imagined. The *real* is theorised as that which occurs outside Magda's mind's eye and is therefore not invented by her. Magda is regularly seen lying on her bed, twisting and grinding her closed eyes to manipulate her inner visions. She occupies this position in the beginning of the novel when she visualises the wife's arrival, and she signals her return to it as she revokes the murder scene and sends it rattling across the theatre of her mind back through the gates of horn. Magda's visions are also seemingly beyond her control and occur during stressful events, such as when she is struck by her father and drifts off into the dream of a winter world. When she watches Anna descend from the cart, Magda is pulled into the dark theatre of her mind where a roving light illuminates figures intermittently. Anna, it was therefore suggested, is beyond Magda's mind's eye's control.

Yet the above cinematic cues are then noticeably absent when Magda's father returns towards the end of the novel. After several scenes of Magda arguing with the voices from the flying machines, she says rather uneventfully: "But I have other cares besides quarrelling with my voices. Sometimes when the weather is fine, as it is today, sunny but not too warm, I carry my father out of his room and seat him on the stoep . . ." (sec. 261). Considering the first murder is imagined, it is easy to accept that the shooting too is the product of her imagination and he has therefore always been alive. Yet there are no formal indications that his reappearance signals a return from the mind's eye into an external reality. What if these closing scenes and his death from the shooting are part of the same main narrative in which

the first murder is embedded? The first murder is therefore a fantasy while Magda's father's second death is linked on the same narrative level (the real) to his final return. Such a structure would be impossible to resolve through conventional notions of cause and effect, and I propose to show that this irresolvable connection, which cannot be appropriated by conventional reading strategies, is visible in the screenplay's narrative. As will be observed in the following outline, Coetzee has kept the overall plot of the screenplay broadly similar to the novel's, apart from the opening sequences.

The screenplay begins by showing routine life on the farm. This pattern is then disrupted when Magda's father brings home a female companion ("the Woman"). As in the novel, Magda soon murders them with a hatchet, but these events are almost immediately revealed as fantasy when her father reappears on the stoep, "looking through a pair of binoculars" as Hendrik and Anna ride towards the farm on a donkey cart (sc. 31). Tensions escalate as Magda's father pursues Anna, and when he takes her into his bedroom an enraged Magda fires a rifle through his window, wounding him fatally. After his death, conflict between Hendrik and Magda over money leads to her rape. She, Hendrik, and Anna then briefly share an awkward living arrangement in the farmhouse until Hendrik and Anna flee. Anna is never seen again, but "Magda is forced to confront Hendrik" when he is brought back to the farm under arrest (sc. 132). She implicates him in the crime and is left alone on the farm. Years pass and she is suddenly an old woman, wearing "the same black dress, now stained and filthy" (sc. 137). She tries to contact an aeroplane by building stone structures and a bonfire, but she is left disappointed and angry at these beings' indifference. She then argues with the voices in her head while preparing soup, which she afterwards takes to her elderly father who "trembles with Parkinson's disease" (sc. 140). Unlike his earlier return, there are no indications that this scene is demarcated from the main narrative. Instead, in the final stages of the screenplay, Magda evinces the physical and psychological deterioration

instigated by the extreme isolation following her father's death. She then remains in this changed state when she serves her father his soup. There are no observable divisions between the imagined and the real, and instead the events following Anna's arrival on the farm are connected within a primary, inexplicable narrative.

This structure can be identified by picturing how the screenplay would look on screen if it were filmed. Through voice-over, editing, and other formal choices, the screenplay guides its implied viewer to perceive cohesive structures that join events along a main narrative. (For this chapter, the terms *cohesion* and *continuity* are used to describe connections and not to suggest the seamless editing style of Classical Hollywood Cinema). In his studies of cinematic narrative, Edward Branigan explores how even the smallest connections between events are powerful tools in film comprehension because "the spectator constructs temporal, spatial, and causal situations by assembling parts two at a time" (40). The interpretation of localised connections is meanwhile carried out within a broader conceptualisation of the narrative and its possible directions and meanings. Rather than considering on-screen evidence alone, "the perceiver must search, compare, test, discriminate, remember, and speculate within many realms and imagined contexts" (46). The viewer is therefore continually engaged in building narrative comprehension.

Coetzee is attentive to how cinematic cues facilitate narrative communication between viewer and film, as is evident in his communications with director Clive Levinson.

Kannemeyer details how Coetzee and Levinson disagreed fundamentally on many aspects of the proposed film, which ultimately resulted in the termination of their contract. Among other things, Levinson expressed concern over how the viewer will understand the narrative, but Coetzee refused to distinguish between reality and imagination and instead responded:

You object, "The audience will not understand what is going on." Very well, I suggest that certain signals occur which are not present in the book, and which mark off a



scene from the revision of the scene, even to the extent of indicating which is the more trustworthy, though in fact it turns out at the end that nothing, or very little, has been trustworthy. (qtd. in Kannemeyer 307-08)

Although Coetzee is evasive as to how the narrative is envisioned, he shows his intention to direct the viewer's comprehension through "certain signals." One also sees that unlike the novel, which declares Magda's unreliability from the start and also hints at her father's return by storing his belongings "to await the resurrection" (sec. 161), the screenplay will reveal its untrustworthy nature only "at the end," suggesting that the text will present the illusion of a reliable narrative until that point.

This is firstly achieved by streamlining the story of *In the Heart of the Country* and toning down the use of disruptive media effects. Stylistically, the screenplay is very different from the novel, and although it uses a few jump cuts, overall the text bears little resemblance to the independent cinema behind *In the Heart of the Country*. There are neither stills nor suspensions of time, and the numerous revisions and repetitions have been removed (with the exception of one repetition shortly before the first murder). There is, for example, only one scene showing Magda's father riding up to Anna (the novel has three). The argument between Magda and her father over Old Anna's departure is also reduced from four scenes to one. From an aesthetic viewpoint, one is less likely to expect unreliability in this narrative which appears more conventional, and therefore the final impact of Magda's father's return is likely to be unexpected (unless the viewer is familiar with the novel).

The screenplay also allows for a key departure from Magda's first-person narration, which will prevent the viewer from normalising events as a product of her mind. Any abnormalities in the novel can ultimately be absorbed within the bounds of convention because Magda is the narrator, and thus anything can be understood as the product of her imagination. Zimmler observes how "the use of a single narrator ensures that the contradiction

[his return] cannot be explained by a difference in perspective,” and therefore “the repetition is explicable in terms of the logic of the narrative itself (Magda is mad and hallucinating or bored and fantasizing)” (68). To the first option of madness, however, Coetzee asserts that “Magda is passionate in the way that one can be in fiction” and writes parenthetically “I see no further point in calling her mad” (*Doubling* 61). By choosing to perceive certain events as imagined, by classifying either Magda’s father’s death or his reappearance as illusion, the reader can resolve any inconsistencies in the story. The screenplay, however, resists this interpretive strategy by removing narratorial control from Magda and instead presenting her story through an external, third-person film narration with frequent voice-over segments.

The voice-over structure, it will be shown, precludes the viewer from interpreting Magda as the narrator for the main narrative (which includes the shooting and her father’s return), and therefore these events cannot be contextualised as the product of her mind. Coetzee’s aesthetic choices are significant because voice-over functions as a site where one can choose to assign narrative control to a film character, even though technically the voice-over track is subordinate to the film narrator. Although there is some contention in film theory about the term *narrator*,<sup>11</sup> I rely on Jakob Lothe’s understanding of the film narrator as “a heterogeneous mechanical and technical instrument, constituted by a large number of different components” which together perform the same function as “the literary third-person narrator” (30). Sarah Kozloff takes a similar view in her seminal study of voice-over, but she coins the term *image-maker* in place of narrator (with *narrator* used for voice-over speaker). The film narrator, then, is the greater apparatus that directs cinematography, editing, voice-over, *mise en scène*, and other such resources. Although voice-over represents one of the film narrator’s constituent parts, Kozloff notes that a film can be structured in such a way as to “create the sense of character-narration so strongly that one accepts the voice-over narrator [speaker] as . . . the mouthpiece of the image-maker either for the whole film or for the

duration of his or her embedded story” (45). The viewer can be guided to perceive a character as the narrator (image-maker) who visualises on-screen events. Considering that the film narrator is such an abstract entity, viewers are more likely to “embrace the character as the principal storyteller,” but this instinct can be stopped if “the film plays upon the distinction and deliberately frustrates [its viewers]” (Kozloff 49). Analysis will show that the screenplay’s voice-over track achieves precisely this estranging effect and thus prevents the viewer from latching onto the more familiar idea of a character-narrator.

Coetzee’s voice-over methodology will be explored in contrast to *Dust*, which situates Magda as the perceived narrator for most of the film. As Dovey and Dovey note, *Dust* follows a conventional reading of the novel: “The repetitions are largely accounted for in narrative terms as the fantasies of a crazy woman; they are explained or naturalized through being reduced to the level of the individual psychology of madness” (63). Throughout the film, Hänsel demarcates fantasy through “the convention of a musical motif, and also by embedding the ‘fantasy’ sequences within the sequences which depict ‘real’ events” (62). Magda’s rape, for example, is interspersed with a dreamlike sequence of her and Hendrik in a lovers’ embrace. She also grabs her head in pain as a rush of noise is heard and her father and his wife are shown in the approaching cart amid wind and dust, which conveys that this outdoor scene is actually in her mind. While Dovey and Dovey analyse individual moments of overt fantasy, this chapter will examine the overall structure of *Dust* and consider that most of the film is envisioned as a projection of Magda’s mind’s eye. A comparison with Coetzee’s screenplay will then be used to highlight how he avoids this type of approach.

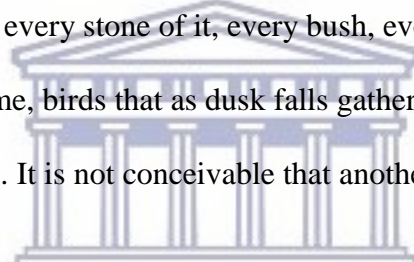
Analysis of the screenplay’s structure will simultaneously explore how manipulations of on-screen energy choreograph the characters’ lives to the changing seasons. During initial drafting stages, letters between Coetzee and Levinson reveal his focus on pacing:

The problem with *tempo* is that the book tends to be meditative, and therefore in filmic terms static. The solution is not to speed things up but to create variety of tempo and also to maintain a sense of direction and urgency even when the physical tempo of events on the screen is slow. (qtd. in Wittenberg, “Godard in the Karoo” 21)

In later communications with filmmaker Francis Gerard, Coetzee outlines additional sequences in a dramatic way that also “reveals his close attention . . . to the overall rhythm and pacing of the film” (Wittenberg, *Two Screenplays* 14). The result is a versatility of pacing that together with natural imagery aligns the flow of events with the seasons. In this respect, the screenplay resembles Coetzee’s novel *Waiting for the Barbarians*, which describes a full cycle of the seasons vividly as nature directs the lives of those living in an isolated outpost amid a vast wilderness. *Waiting for the Barbarians* begins as “[s]ummer is wheeling slowly towards its end” (2) and ends with “the first [snow]fall of the year” (155). Although Coetzee’s screenplay takes place over a longer period (the flashforward skips ahead many years), the events shown on-screen depict a full cycle of the seasons from summer to summer, and perhaps the adaptation process (undertaken circa 1980) was partly influenced by *Waiting for the Barbarians*, which was finished before this project’s completion

Nature plays an important role in the screenplay. Through cinematography, Coetzee is able to capture the Karoo landscape that is absent from *Dust* (filmed in Spain) and, surprisingly, from *In the Heart of the Country* itself. The novel privileges Magda’s interiority, rendering nature mostly symbolic. This is evident through intermedial reference to painting when Magda speaks of “preferring to immerse [her]self in a landscape of symbol” (sec. 28). Helen Deese explains that this term is often applied to medieval and Italian Renaissance works: in the landscape of symbol, “the facts of nature are noticed only for meaning something beyond themselves” (214). Magda too locates the symbolic in the natural through the motif of a tumultuous, sunset sky: she reads “these glorious sunsets” as evidence of nature

speaking “with tongues of fire” (sec. 32). The phrase “tongue of fire” (sing.) is a biblical reference (Isa. 5.24). Magda also watches the bright colours of a “haloed sunset display” swirl around her father in “streaks and whorls” (sec. 62). These shapes are evocative of the type of brush strokes one would see in thickly-applied oil paint (suggestive of Vincent van Gogh).<sup>12</sup> The colours of the sky seem to be painted around the figure of Magda’s father. In contrast to the symbolic, painterly presence of the Karoo in the novel, the landscape of the screenplay is envisioned through cinematic (photographic) images. This naturalistic depiction allows Coetzee to portray the Karoo landscape more authentically. This space is deeply meaningful to Coetzee, who as a child was enraptured by the family farm of Voëlfontein, described affectionately in *Boyhood*:


 Bird fountain; he loves every stone of it, every bush, every blade of grass, loves the birds that give it its name, birds that as dusk falls gather in their thousands in the trees around the fountain. . . . It is not conceivable that another person could love the farm as he does. (67-68)

Wittenberg articulates how the screenplay’s reimagining of the farm in *In the Heart of the Country* becomes a way for Coetzee to reconnect with this beloved, childhood space:

“Indeed, *Boyhood*’s imagination of the sights and sounds of the Karoo can be understood as a reprise of the earlier screenplay version of *In the Heart of the Country*, where Coetzee made the generic Karoo farm of Magda more explicitly like that of Voëlfontein” (483). The screenplay captures this landscape through the addition of several outdoor scenes and the regular use of long shots, which allow Coetzee to impart the vastness of this space. The text furthermore depicts the seasonal changes in the landscape, and this emphasis on how time progresses in the natural world, it will be shown, offers valuable commentary on the temporal thematics explored in *In the Heart of the Country*.

The final part of this chapter will incorporate findings from the screenplay study into an investigation of cinematic temporality in the novel. Magda often speculates on the nature of time, and analysis will suggest that film aesthetics engage in a philosophical exploration of ideas put forward in Jorge Luis Borges's essay "A New Refutation of Time" (1946). Coetzee's reference to Borges is cinematic in that it is mediated through *Alphaville*, a film that prior analysis has shown was seminal for the evolution of the novel. The discussion in this chapter will centre on the temporal motifs of the wheel and the river, which Alpha 60 too cites from Borges. Although the film and *In the Heart of the Country* draw the same material from Borges's essay, each interprets it differently. The image of the wheel (to which the river image is tied) is related to the concept of an eternal present, but although Alpha 60 espouses this idea, in practice it fixates on present-future relations, trying "to plan for and predict the future in ways which subordinate it to the present" (Farocki 61).<sup>13</sup> The analysis of *In the Heart of the Country* will therefore exclude *Alphaville* and focus on Borges's essay to which the novel is closer. Coetzee also writes about the eternal present in his analysis of Kafka's "The Burrow" ("Time, Tense and Aspect"), yet this essay does not look at the motifs of the river and wheel. These images, it will be shown, are closely tied to cinematic manipulations of time in *In the Heart of the Country* and resonate with Borges's approach to time.

In outline then, this chapter will begin by establishing voice-over patterns that remove Magda's narratorial control from the main narrative. This is followed by an examination of how the opening sequence of the screenplay creates expectations of continuity that are disrupted by the arrival of the Woman. Continuity is soon restored, and the main narrative continues unbroken through several formal strategies that ultimately link Magda's father's death to the final scene when he reappears. One of these strategies is the treatment of seasonality, which will be examined as a methodology used by Coetzee to produce an underlying framework of continuity. Observations from this analysis will then be



incorporated into the study of cinematic time in *In the Heart of the Country*, which will examine how Borges's theories of time and accompanying motifs are suggested in the novel through cinematic devices.

## Voice-over Techniques

Voice-over makes it possible for filmmakers to assign narrative control to a character. *Dust* employs it for this effect, depicting Magda as the narrator for most of her story, which is framed between the opening shot and final scenes. By looking at the narrative strategies employed by Hänsel, one is able to see how different Coetzee's screenplay is. Firstly, the texts take antithetical approaches to the opening scene, which is crucial because the impression of "voice-over narrators as primary, framing storytellers" is far more believable "when the voice-over is simultaneous with the film's opening shots, when one has seen as little as possible of the story world, and certainly before one sees the narrating character" (Kozloff 50).

*Dust* fulfils these criteria through formal choices that create the impression of a fictional world brought into existence as Magda's voice-over speaks. The film begins with her in a medium shot, facing directly away from the camera as she looks out across the landscape. Although she is in the scene, she is an anonymous figure (not yet truly visible). The camera then pulls back from her as her voice-over says, "To my father, I've been an absence all my life. Sundown after sundown, we sat facing each other. . . . We must have fronted each other in silence. Is it possible that we spoke? No." Because Magda is speaking about her life, the choice of voice-over emphasises her "claim to be telling the story" (Kozloff 45). As detailed in the introduction, Hänsel was attracted to the father-daughter relationship in *In the Heart of the Country*, and the beginning of *Dust* immediately signals her

intention to explore this bond by having Magda speak about her father. Magda's opening voice-over conforms to one of the most recognisable functions of a first-person voice-over because it presents the "film as a remembrance of things past" (Kozloff 54). When the film then cuts to an establishing shot of the farmhouse with the caption "CAPE PROVINCE SOUTH AFRICA," and her father is shown riding up to the house, the viewer is left with the impression that Magda is looking back at a period in her life when something particularly significant occurred between them. By facing directly away from the camera in the opening shot, Magda also aligns her gaze with the camera's line of sight; the farmhouse setting therefore falls under her gaze as if she is picturing this scene for the viewer. The camera's motion furthers the impression of a flashback as it pulls away from her, moving backwards as if retreating into the past.

While formal choices in the beginning of *Dust* focus on establishing Magda as the primary narrator, Coetzee's screenplay adopts a contrasting methodology. The beginning of *Dust* is actually closer to the novel's opening because of the intense focus on Magda's subjectivity. In contrast, the screenplay begins with a "tracking shot across the flat, barren countryside" (sc. 1), drawing the viewer into the Karoo setting while signalling with this external, depersonalised viewpoint an immediate break from the first-person narration of the novel. Magda only appears on screen after Hendrik and her father, and she is shown lying quietly in her bedroom. Unlike *Dust*, she does not present this setting but is rather introduced as part of it. She next appears after outdoor scenes showing her father and Hendrik discussing the following day's tasks. As she strolls along the riverbed at dusk, watching the birds roost, her voice-over says, "When I was a little girl in a frilled sunbonnet I would sit in the dust, playing with my friends the beetles . . ." (sc. 9). (The roosting birds are reminiscent of *Boyhood*.) This voice-over plays several minutes into the film, much longer than is necessary for Magda to be perceived as the film's narrator, and its content gives the impression that one

is merely listening to her thoughts as they arise. Her childhood reminiscence shifts dreamily into the subjunctive mode as she pictures herself living a rustic life in the *veld*: “If it came to the pinch, I think, living in a mud hut out in the veld, . . . talking to the insects – I wouldn’t complain.” The use of the parenthetical “I think” furthers the suggestion of spontaneity while also anchoring her voice-over in the present scene. Technically a voice-over can originate from any point in the narrative, yet this one is created to give the impression of immediacy.

This first voice-over establishes a pattern that will continue throughout the screenplay as Magda’s voice-overs are continually placed in the present. Rather than creating a unified voice-over that reflects on these events from the future, the voice-over track relays a series of individual thoughts. This is observable when Magda presses herself against the dining-room window (a scene examined in the prior chapter for its resemblance to *Alphaville*), saying, “I live inside a skin inside a house” (sc. 48). As the voice-over plays, her eyes are closed in an introspective gesture that suggests she is listening to her thoughts, and the simple present tense (“I live”) further synchronises her voice-over to this gesture. As in this scene, all voice-over text is taken to a degree from the novel, and Coetzee has primarily selected the present-tense voice, thereby creating the impression that Magda’s life is unfolding for the viewer. After being raped, for example, she lies on her bed beside Hendrik and her voice-over says, “In spite of everything I’m sure that if I got up now and went out into the afternoon, I would find it like any other” (sc. 112). She is clearly commenting on her present situation, thinking that if she were to leave her bed, she would encounter the world’s indifference to her suffering. The adverb *now* is used in four other voice-overs to stress the continual focus on the present, and her voice-over accordingly never demonstrates the type of advanced knowledge that an omniscient narrator would have. Although Magda, for example, is suspicious of her father’s leering interest in Anna, she does not see him undressing her. Magda’s voice-over in the scene following this event accordingly reveals no advance

knowledge but rather articulates the general, simmering tension between her and her father. As they eat together in strained silence, she says, “There is a note in the air now that only dogs can hear, and certain people” (sc. 54).

Magda also uses the iterative, habitual present several times. Although these voice-overs do not focus on specific on-screen events, they conform to the idea of a present-tense audio track and therefore continue to foster the impression that Magda’s voice-over is evolving with and within the narrative. When Hendrik, for example, is shown eating dinner alone outside his cottage, Magda’s voice-over says, “At the end of each month Hendrik is paid six shillings. Also every two weeks part of a sheep” (sc. 10). She ends her summary of his routine with, “He keeps his station, we keep our distance.” Magda is articulating the current state of affairs (their routine and their relationship) that will later change dramatically. After the rape, Magda and Hendrik fall into a new pattern of estranged physical intimacy. “Some nights he does not come to me” (sc. 115), her voice-over says as he has sex with her. The specification *some* shows that they have entered a new routine.

The intention to limit voice-over to the present is also evident when comparing the screenplay to its earlier draft held at the Harry Ransom Centre (henceforth referred to as the HRC draft). Five voice-overs from the HRC draft have been rewritten in the final text as direct speech, with Magda “*talking to herself*” (sc. 64, 88, 89, 103, and 139). Many of these voice-overs are unaltered, for example, the voice-over “Once I lived in time like a fish in water. . . .” (HRC sc. 68) is written verbatim in the final draft as direct speech (sc. 89). Other voice-overs have been slightly paraphrased, such as when Magda expresses her outrage at hearing her father and Anna in the kitchen. In the HRC draft, her voice-over exclaims, “So full of bravado. He brings her into the house, he comes so full of bravado to announce her his concubine” (sc. 42a). In the final draft this becomes: “MAGDA (*Outraged, talking to herself*) He brings her into the house. (*Pause*) He comes to announce her, his property” (sc. 64). This

repeated conversion of voice-over into direct speech suggests that Coetzee regarded both as interchangeable, and therefore voice-over is envisioned as responding, like speech, to the present moment.

By preventing voice-over from controlling the image, Coetzee avoids “the subordination of image to voice” that he often finds tedious in films (*Doubling* 60). The image is instead autonomous. The screenplay also calls attention to this relationship by desynchronising voice and image during the longest voice-over section (abridged below), which shows the image accelerating ahead of Magda’s voice. As she finishes quarrelling with her father over Old Anna’s departure, her voice-over says:

My father creates absences, wherever he goes he makes absences. (*Pause*) My father is the absence of my mother. He has murdered all the motherly in me. Now I am in mourning for the uses I was never put to. . . . I am sure there will be a time for weeping. (sc. 60-63)

This voice-over remains in the simple present tense (“My father creates,” “I am”) while the image skips ahead across four scenes: Magda stands behind her father’s chair, she lies down in her bedroom, she walks through the riverbed, and she unpacks a kist in the attic. The voice and image tracks therefore become asynchronous, with voice-over left behind as the image jumps ahead in time.

In summation, Magda’s voice-over does not overexplain and dominate the image but is rather a series of brief, independent responses by her to an unfolding narrative. She therefore fits Kozloff’s description of a voice-over speaker who “speaks intermittently – and sometimes only minimally – and is not in control of . . . her story to the same degree, or in the same manner, as a literary narrator” (43). More specifically, the screenplay achieves this effect by limiting voice-over to the present tense and by allowing the image independence

from the voice, and this will become crucial to reading the text's global structure as well as the embedded sequence, which is understood in contrast to the primary narrative.

## Setting the Scene

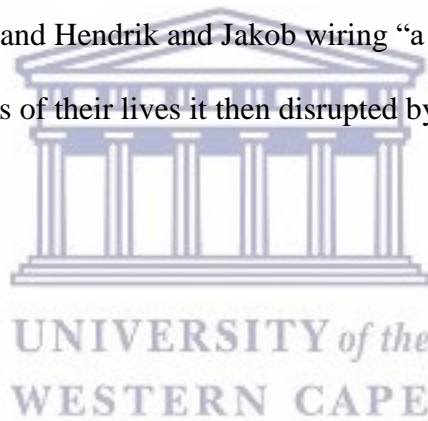
The first sequences of the screenplay present routine life on the farm and establish a pattern of cause and effect whereby events follow one another in a logical manner. Branigan terms this type of chronology *prospective time*, and he explains it as the temporal relation of two on-screen spaces (A and B), with the time of A leading into the time of B (“A and so B”); this is furthermore the “usual expectation” in film comprehension (41). The screenplay draws on this familiar style in order to instil expectations of continuity in the viewer, which will later influence how certain film cues are interpreted, such as by incentivising the viewer to dismiss the first murder as part of an embedded narrative in order to re-establish continuity.

The story begins on a “HOT AFTERNOON” with a “HEAT HAZE” that textures the opening “tracking shot across the flat, barren country-side” (sc. 1). A heat haze causes “a shimmering in the air near the ground that distorts distant views” (“Heat haze”) and thus orientates the viewer temporally at the height of summer. The film’s opening titles are set to run over this shot, prolonging the camera’s motion to suggest the immensity of this space. Hendrik and his dog are shown as distant figures that appear to “crawl across the empty landscape,” moving slowly as if stifled by the waves of heat. The next four scenes (sc. 2-5) then continue to express the enervating effect of this climate by showing its soporific effect: Hendrik sleeps beneath a shady thorn tree; Magda’s father is asleep in his bedroom with the curtains drawn; Magda lies awake in her darkened bedroom; and the hens in the chicken-run are “dozing in the heat” (sc. 5). The cool of dusk then sees the characters outside and active



as Magda's father and Hendrik meet in front of the storeroom and Magda takes "her evening walk" along the riverbed, watching the birds roost while her first voice-over plays (s. 9).

This smooth progression of time is also iterated visually through gradual changes in lighting. In film, light can be manipulated to "indicate the approximate hour of the day or at least whether it is early morning, high noon, or evening," as well as conveying seasonality (Zettl 28). These opening scenes progress from "AFTERNOON" (sc. 1) to "DUSK" (sc. 6) to "NIGHT" (sc. 11). The next day begins in the "EARLY MORNING," with "bleak dawn light" falling through the open kitchen door (sc. 13). This soft light brightens into "MID-MORNING" (sc. 17) and "DAY" (sc. 19) before waning again as "DUSK" falls (sc. 21). During this second day, the screenplay again depicts routine tasks, such as Magda sweeping the kitchen, she and Hendrik milling coffee beans, and Hendrik and Jakob wiring "a newly set-up corner fence-post" (sc. 17). The ordinariness of their lives is then disrupted by the sudden arrival of the Woman.



## Interlude

There are several cues that will guide the viewer into reading this sequence as fantasy retrospectively. Montage firstly marks a deviation from the main narrative as the smooth continuity editing is now jolted by a disorientating jump cut: the image changes from a long shot of Magda's father entering "[t]he farmhouse at sunset" (sc. 22) to a day shot of Magda's father and the Woman arriving in a buggy, filmed from within the house. The viewer is confronted with what seems to be a sudden and disorienting flashforward. Magda's father appears to have left the farm and returned days later. The unsettling effect suggests that these events are part of an aberration in the story, and the viewer will later recognise this as a break into an embedded sequence. The Woman's arrival is also filmed "FROM POINT OF VIEW

INSIDE HOUSE, THROUGH A CURTAINED WINDOW” (sc. 23) and Magda is revealed as the watcher. The Woman thus enters the narrative under Magda’s gaze, which will later suggest that Magda is bringing the Woman into the story through her mind’s eye.

The possibility that Magda is inventing these events is furthered by other disruptive techniques, firstly through auditory manipulation. During dinner, the Woman chatters away to Magda’s father while Magda sits “angry and affronted” (sc. 24). “The Woman’s voice fades out and is replaced by” Magda’s voice-over. Although the Woman is still seen talking, her voice is muted as Magda’s thinks about her mother who was “too frail and gentle to give birth to the kind of rough boy-heir [her] father wanted.” The fading sound accompanies Magda’s retreat into her mind and therefore places this event within her subjectivity. The unreliability of the embedded sequence is then hinted at by the two scenes preceding the murder. As Magda walks down the windowless passage (a scene discussed in the previous chapter for its use of chiaroscuro), she is met by the Woman who leads her into the bedroom, but the next scene then revises this event by showing “Magda, dressed as before in white,” walking towards the bedroom, armed with a hatchet (sc. 28). Because this is the only narrative revision in the screenplay, it emphasises the abnormality of these events.

The transition from the embedded sequence back to the main narrative then provides the final pieces needed to interpret this section as imagined. The visual juxtaposition of shots is firstly important. In a surreal moment after the murders, Magda “wades slowly out” into the moonlit dam, and her white nightdress “spreads out like a flower around her” (sc. 30). In the novel, she wears black but here the dress is white, likely bloodstained, and it would therefore seem more ethereal in the moonlight. She then leaps into the water “and begins to dog-paddle slowly, first toward the moon in the middle of the dam, then back again toward the camera.” This comical dog-paddle is incongruous with the intensely brutal murders she has just committed. The screenplay then cuts abruptly from this cool, dreamlike image to the

harsh light of “A HOT AFTERNOON” on the stoep, with Magda again dressed severely “in black” (sc. 31). The stark contrast has a sobering effect, as if one is now waking up to reality. Her father watches the cart approach while she “sits in a chair looking into nothingness.” Magda’s vacant stare shows that she is detached from what is happening around her; her gaze is focused inwards as her voice-over asks, “Where does it come from, whatever this is in me that is in love with the gloomy, the violent?” These words coupled with her pensive look suggest that the murders were played out within her mind’s eye (as in the novel), and she is now questioning these fantasies which reveal her attraction to “the gloomy, the violent.”

Whereas the Woman enters the narrative under Magda’s watchful gaze (now revealed to represent the inward gaze of her mind’s eye), Anna enters under Magda’s father’s gaze, thus signalling that this event is outside Magda’s scope. She is then largely excluded from this sequence. In the next scene, her father hides “the binoculars behind his back” while the cart passes the house (sc. 32). There is no mention of Magda in the shot. The cart is also filmed “FROM THE STOEP,” which places the camera near Magda’s father and thus emphasises his presence because he would appear larger on screen than the distant figures of Hendrik and Anna. He also occupies an elevated position that asserts his dominance. Magda’s presence is only inserted into the story when Hendrik and Anna are finally inside the cottage and her voice-over says, “Hendrik has found a wife: He is no longer young and he doesn’t want his blood to die from the earth” (sc. 35). As usual, her voice-over has little authority and merely comments on what is already known as well as speculating on Hendrik’s motives.

The screenplay goes to great lengths to ensure that the viewer will separate the episode with the Woman from the main narrative (the real), teaching the viewer to recognise the formal directions that will be withheld when Magda’s father returns at the end of the film.

While the embedded sequence shows demarcation, the rest of the narrative then emphasises connections.

## **Narrative Cohesion**

Anna's arrival marks a return to prospective time, which is then maintained for the rest of the film. The screenplay firstly uses several continuity markers to create broad linkages across the main narrative. Magda, for example, rings "the silver bell from the dining table" outside her father's bedroom (sc. 66) and later "finds the bell she was ringing on the floor" (sc. 81). Continuity is also conveyed through the addition of the two neighbours (father and son) who visit Magda's father to discuss farming matters. Magda barely acknowledges them, and "[a]n uneasy silence" takes over as she serves tea (sc. 46). After her father's death, "the neighbours, seen before," arrive while Anna is cutting Magda's hair (sc. 120). Among those who later drag Hendrik back to the farm in chains are "the two men who have earlier visited the farm" (sc. 131). These men only appear once in the novel (when Anna is cutting Magda's hair). Their increased participation in the screenplay adds to the impression of continuity across a large section of the narrative.

Coherence is also achieved through pacing and natural imagery, which stage narrative events according to the seasons. When Hendrik's cart nears the house, the characters are swept up in what the novel calls "the storms of human conflict" (sec. 85). Nature inserts itself metaphorically within their personal relationships, and seasonal changes become expressions of the fluctuations in Magda's life.

### *The Summer Storm*

The motif of the summer storm begins with the “cloud of dust” whipped up by Hendrik’s cart (sc. 31). The air is charged with a sense of anticipation as it passes under Magda’s father’s gaze and he then watches Anna’s face in a voyeuristic close-up. That night, a sole “wink of light” burns eerily in one of the farmhouse windows (sc. 38). In “the vastness of the night landscape,” this small flame signifies Magda’s father’s growing desire. The image resembles Dostoevsky’s vision of the boy who has fallen overboard and looks toward the ship’s lantern, focusing on this “speck of light in a wilderness of night and water” (*Master of Petersburg* 78). In both novels, the lighting effect expresses great isolation. Like the vessel adrift in the ocean, Magda’s home appears lost in the expanse of the Karoo. A cut to Magda’s bedroom then shows her listening to her father’s restless pacing, and her expression conveys that “all is not well” (sc. 39).

The initial flicker of attraction whipped up in the small dust cloud soon grows into a destructive force. The following day begins with the foreboding image of a brewing storm: “Wide angle, the veld, far in the distance the rumble and dark clouds of a thunderstorm” (sc. 40). The impact of this image is augmented by the choice of a wide-angle lens, which creates a greater depth of field through the illusion “that the background object is farther behind the foreground object than it really is” (Zettl 165), thereby intensifying the idea of a vast and powerful landscape that stretches into the distance. The turbulent sky then becomes indicative of the violent passions brewing inside Magda’s father as the screenplay cuts to a telephoto shot of the sheep runs, where the sheep emerge out of “[c]louds of dust,” as if the storm has moved into this space (sc. 41). Hendrik follows, then Jakob, and finally Magda’s father on horseback. In contrast to the wide-angle lens, the telephoto creates a bunched perspective as objects in the foreground and background now “appear closer together” (Zettl 164), giving

the shot a claustrophobic feel. At the pens, on-screen energy intensifies into an explosion of activity as the sheep are “driven with whoops and gestures” (sc. 42). Hendrik struggles with a sheep at the dipping-hole while Magda’s father looks on “in a glowering angry mood” (sc. 43). The frenetic pace almost culminates in violence when a sheep breaks away and “Magda’s father shouts in exasperation and half-raises the stick at Hendrik.” The build-up is then defused as “Magda’s father controls his temper.” Hendrik returns to his task, and the screenplay cuts to the stoep doorway, where Magda looks out to see Anna in the riverbed.

The tempo now changes to a restrained pace that conveys the underlying tension (the eye of the storm). The narrative is held taut by a sense of stifled energy as Magda’s father leers at Anna while Magda remains the helpless watcher. The motif of the storm then resurfaces when her father rides up to Anna amid the setting of “Wind and dust. Sound of thunder in the distance” (sc. 51). This ominous sound is followed by the schoolroom scene of him undressing Anna. When Old Anna later disappears, “Magda storms down the passage” to confront her father (sc. 60). The verb *storms* signals the shift from external forces into the idea of the storm inhabiting interpersonal relations. Although her effort ends with a meek withdrawal, her anger returns more intensely when her father brings Anna into his bedroom. As in the novel, several scuffles ensue, with Magda ringing the bell loudly until he slaps her hard in the face. The gradual rise of energy finally explodes when she shoots her father.

A discordant tempo then sets in after the shooting and becomes mimetic of a volatile period. The rhythm that follows is disharmonious, with frequent but intermittent high-energy spurts accompanying a series of conflicts. Magda firstly struggles to rouse Hendrik for help: she shouts, throws things, and even “tries to thrust [a broom] into his face” (sec. 73). A similar burst of energy is observed when Magda, after “vacantly searching” the house” (sc. 81), suddenly “throws open the door to the sewing-room” and confronts Anna angrily (sc. 82). Hendrik then attacks and chases Anna. Magda is again furious with him when he refuses



to help her bury her father, and she later fires a rifle at him and Anna as they parade about in clothes taken from the loft. Following this, “[Magda] screams and screams” as Hendrik sits beside her bed and touches her thigh (sc. 107). This period of instability is finally marked by the most brutal act of violence when Hendrik throws Magda to the kitchen “floor and begins to kick and beat her” and then rapes her (sc. 111).

Thereafter, the pacing slows to reflect this turning point in Magda’s life, and the summer energy now begins to dissipate as winter nears. The kitchen scene is followed by another rape in Magda’s bedroom (although now termed *intercourse*). This is a low-energy event that takes place in “DIM LIGHT.” Without struggle, “Magda enters, dressed as usual in black, hanging her head in embarrassment” (sc. 112), and she complies silently when Hendrik orders her to undress. After he has sex with her, the screenplay shifts to a “MORNING” scene outside Hendrik’s cottage, with Magda asking him and Anna to come live in the house (sc. 113), and it is unclear how much time has passed between these three scenes (kitchen, bedroom, and cottage). Their relationships are inverted, with Hendrik becoming interim master of the household. Magda, Hendrik, and Anna settle into a quiet and dispassionate routine until the return of the two neighbours prompts Hendrik and Anna to flee, and this significant event is synchronous with the change in seasons. “Magda, heavily muffled against the cold,” watches them leave as “FAINT LIGHT BREAKS” (sc. 122). The dawn ushers in a new period in her life as, left alone in the wake of an intense summer storm, Magda now faces a listless and lonely winter.

### *A Winter Lull*

The winter narrative is marked by torpor. Whereas the summer exuberance is fuelled by conflict, Magda now mulls about in isolation. The following scenes are slow and drawn out, conveying the sluggish passing of time as entropy takes hold of her and the farm:

123. The peach and apple trees in the orchard, leafless, against a grey winter sky.

124. The door of Hendrik's deserted cottage flaps in the wind. (sc. 124)

125. Long shot of the bare veld. Sound of wind. A small flock of sheep moves into view. Behind the sheep, driving them, comes Magda. . . .

126. Magda pushes open the door of the schoolroom, in which Jakob and Old Anna had lived. . . . Light comes through the broken roof. . . .

127. The stagnant surface of the dipping-hole. A dragonfly hovers over it.

128. From a distance, the farmhouse. No sign of life.

The winter imagery shows a barren and cold land, and apart from the flapping door there is little motion to this sequence. Even the shot of Magda chasing sheep has a static feel because the camera is in a stationary position and must wait as the "flock of sheep moves into view."

The use of a long shot also reduces energy because these distant figures would appear to move slower on screen. A lifelessness pervades these images: the sky is grey, the trees and veld are bare, the cottage and schoolroom are deserted, the dipping-hole is "stagnant," and the farmhouse shows "[n]o sign of life." In the dilapidated schoolroom, "the broken roof" and "filthy old blackboard" (sc. 126) recall the ghostly bedroom abandoned by Magda's mother. There are also no variations in light throughout this sequence as each slugline uses the same, nondescript marker "DAY," and one therefore has no sense of time passing. Winter thus becomes one long and unending day.

The winter sequence in particular highlights Coetzee's choice to emphasise seasonality and adopt a mimetic approach through pacing. The novel similarly presents a winter series that conveys the farm's deterioration, but the adaptation process has refashioned

this material to fit within the overall choreography. Whereas the screenplay stages the onset of winter through several scenes, the novel compresses it into a few lines:

Winter is coming. A cold wind whistles across the flats beneath an iron sky. The potatoes have gone to seed, the fruit has rotted on the ground. The dog has departed, following Hendrik. The pumps spin monotonously day and night, the dams flow over. The farm is going to ruin. (sec. 231)

This extract approximates a specific type of montage identified by Monaco “in which a number of short shots are woven together to communicate a great deal of information in a short time” (ch. 3 “Montage”). The technique is used twice in the screenplay to group several activities within a single scene: the first “MONTAGE” shows Magda, Hendrik, and Anna cleaning the house (sc. 100); and the second “MONTAGE,” shows Magda building stone structures and a bonfire to signal the aeroplane (sc. 138). The novel’s description of winter similarly compresses several images. In contrast, the screenplay depicts winter through several scenes, thereby expanding the material to slow the feel of time. Many of these scenes also have sparse descriptions that suggest a single, protracted shot.

Night then ends the long winter’s day as “Magda lies on [her] bed, her eyes open” (sc. 129). The room is dimly lit, recalling the first time she is seen in her bedroom with the curtains closed to shut out the summer sun. There are three clear taps at the window that she ignores. This odd moment will be familiar to the novel’s readers because Magda imagines that one night she will hear Hendrik “tapping at the window” (sec. 236); in the context of the screenplay, however, these taps seem like the typical, nightly rattle of a broken-down estate (perhaps Hendrik’s door is flapping again). Rather than sneaking up to her window, Hendrik is dragged back to the farm in chains. In this episode, which will be examined next, his return ushers in a new period in Magda’s life, which is mirrored by another seasonal change.

### *Winter's End*

A shift in season again accompanies a turning point in the narrative. The end of winter is signalled by a suddenly burst of energy as “Magda walks rapidly down the passage” and onto the stoep, where she is halted by the glare of “brilliant sunlight” (sc. 130). The bright light immediately marks a change from the muted, grey winter sky. As in the previous summer, a cart now approaches the stoep. This one is drawn by horses, and “behind the driver, standing, his hands tied to the rails at either side, is Hendrik” (sc. 131). Men with rifles ride alongside as “[t]he cart sweeps around and pulls up facing the way it came,” and Hendrik is almost knocked down by the motion. Magda is then hurried towards him by “a man behind her directing her steps” (sc. 132). With a nod from her, the man signals the driver and Hendrik is whisked away violently: “He is jerked from his feet. The cart drives off in a cloud of dust.” This dust cloud echoes the storm of summer that began with the dust cloud whipped up by Hendrik’s cart. With the departure of Hendrik and the men, Magda is now truly severed from the outside world. Jakob and Old Anna have left, Magda’s father is dead, and Anna’s whereabouts are unknown. In the novel, Jakob and Old Anna visit Magda once more (sec. 235), but in the screenplay Magda never sees them again. With Hendrik captured and taken away, and the truth of her father’s death known, the neighbours will never return. It will be many years before Magda encounters another person.

Hendrik’s return breaks the stalled time of winter, and the energy of these events flows into the next scene: “The pump spinning furiously. Water spills over the edge of the cement dam” (sc. 133). Magda then winds the clock, reiterating that time can now move forward. From this point, one finds the most crucial elements needed to read the main narrative as unbroken, with the repercussions of her father’s death continuing into the last scene where he reappears.

## The Final Scenes

The last stage of the screenplay shows a continued deterioration in Magda's appearance and behaviour as she becomes increasingly unkempt and erratic. She walks home "balancing a small pumpkin on her head" (sc. 135) while her voice-over explains that "the farm has now been searched" for her father, thereby linking her eccentric, childlike behaviour to the absence of a parental figure. "Her hands and nails are noticeably dirty" as she starts to eat "rapidly and mechanically, looking into the camera" (sc. 136). The oddity of her performance is heightened by her gaze into the camera, which momentarily gives the impression that she is looking through the screen at the audience (a distracting technique that breaks the illusion of the fiction). The use of voice-over furthermore creates the bizarre impression of ventriloquism, as if she is throwing her voice. She calls attention to her mouth by eating rapidly, referencing the familiar ventriloquist trick of drinking while speaking. Her peculiar behaviour is again associated with isolation as her voice-over says, "I was not made to live alone."

This pattern of decline continues into the orchard "MANY YEARS LATER" (sc. 137). The passing of time is immediately evident in her appearance: "Her hair has turned white. She wears the same black dress, now stained and filthy." Her appearance is worse and her behaviour is stranger. She terrifies a boy who is picking fruit by grabbing his arm and making a sexually suggestive gesture; he flees as "Magda laughs at length." This encounter is followed by a feverish "MONTAGE" during which she labours to build stone structures, lights a bonfire, and "stands in her old patched white nightdress waving her arms and shouting at the sky" (sc. 138). Her speech reveals a disturbed state of mind as she calls out, "I know you hear me. You can't fail to see me. Why do you taunt me so?" She then mutters to herself, "I

hear you. It's your voice that keeps me from turning into a beast." Her abnormal behaviour and filthy appearance show that the decline instigated by her isolation has continued unimpeded over the years. These changes in Magda and are then linked to her father's reappearance.

In this final stage of connecting the main narrative, the voices Magda hears play a significant role. After the montage, she stands in the kitchen preparing soup and again expresses her frustration at their indifference. Her voice-over recalls, "Last night the voices said: without enemies . . . you have no choice but to turn yourself into an adventure" (sc. 139). She then exclaims aloud, "Pah! They miss the point. But then they never listen to me." She dishes up the soup and carries it out to the stoep. As the scene ends, her voice-over repeats verbatim the line accompanying her father's return in the novel: "But I have other cares besides quarrelling with my voices." As in the rest of the screenplay, her voice-over originates in the present; this is also emphasised by the fact that her monologue is divided between voice-over and direct speech. It is most likely that the voices Magda hears in this scene are the same ones she hears during the montage. There is also a possibility that these are the voices revealed earlier when Magda's father takes Anna sweets and Magda's voice-over says, "Look upon a poor man as totally undone if he has the misfortune to have a fine wife and a powerful master. That is what the voices say. In my solitude I hear voices . . ." (sc. 51). In this prior scene, the voices comment on the actions that lead to her father's death. Whether the voices originate here or later during the montage they perform the same continuity function of linking Magda's father's death from the shooting to the scene of Magda preparing soup. In context, however, her insistence that "they never listen" makes it more likely that she is referring to the sky beings that refuse to notice her.

The prior narrative events represented by these voices are then joined to the final scene in which her father returns. She "carries the tray out into the passage, through the house



and out on to the stoep” (sc. 139). Her motion remains continuous as the camera follows her into the next scene, where her father is waiting for her. His appearance is then described in detail:

Magda emerges from the house with the tray. Her father sits on the stoep in an armchair. He is old, white-haired, frail. He trembles with Parkinson’s disease. He wears a hat and nightshirt. There is a rug over his knees. He stares out into the gathering dark. (sc. 140)

Magda’s continuous motion shows that there is no separation between the ending and the rest of the narrative. The soup that she prepares while arguing with her voices is given to her father. He is served by a daughter who still suffers the repercussions of the extreme isolation brought about by his death. Although Magda’s physical appearance in the final two scenes is unspecified, there are no indications that she is suddenly young again. This fits the pattern of progressive time in the screenplay. Time never moves backwards but rather skips forward, which is stressed by the slugline markers “NEXT MORNING” (sc. 26), “LATER” (sc. 76), “THE NEXT AFTERNOON” (sc. 110), “DAYS LATER” (sc. 104 and 119), and finally “MANY YEARS LATER” (sc. 137). The primary narrative continues to move forward unbroken, and the viewer is now tasked with interpreting this startling ending.

The mystery surrounding Magda’s father’s return is augmented by careful attention to his physical appearance. There is no mention of visible scars that would suggest he survived the first attack (with the hatchet). Neither is there any indication of the gunshot wound. Magda lifts his blanket to check “the diaper for wetness” and there is no trace of the “bullet-hole” in his stomach (sc. 71). The specification of Parkinson’s disease shows instead that he is incapacitated by illness. She shoots him, he dies, and he is now here, unmarked, while Magda maintains the psychological scars of his death and her subsequent alienation. And without contrary indication, one must assume that she too is aged. The viewer is then

prevented from reading his earlier death as fantasy because she is not narrating these events. As in the beginning of the screenplay, Coetzee pre-empts the viewer from identifying Magda as the narrator, and his approach can again be highlighted in contrast to *Dust*.

In Hänsel's film, the transition into the final scenes completes the idea of Magda as primary narrator. The film cuts from an exterior shot of her looking out over the empty farm (there is no stone montage with an aeroplane) to a close-up of her hand winding the clock, signifying a return to chronicity and her routine. She silently prepares soup that she takes to her father on the stoep. As she tends to him and speaks fondly of the past, the camera moves slowly towards them, stopping in a medium shot. Whereas the camera moves away from her in the first shot, retreating into the embedded narrative, it now moves towards her, signalling a return to the present. The events of the film now appear to have been the daydream of a lonely caretaker who imagines her father before his incapacity (a fantasy that becomes violent and confused). The film suggests that as Magda looks out of the window in the opening scene, she becomes lost in reverie, and the viewer then witnesses a mind's-eye vision that continues until she wakes from her dream and tends to the clock. The narrative of Anna and Magda's father is therefore played out in the suspended time of her mind. The halting of time is further suggested by the static nature of the film, not only because of the slow pacing but because there is little indication of time passing. There are no discernible changes in seasons, there is no flashforward, Magda does not age, and when she meets the boy from the post office, she is only slightly unkempt. In the final scene, her voice-over paraphrases the closing lines of the novel, beginning with "I have chosen at every moment my own destiny, which is to die here, in this petrified garden, near my father's bones." The film thus begins and ends with Magda's voice-over, emphasising her claim over this story. The credits then roll over this image of them sitting side by side, reiterating Hänsel's decision to foreground the father-daughter bond.

In the final scene of Coetzee's screenplay, however, the camera asserts its independence from Magda by remaining outside as she drags her father's chair "through the front door and into the dark house." A similar effect is observed earlier when Magda and Old Anna pass the locked room and "[t]he camera stays behind, with the locked door in the foreground" (sc. 20). Magda's voice-over then speaks about her mother, and it seems that the camera is trying to direct her towards this room. In the final scene, the camera again refuses to follow her.

The film then expresses the lack of narrative closure visually. This scene invites the use of a fade out, which often concludes a film. Day is ending as the story is ending. The setting is already partially dark (dusk) and could easily slip into complete blackness, but instead the viewer is left watching the doorway. The denial of this cinematic convention recalls the unfinished nature of the novel. The doorway becomes the absence, the dark O from which no explanation will come as "End credits roll on an empty scene."

In conclusion, Coetzee's screenplay presents a narrative structure that subverts conventions of cause and effect. The events of the main narrative are connected through prospective time, yet ultimately these linkages lead into the final scene when Magda's father reappears and the text reveals its fictionality. Paradoxically, the screenplay deploys cohesive structures to create an irresolvable connection: the events of the main narrative are formally inseparable and thereby place Magda's father death and his return along the same line. The third-person narration then resists the established reading strategy of seeking resolution by assigning the narrative to Magda's imagination. Coetzee's screenplay thus offers a different perspective of the narrative of *In the Heart of the Country*. It reflects the possible structure implied in the novel through cinematic cues, which embed the first murder within Magda's mind's eye but offer no such guidance as to reading her father's final return. In contrast to the screenplay, *Dust* allows the narrative to be regrouped into a realist understanding by situating

Magda as the primary narrator, creating the impression that time is stalled as the events of the film are projected within her mind's eye. Unlike *Dust*, Coetzee's screenplay has a forward momentum, with temporal progression highlighted through seasonality. In the following section of analysis, this treatment of time will be used to explore a greater temporal framework demonstrated in *In the Heart of the Country* through film techniques.

### **The Cinematic Temporality of *In the Heart of the Country***

In his essay "A New Refutation of Time," Borges presents two conflicting ideas of time through the image of the river and the sphere, and I will consider how these temporal oppositions function in *In the Heart of the Country*, using the adapted screenplay to augment this discussion. The conclusions drawn from the screenplay so far will be used as part of a renewed engagement with the novel's cinematic treatment of time. The previous chapter examined how approximations of montage convey various experiences of time, which is slowed, halted, fractured, regressed, advanced, and revised. Analysis will now explore the additional technique of accelerated motion, which demonstrates the rapid progression of time by showing on-screen events in fast motion.

The following section will first examine Borges's theories of time and the accompanying motifs. Borges argues against conventional notions of time, yet he ultimately ratifies the concept he aims to refute (a failure he openly acknowledges). This discussion will be accompanied by an overview of a similar pattern in Coetzee's other fictions (including the screenplay) and critical works. Analyse will then focus on the cinematic treatment of time in *In the Heart of the Country*, looking particularly at two simulations of accelerated motion. The final discussion will then consider the implications of Magda's antagonistic relationship

with time in relation to language, which creates an additional parallel between the novel and Borges's essay.

### *A Refutation of Time*

The motifs of the river and the sphere emerge from Borges's attempt at denying what can be viewed as the common definition of time: time as "[t]he indefinite continued progress of existence and events in the past, present, and future regarded as a whole" ("Time," def. 1). Borges adamantly refutes "the existence of one single time, in which all things are linked as in a chain" (257). This denial of time as successive is sparked by a paradigm-altering moment in which he feels himself living in a scene from the past. During his after-dinner stroll one evening, he is suddenly struck by the sense that he is watching a scene from the 1890s. The aura of this space and its objects "is not merely identical to the one present on that corner so many years ago; it is without resemblances or repetitions, the very same" (262). For Borges, there is no separating these moments that occur thirty years apart, and this startling experience suggests to him that linear time is an illusion.

Borges then uses the sphere to construct a schematic representation of an eternal present, which by its rigid position resists the possibility of sequential time. He declares that "each moment we live exists, but not their imaginary combination" (258) and turns to Schopenhauer's dictum: "No man has ever lived in the past, and none will live in the future; the *present* alone is the form of all life . . ." (268). (Alpha 60 also quotes these lines.) According to this logic, one can only be alive in the present, suggesting that past and future states are merely alluded to by this position. Borges furthermore references Schopenhauer's image of the sphere (in lines also quote by Alpha 60) to illustrate how the observer remains

at a fixed temporal position while the rest of time spins by, thereby reiterating the notion that time only comes into existence when it enters the point of *now* in which the observer lives:

We might compare time to a constantly revolving sphere; the half that was always sinking would be the past, that which was always rising would be the future; but the indivisible point at the top, where the tangent touches, would be the extensionless present. (268-69)

The present remains at a fixed point that touches the sphere without joining its rotation. Although it is not entirely clear how past and future figure into this closed structure (past becoming future becoming past?), the main idea that will enter *Heart of the Country* is of an observer in a fixed position, held outside the spinning sphere of time.

Borges, however, ends his essay with the overwhelming sense of a temporal reality beyond his perception, one that is futile to refute as it is inherent to life:

Denying temporal succession, denying the self, denying the astronomical universe, are apparent desperations and secret consolations. Our destiny . . . is frightful because it is irreversible and iron-clad. Time is the substance I am made of. Time is a river which sweeps me along, but I am the river; it is a tiger which destroys me, but I am the tiger. . . . The world, unfortunately, is real; I, unfortunately, am Borges. (269)

Borges places the denial of succession on par with the denial of self and “the astronomical universe.” All such oppositions are merely “desperations and secret consolations,” futile in the face of an “irreversible and iron-clad” future (269). There is an inescapable duration to life as the self ages and the universe continues to move. Unlike the sphere of time, the spinning motions of celestial bodies represents temporal progression as day turns to night and seasons pass. These motions are cyclical, but they drive one into the future towards the end of life. Therefore, rather than being an independent observer on the rotating sphere of time, Borges concludes that he is part of the river of time. The repetition of “I am” suggests that the



destruction of time is brought by one's own existence. Time is within nature, which includes the self ("I am the river"). He is swept along in the river that is his own mortality. The world, the phenomenal universe, is ultimately real and unassailable. Borges thus ends by validating the concept of successive time that he had attempted to refute. Ironically, both the denial and acceptance of time are inspired by visceral responses. In the beginning, he is struck by the feeling that he is within the aura of the 1890s; in the end, he is overwhelmed by the reality of the world around him. *In the Heart of the Country*, it will be shown, presents a similar temporal duality, involving the juxtaposition of (false) subjective time against the concept of real time.

This is part of a pattern in Coetzee's fictions and critical writings in which the falsity of historical time is contrasted against the true time of the material world. In *Doubling the Point*, Coetzee speaks of the threat of "time as history," which he contrasts against the concept of "time itself, time as death" (209). History stands in opposition to that which is irrefutable (death). Rather than being a version of time, death is "time itself" and thus takes on a reality against the fallacy of historical time, as supported in "The Novel Today" when Coetzee argues that "history is not reality" but is "a certain kind of story that people agree to tell each other" (4). The physical reality of existence in the form of death stands against the imposed narrative of history. This position is repeated in *The Childhood of Jesus* when Simón and the other stevedores discuss the significance of history and one man says, "History is merely a pattern we see in what has passed" (138). Their discussion contrasts the materiality of climate, which "has real manifestations" such as wind and rain, against the insubstantiality of history, which "has no manifestations in the present" (137). The phenomenal universe represented by nature is therefore validated against the imposed perception of history – a division that is also presented in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. When the political concerns of the Empire disrupt the Magistrate's life, he expresses a profuse desire to return to nature and

“live outside history” (154), which is forced on them by the Empire: “Empire has created the time of history. Empire has located its existence not in the smooth recurrent spinning time of the cycle of the seasons but in the jagged time of rise and fall, of beginning and end, of catastrophe” (133). The Magistrate uses the terms *smooth* and *jagged*, showing how rhythm has an associate tie to these contrasting ideas of temporality. Formal strategies which manipulate the experience of time therefore also stand against the unchanging flow of nature. The word *jagged* in particular brings to mind the effects of montage editing which, like the jagged time of history, creates a highly-distorted experience of time.

The screenplay too presents temporal oppositions. Through editing and the manipulation of on-screen energy, the feel of time is slowed (winter) or sped up (summer), and jump cuts create a fractured perception of time (though this is far less than in the novel). The various rhythms of the text run counter to the even flow of true time. These localised distortions are also mirrored in the macrocosm of the narrative structure, which destabilises the idea of succession through the disruption of cause and effect (the irresolvable connection). As in Borges, however, the attack on linearity ultimately gestures to nature’s autonomy. The narrative disrupts the flow of time and resists the linear, yet it executes this through imagery and choreography that gestures to the indomitable presence of nature. The cycle of seasons remains chronological, and death is still the iron-clad destiny of life. Although Magda’s father returns, he is in the advanced stages of Parkinson’s disease. He is not resurrected but rather brought back to die. In the novel, Magda also describes death as the ultimate fate, saying that her destiny “is to die here in the petrified garden, behind locked gates, near [her] father’s bones” (sec. 266).

In all these texts, a subjective temporality stands against the reality of Borges’s astronomical universe. Time is the moving force that carries one from birth to death, manifests in the world as days and seasons, and continues irrespective of human interference.

In *In the Heart of the Country*, Magda remarks ironically that one day someone “will recognize in the clock the machine that has tamed the wilds” (sec. 9). The clock, however, needs to be adjusted weekly according to “sun and almanac” because it too is ruled by nature. The following sections will explore how *In the Heart of the Country* conveys these temporal concerns visually through the use of accelerated motion and montage. This analysis will also examine the wheel motif, while the river of time will be explored afterwards under the discussion of language.

### *Accelerated Motion*

Magda frequently speculates on time and offers several contrasting perspectives, such as imagining her home as a place “out of time” (sec. 236) and wondering if “there is no time” (sec. 237). During these vacillations, she invokes both of Borges’s motifs. She firstly engages with the Borgesian idea that only the present exists. For her, however, this concept is of little consolation because she recognises it as a place of exclusion. When she imagines that Anna wants stories from a real past, she laments that her words “have no past or future” and instead move from nowhere to nowhere “across the flats in a desolate eternal present” (sec. 226). The eternal present then resurfaces in the image of a sphere when she considers herself unmoved regardless of the direction her story takes:

[F]or the truth is, I fear, that there is no past or future, that the medium I live in is an eternal present in which, whether heaving under the weight of that hard man . . . or washing the dead or dressing meat, I am the reluctant polestar about which all this phenomenal universe spins. (sec. 227)

She is excluded from life, occupying a fixed point on the spinning celestial sphere, just as the tangent touches but never joins the spinning time of Borges’s sphere. The astronomical

imagery, however, both represents the eternal present and excludes it by denoting the material world.

This sphere motif then manifests visually when accelerated motion is used to simulate Magda's perceived withdrawal from time. While her father is pursuing Anna, she lies in her shuttered bedroom, incapacitated by a migraine:

Days and nights wheel past, the light in my shuttered room brightens to grey-green and darkens to black, old Anna appears and disappears and reappears in a round of [chamber] pot and plate, murmuring, clucking. I lie here involved in cycles of time, outside the true time of the world, while my father and Hendrik's wife travel their arrow-straight paths. . . . (sec. 75)

The others continue on "their arrow-straight paths," but she is stuck "in cycles of time, outside the true time of the world" (sec. 75). While they move in temporal succession, Magda feels trapped outside the progression of the plot. She begins to lose touch with reality and perceives the world outside spinning by rapidly as the days *wheel* past. This circular motion describes the sun's path as it crosses the sky in an arc, with the light in Magda's bedroom brightening as it rises and darkening as it sets. The daylight is grey-green because it filters through her green curtains, stressing that the scene is viewed from within the bedroom. Old Anna wheels in and out of Magda's room: she "appears and disappears and reappears," twirling as if she is a little clockwork figure spinning on a closed track. Her "murmuring, clucking" noises additionally mimic the unintelligible sounds of accelerated speech. Her humorous motion references the generic associations of accelerated motion. Because this technique displays objects as "not merely faster than normal but also more erratic, more jumpy," it was often used in silent films for comedic effect (Zettl 267). Dovey and Dovey reference accelerated motion in their film visualisation of *In the Heart of the Country*, picturing a scene of Magda trying to contact the sky-gods "presented in Chaplinesque

fashion, with Magda shown in fast motion building words and lewd signs in stones” (73-74). The sight of Anna twirling in and out of the room suggests that Magda’s mind is unravelling; the world around her appears to be spinning out of control as she remains fixed in place, feeling excluded from the external world.

At the same time, this temporal distortion acknowledges the irrefutable reality of the astronomical. Magda perceives herself as “involved in cycles of time, outside the true time of the world,” as if she is caught in a closed loop outside linearity. Yet this imagery validates temporal succession by referencing the universe in motion as it drives time forward and pays no heed to her indisposition. The independence of true time is reiterated when she then leaves her bedroom and finds herself in the kitchen. While the text continues to show disjunctive temporality through montage, such as in the repetitions and alterations of the argument with her father, Magda acknowledges that she cannot resist the pull into the future: “I am a blind spot hurtling with both eyes open into the maw of the future, my password ‘And then?’ And if at this instant I do not look as if I am hurtling, it is only because I dither for a while . . .” (sec. 89). Her apparent stasis, her dithering, can temporarily suspend the belief in linearity, but it ultimately cannot negate her forward passage through time.

Accelerated motion again validates true time and its indifference to Magda after the rape sequence. Fast motion is juxtaposed against the continual regressions that convey the trauma of rape as Magda is forced to relive these experiences through a fractured perception. The narrative shows two rapes: the first and most violent takes place in the kitchen; the second is set in Magda’s bedroom and appears to be a separate event because her resignation to “a woman’s fate” (sec. 208) suggests the submission of one already broken down by violence. All of these scenes are narrated in the simple present tense, thereby representing the idea of an eternal present cut off from the world as montage breaks her experience into self-contained, nonlinear fragments. The scene in the kitchen begins with Magda and Hendrik

arguing over money. He grabs her arm as she turns to leave; she tries to “lunge at him” with a fork but misses, and he knocks her down and starts to kick her (sec. 205). The narrative then skips back to just before he grabs her arm. This time the full rape is shown, ending with her sobbing on the floor. Then the narrative again jumps backwards as Hendrik pins Magda against the wall and she drops the fork; the rape begins but is described with far less detail. The following two sections show Hendrik assaulting Magda in her bedroom; then there is one final flashback to the kitchen scene. As she lies in her bed beside a sleeping Hendrik, the events flash into her mind, narrated again in the simple present tense: “Fingers grip the spine of a fork, the tines flash out, plunging through the patched shirt, ploughing through the skin. Blood flows” (sec. 210). The series of images has a strong cinematic quality as she switches between different perspectives and focuses on details (fingers, tines, skin) as if using close-ups. If one looks at the entire sequence of both rapes, montage conveys the psychological fracturing of a mind unable to move past trauma, and she is forced into the continued experience of these events. These regressions stall time by expanding two events into several scenes. The violence of the assault is furthermore mirrored by the strong, visual collisions that result from the jarring edits.

When Magda is finally released from this sequence, time moves forward rapidly. From her recumbent position beside Hendrik, she says, “The last of the afternoon is wheeling past while I lie beside this man seeping tears and blood” (sec. 211). She is once more the reluctant polestar around which the phenomenal universe moves. She witnesses time accelerate as she lies still, tears streaming from her face. Earlier, when the second rape begins in her bedroom, she expresses her desire for time that will allow her to move forward and make sense of this experience: “I must simply endure until finally I am left alone and can begin to rediscover who I am, putting together, in the time of which there is blessedly so much here, the pieces that this unusual afternoon in my life is disarranging” (sec. 208). Yet as



she lies beside Hendrik, she remains at odds with time, watching it rush away from her while she is left behind. It seems as if the natural world is counterbalancing the time lost during her regressive episodes, righting itself in the face of her suffering. She imagines that if she were to go outside she would find “an afternoon like any other,” and “the sun would still lie ponderous and indifferent on [her] skin.” The natural world continues despite her distress; “this part of the world,” she observes, “belongs only to the sun” (sec. 211).

In both novel and screenplay, Magda is unable to move peacefully with the river of time and thus cannot experience the true time of nature. In the context of the novel’s critical reflections on language, her heightened dissociation from time is also representative of the broader, diffuse distance inscribed in representation. As Borges stresses, language can only “*invoke the idea of time*” (253) and therefore the mere acknowledgement of temporality creates a barrier to it.



### *The Interference of Language*

Although real time is perceived to exist, it can only be described through allusion by offsetting one temporal concept against another (represented as the river against the sphere). Borges acknowledges that one cannot truly refute time intellectually because of the impossibility of describing time through language: “All language is of a successive nature; it does not lend itself to a reasoning of the eternal, the intemporal” (260). Paradoxically, time as that which is eternal and universal is itself intemporal, and it is therefore regarded as a state outside the grasp of language because to use language is to ratify through linguistic tense the concept of temporal succession. Language furthermore distances itself from universal time because it involves the demarcation of events, referring to individual acts within the indivisible field of universal existence, which also necessitates ordering. When Borges writes

of experiencing “the very same” moment that occurred thirty years before, his description invariably isolates two instances in time (one the same as the other), which simultaneously places one prior to the other. Borges cannot truly use this experience on the street corner to refute time for to capture it in language is to acknowledge the very succession he denies.

*In the Heart of the Country* similarly raises the issue of how the experience of time is limited by linguistic perception. When Magda complains about the lack of excitement after the shooting, she says, “Once I lived in time as a fish in water, breathing it, drinking it, sustained by it. Now I kill time and time kills me” (sec. 150). Although she suggests a prior, harmonious relationship with time, she earlier complains about “the blind, subjective time of the heart, with its spurts of excitement and drags of tedium” (sec. 9). The fish simile, however, raises the question of what it means to live like a fish in water. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the Magistrate similarly observes, “What has made it impossible for us to live in time like fish in water, like birds in air, like children? It is the fault of Empire! Empire has created the time of history” (133). To be a fish in water is to escape these forced ideas of temporality (for him, it is history) and live with nature. Albert Einstein famously wrote: “Of what is significant in one’s own existence one is hardly aware . . . What does a fish know about the water in which he swims all his life?” (“Self-Portrait”). To be a fish in water, one cannot know water, for to know it places it within the opposition of non-water, and thus it is no longer essence but merely one concept against another.

The river motif accordingly represents this nonhuman space where the proverbial fish resides. The river of time is invoked by Magda after the narrative skips ahead many years and she awakens as an old woman. As in Borges, the river of successive time is envisioned by her as existing beyond the domain of human experience:

Perhaps I am wrong to picture time as a river flowing from infinite to infinite bearing me with it like a cork or a twig; or perhaps, having flowed above ground for a while,

time flowed underground for a while, and the re-emerged, for reasons forever closed to me, and now flows again in the light, and I flow with it. . . . (sec. 237)

In the absence of Magda's narration, "time has flowed ceaselessly," and she interrogates its passage through the river image. Like Borges, she describes herself as being carried in the unending river ("from infinite to infinite") which moves ceaselessly. She cannot, however, convey this experience directly and instead comments on it retrospectively. The repetition of "perhaps" shows that she is struggling to translate the experience into language. She instead begins to consider that time has "reasons forever closed to [her]." *The Master of Petersburg* also invokes the river of time as existing apart from human temporality to convey how Dostoevsky's experience of time has been distorted by grief: "[H]e has been tugged out of human time. The stream that carries him still moves forward, still has direction, even purpose; but that purpose is no longer life. He is being carried by dead water, a dead stream" (20). The river is a place outside "human time." In his gloomy state, Dostoevsky perceives this river as death itself. The reference relinks to Coetzee's original statement about "time itself, time as death" (*Doubling* 209). The river is beyond human perception yet anchored in the self as mortality. As Borges declares, "Time is a river which sweeps me along, but I am the river. . ." (269). Through Magda, then, Coetzee acknowledges how this time evades the grasp of language and instead exists in the gap – the space where language is absent. Yet in this space, Magda still ages. Regardless of her ability to articulate time, she is carried along in its waters towards the inescapable fate of death.

In conclusion, *In the Heart of the Country* and its adapted screenplay both present a temporal duality: the juxtaposition of natural time (time in essence) against perceptual, linguistic time. This division is furthermore apparent in several of Coetzee's other fictions, and it will be examined again in the next chapter on *Life & Times of Michael K* – a novel which also employs the river motif. Through cinematic techniques, *In the Heart of the*

*Country* and its adapted screenplay convey temporal distortions. As in Borges's essay, however, these texts ultimately validate the time of nature and the truth of death.

## Chapter Summary

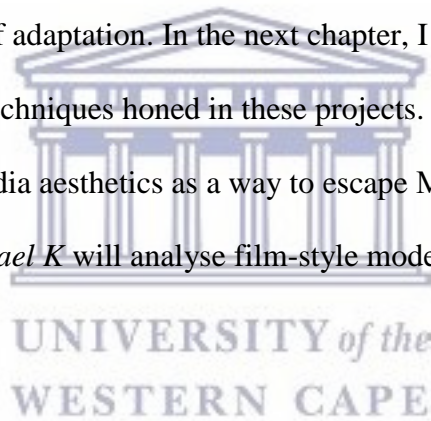
Through the adaptation process, Coetzee has opened up Magda's claustrophobic and involuted world. The screenplay's intermittent flashes of voice-over represent a character in the midst of a story unfolding around her, and only the embedded sequence is attributed to her mind's eye. This brief interlude of jealousy and rage reveals her volatility, which expresses itself dramatically when she shoots her father. The shooting is the culmination of the many clashes that propel the characters through the summer storm. From the moment Hendrik brings Anna onto the farm, Magda is caught up in a relentless narrative of betrayal, patricide, rape, and finally abandonment. She then slips into the desolate winter, gradually unravelling until Hendrik's arrest sparks a flashforward that sees her greatly changed and acting as her father's caretaker. The narrative only exposes its unreliability at the very end, and it does so under circumstances that prohibit explanation. There is no evidence of narrative demarcation and no possibility that she will be mistaken as the narrator. The text instead invites the viewer to accept its irresolvable connection as an enigmatic gap, impenetrable by any narrative strategy. And because an adaptation is partly a reflection of its source, the screenplay raises the possibility that a parallel structure exists in the novel. This too is identifiable through the study of cinematic visuality because the projector eye suggests a similar framework: the sequence of Magda's father's companion plays out within her mind's eye, Anna enters the story outside of Magda's imagination, and Magda falls apart in the aftermath of her father's death, becoming the tattered and eccentric woman signalling

aeroplanes. She struggles with voices but then places these concerns aside to tend to her father. The screenplay draws out these foundational narrative choices, thereby creating a map for approaching the novel in an entirely new way.

The screenplay also places greater significance on nature. Choices in cinematography allow Coetzee to depict the Karoo landscape by expressing its vastness through long shots and following its transformations through the seasons. The emphasis on natural imagery is furthermore part of a narrative strategy that creates structural coherence by counterpointing key events with seasonality and pacing. Nature is then rendered metonymic of the human experience. The energy and violence of a gathering storm represents the burgeoning conflict instigated by Anna's appearance. The eye of the storm is then the tense period of waiting, and finally the storm erupts with the act of violence. As Magda's interpersonal relationships disintegrate, the passions (the heat and energy) of the Karoo summer dissipate, and she is left to endure a listless winter. This approach to seasonality adds continuity to the main narrative (ultimately destabilising conventions of cause and effect) while also demonstrating that nature retains its linearity. The idea of successive time that is challenged by the text is thus also validated by the emphasis on nature. The novel too conveys this duality as the temporal distortions presented through accelerated motion are placed within the context of the natural world (the wheeling sun). Despite the numerous formal strategies that reshape the experience of time, the astronomical universe remains inescapable, and the immortal river of time continues to flow.

Although there are similarities between the texts, the screenplay is also an autonomous and creative work. In addition to changes in narration, the creation of new scenes, and other such choices, the overall aesthetic of the screenplay is markedly different from the novel's. While the novel draws its cinematic style from independent European cinema, the screenplay adopts a toned-down approach. There are few disruptive editing

techniques and none of the striking lighting effects, stills, and projector simulations found in the novel. Neither does the screenplay show slow and fast motion. In terms of visuality, Coetzee's approach is far more naturalistic, and there is great attention to the details of cinematography, including specifications of light, lenses, camera angles, and shot sizes. These choices also suggest the influence of his background in photography. The approach to landscape photography furthermore gestures towards the desire to capture the beloved Karoo space that will later enter *Boyhood*. Coetzee again achieves this cinematographic effect in his fourth novel *Life & Times of Michael K*, which he began as the adaptation process was nearing completion. By the time that *Michael K* was written, then, Coetzee had experience in writing cinematically, both by inscribing cinematic visuality in *In the Heart of the Country* and by working in the genre of adaptation. In the next chapter, I will explore how Coetzee continues to deploy the film techniques honed in these projects. Paradoxically, while this study of adaptation values media aesthetics as a way to escape Magda's subjectivity, the study of *Life & Times of Michael K* will analyse film-style modes of narration as a way to access K's interiority.





## Chapter 3: Point of View: Cinematic Subjectivity in *Life & Times of Michael K*

### Chapter Overview

This chapter will examine how film and photography have left an indelible mark on *Life & Times of Michael K*. The novel, it will be shown, is shaped by an intensely cinematographic prose that deploys camera-eye modes of narration and chiaroscuro lighting effects as well as using film techniques to display projections of K's mind's eye. These cinematographic modalities affirm the central and continuing influence of the formal, cinematographic developments of *In the Heart of the Country*. As in the prior study of *In the Heart of the Country*, the influence of photography is examined predominantly within the field of cinematography, but it is important to note that these visual inscriptions demonstrate how Coetzee has integrated his own experiences in amateur photography into a cinematic mode of prose writing. Furthermore, the cover of the Ravan edition of *Michael K*, which shows a sepia negative of a man in a bowler hat, "explicitly signaled Coetzee's interest in camera work and darkroom processing" (Wittenberg, "Film and Photography" 478). *Michael K* was also impacted by Coetzee's work in adaptation as he began the novel while writing the screenplay for *In the Heart of the Country*. Coetzee's engagement with film and photography "suggested the choice of the austere Karoo setting in the Prince Albert area, and, furthermore, helped to craft the novel's narration" (Wittenberg, "Film and Photography" 473). Archival material confirms that Coetzee's prior engagements with several intermedial writing practices were central to the creation of *Michael K*.

Coetzee's notebook documentation of *Michael K*'s formative period reveals that he frequently explored intermedial solutions as a means of solving difficulties in grafting the text. In a detailed study of this archival material, Attwell discusses how *Michael K* gradually takes shape through the challenging process of numerous revisions coupled with moments of clarity catalysed by literary sampling and experimentation with visual media. Frustrated with the direction of his ideas, Coetzee continually turns to literary sources for inspiration, such as the works of Kafka and Kleist's *Michael Kohlhaas*, which play an important role in the text's inception (*J. M. Coetzee* ch. 7). Coetzee is then drawn to narrative photography, and he dabbles in the possibility of writing a photonovel. Shortly after suggesting this mixed-media format, he considers structuring the text as "a screenplay, with extended descriptions of frozen stills" ("Notebook," 14 June 1980). This reference to stills suggests the influence of the Arthouse cinema behind *In the Heart of the Country*. In the notebook, Coetzee then returns to the photonovel idea but finally abandons it and writes enthusiastically: "New idea: to cast the whole as a screenplay . . ." (19 June 1981). This new plan sketches the possibility of creating a voice-over dialogue between the narrator and K, who speaks "from his hospital bed to the narrator: only when we get to the hospital sequence do we understand the vantage point." The screenplay format then remains part of the writing process, and terms such as *shot* and *scene* are employed as a type of cinematic shorthand to outline events. Coetzee, for example, uses both terms to create a camera-eye point of view: "The scene on p. 46 is better shot from outside the shop, through the window . . ." (22 June 1981). The camera point of view is also used in "Shot of K-'s face. . . . K- comments on himself" (29 June 1981), with K's independent commentary likely referring to voice-over.

The large number of these notebook entries devoted to intermediality emphasises how integral film and photography were in shaping *Michael K*. While the notebook for *In the Heart of the Country* contains only two entries referencing film (one for *Alphaville* and one

for *Deliverance*), there are at least seven entries in the *Michael K* notebook in which Coetzee considers the photonovel and screenplay formats as viable rubrics for the novel (and many more in which he uses screenplay terminology to draft the text).

These cinematic frameworks, it will be shown, remain in the novel and have been fleshed out into a vivid prose that focalises K's point of view through the literary camera eye and further manifests his subjectivity through a cinematic mind's eye as well as chiaroscuro lighting effects. I propose to show that through the identification and close scrutiny of these visual properties, one can isolate an optical subjectivity and thereby access K's mental processes. The study of cinematographic form therefore opens up avenues into K's interiority that are closed to a mode of analysis which does not take into account the text's intermedial references. This reading of the novel is a response to a pervasive silence surrounding K that resists interpretation. Several writing techniques transform K into an elusive figure. K is firstly characterised as a solitary and reticent individual who seldom speaks, and when he does interact with others, it is through a strained and impersonal discourse, even in his primary relationship with his mother. The following synopsis of the novel shows how K continually withdraws from the world and becomes, in the words of the medical officer, "[t]he obscurest of the obscure, so obscure as to be a prodigy" (142).

K works as a municipal gardener in Cape Town and lives an isolated life. Because he was born with a hare lip, his mother Anna K, a domestic worker in Cape Town, kept him "away from other children" (3), and he spent his early years silently watching her work until she placed him in the state home of Huis Norenius. Yet as an adult K remains a dutiful son and tries to return her to her birthplace in the Karoo when she falls ill. She dies along the way, and when he reaches what might be the farm of her childhood (she never remembers the name), he begins a life of cultivation, embedding his consciousness into his tasks with an intensity that elevates his care of the land to "a mode of life and an existential principle"

(Attwell, *J. M. Coetzee* 77). The sudden appearance of the owners' grandson soon compels K to retreat into the mountains, but illness caused by starvation drives him back to society where he is placed in an internment camp. K escapes and returns to the farm to resume tending the land. He again begins to starve himself and appears on the point of death when he is apprehended by soldiers who dynamite the farm. K is sent back to Cape Town and hospitalised at a rehabilitation camp, but he again escapes and returns to his mother's old room in Sea Point. The novel ends with a fantastical scenario in which K ferries a vagrant in a wheelbarrow to the farm and extracts water from the broken pump with a teaspoon. There is an enigmatic resilience to this image; K remains committed to the farm yet chooses to explore this devotion through an unrealisable daydream, and it is ultimately difficult to understand K's way of thinking. The use of the signifier *K* rather than his full name gestures towards this inscrutability. He is a cipher – a symbol to be decoded.

But the novel employs several narrative techniques to block attempts at reading K's motivations. As observed in the above plot summary, he has no true avenues for interpersonal expression and therefore cannot confide in another person. *Michael K* is also the first of Coetzee's novels to employ a predominantly third-person mode of narration (excluding the section in the Cape Town hospital). Unlike Magda, K's voice is held within the narrator's consciousness; furthermore, this narrator is often unreliable. In his analysis of the novel's narration, Attridge identifies subtle shifts in consciousness whereby the reader "frequently encounter[s] sentences that begin as statements about K's mental world but which carry on in language that hardly seems his" (*J. M. Coetzee* 50). Attridge further observes how such "uncertainties as to the source of the sentences we read" place the reader in an ambiguous, liminal space between K's mind and the narrator's. To demonstrate his point, Attridge rewrites these sentences in the first-person voice, thus highlighting the incongruity of these words in K's voice and showing how K's subjectivity is artfully usurped by the narrator. The

specific elements of narration that complicate an understanding of K will be explored in greater detail in the first part of this chapter.

The difficulty in reading K is also created by the shift to first-person narration for the second of the novel's three sections. K's time in the Cape Town hospital is narrated by the character of the medical officer (MO), who chronicles his growing obsession with trying to understand K. The MO calls the reader's attention to how little is understood of K's experience. To his battery of questions K responds either tersely or not at all. As he reflects on K, the MO descends into liturgies of exasperated comments such as "I appeal to you Michaels: *yield!*" (152). The MO continually switches between the names Michael and Michaels, thereby stressing the impossibility that he will ever grasp who K is because he is not even certain of K's name. "The medical officer's account, which is ultimately uncomprehending," writes Attwell, "is a proxy for Coetzee's, its failures deliberate, however, because they make possible K's slipperiness" (*J. M. Coetzee* 141). By battering away at K's wall of silence, the MO only succeeds in making its facade more imposing. Despite K's reticence, however, the MO manages to construct an image of him that resonates through the novel.

The MO interprets K as someone who appears to float through life undisturbed. To him, K seems to "have managed to live in the old way, drifting through time, observing the seasons, no more trying to change the course of history than a grain of sand does" (152). These descriptions slip into the esoteric as the MO suggests that K is an "original soul," one "blessedly untouched by doctrine, untouched by history" (151). He is someone "in touch with things" that cannot be understood by ordinary people (155). The novel provides corroborating evidence for a mystical conceptualisation of K. His journey from Cape Town to the farm has a familiar, mystical paradigm: he ascends from the heavy, clammy atmosphere of sea level "upward into the mist" (35) and then further still into the rarefied air of the mountains. Along

the way, he discards all of his worldly possessions save the clothing on his back. K becomes an emaciated aesthete who lives in silence on a mountaintop, sleeping through “whole afternoons” in what might be “known as bliss” (68) – a possibly beatific state. In his review of the novel (“One of SA’s Purest Novels”), André P. Brink suggests that K’s escape from the hospital places him in “a domain on the other side of conventional understanding” (“n domein anderkant konvensionele ‘betekenis’”), and he considers that K’s plan to extract water from the broken pump represents “the ineffable miracle of the mystic” (“die onsegbare mirakel van die mistiek”). On the surface, K appears unencumbered by the world. This chapter, however, will contest the idea that he is someone who slips through life undisturbed.

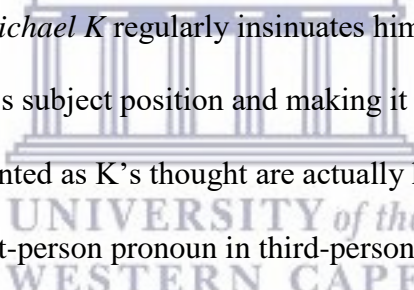
The analysis of intermediality will suggest that K is a complex individual who is frequently weighed by his recent and distant past. Rather than moving through life unaffected, he is immersed in his own human vulnerability as he experiences the world and his place within it. These aspects of K’s personality, it will be shown, are revealed through close analysis of cinematographic techniques embedded in the novel’s prose. There is a level of cinematic meaning-making that is mediated through K’s eyes as well as the visual component of his mind’s eye. These optical states will be considered as distinct from inner vocal processes and therefore provide an alternative perspective to K that can circumnavigate the narrator’s and MO’s influence. The MO himself suggests the importance of the gaze in trying to understand K when he expresses his frustration at K’s elusiveness by saying, “I have wondered what it is you see, Michaels, when you open your eyes so wide – for you certainly do not see me. . . . What do you see?” (150). In this chapter, I will examine what K sees to broaden an understanding of his nature.

The beginning of this study will examine the complexities of *Michael K*’s narration and isolate a parallel structure in *La Jetée* in order to show how the verbal (thought and speech) component of narration can be delinked from the visual. *Michael K* is not inspired by



*La Jetée*, however, similarities between the novel's third-person narration and the film's voice-over make *La Jetée* a useful analytical tool for demonstrating how one can approach optical subjectivity. The methodology for analysing visual channels will then be applied to the analysis of K's mind's eye. This will be followed by a study of camera-eye narration during K's life on the farm and then an examination of cinematic lighting techniques. The final section of analysis will consider how the camera eye focalises K's journey into the mountains. Each section of study will contribute to a broader understanding of K's relationship to his past and to his place in the world.

### **Delinking the Verbal and the Visual**



The third-person narrator of *Michael K* regularly insinuates himself into K's mental processes, thereby usurping K's subject position and making it difficult for one to know whether words and ideas presented as K's thought are actually his. One strategy employed by the narrator is to couch the first-person pronoun in third-person voice. When K, for example, settles down on the farm, one reads: "Now I am here, he thought. Or at least I am somewhere" (52). This passage and others like it "are traceable to the voice-over sequences in the manuscript drafts" (Wittenberg, "Film and Photography" 483). Voice-over can be a form of direct speech that is heard over another scene, such as in Coetzee's idea to have K converse with the narrator from his hospital bed. Voice-over can also be a form of directly represented thought: a character's thoughts are heard aloud. The voice-over in Coetzee's screenplay of *In the Heart of the Country* performs this latter function. The final prose version of *Michael K*, then, amalgamates K's direct speech (or thought) with an external perspective, and this produces a peculiar effect. Although the signifier *I* creates the impression that K's inner voice is speaking directly, the absence of quotation marks coupled

with the phrase “he thought” reminds the reader that these words are relayed by the narrator. This *I* does not actually belong to K but is spoken by the narrator, and therefore one cannot be sure whether such statements come from K directly.

This uncertainty surrounding the authenticity of K’s thoughts is furthered by shifts in consciousness during which, as Attridge describes, “sentences that begin as statements about K’s mental world . . . carry on in language that hardly seems his” (*J. M. Coetzee* 50). The artful way in which the narrator takes over K’s perspective is suggested when K stands against the wire fence in the camp of Jakkalsdrif outside Prince Albert, “looking out over the veld” (94), reflecting on the words of fellow inmate Robert. With food supplies cut as punishment for a bandit attack on the nearby town, Robert considers that the authorities finally have an excuse to let them starve to death. As K reflects on Robert’s theory, the narrative perspective shifts continually between K and the narrator:

If these people really wanted to be rid of us, he thought (curiously he watched the thought begin to unfold itself in his head, like a plant growing), if they really wanted to forget us forever. . . . [he imagines all evidence of their existence buried in a giant hole] *Then*, perhaps, they might begin to forget about us. But who could dig a hole as big as that? (94)

This extract begins with the first-person perspective (us) and then reveals that the narrator is focalising for K (“he thought”). The parenthetical comment “he watched the thought” reiterates that the reader is experiencing K through the narrator’s mediation, yet this sentence also contains the insider perspective of someone focalising from within K’s mind – someone witnessing how K responds to his unfolding thought. The passage then continues in the first-person voice (“if they really wanted to forget us”) and describes an elaborate scenario in which the camp’s inhabitants dig a massive grave, climb inside it, and are buried along with all evidence of their existence, including the huts and fences of Jakkalsdrif itself. As this

uncanny sequence unfurls, it becomes unclear whether these thoughts could belong to K, who is supposedly slow and has difficulty expressing himself. K, for example, is unable to convey his gratitude to a family who takes him in for the night because “the right words would not come” (48). By the time the story of a mass grave concludes, one is no longer sure whether K or the narrator asks, “But who could dig a hole as big as that?”

The uncertainty as to whether this morbid narrative belongs to K is reiterated on the following page:

It seemed more like Robert than him, as he knew himself, to think like that. Would he have to say that the thought was Robert’s and had merely found a home in him, or could he say that though the seed had come from Robert, the thought, having grown up inside him, was now his own? He did not know. (95)

This passage begins with K reflecting on his own nature. The narrator’s voice then appears to slip into these lines as they gradually become part of an extended metaphor: the previous simile of a thought unfolding in K “like a plant growing” (94) is incorporated into a more complex association whereby this “seed had come from Robert” and “grown up inside him.” This imagery is furthermore part of a global motif that compares K to the earth. Within the camp, for example, children incorporate his recumbent body into their game, climbing over him “as if he were part of the earth” (84). The depiction of a burgeoning thought thus fits within the higher-order narrative imagery of the novel and seems too complex for K’s inarticulate nature. The language of cultivation, however, is known to K, and thus there remains some doubt as to who the source of this passage is. There appears to be an inherent unreliability in the verbal dimensions of K’s subjectivity (that which is not *seen* through K’s physical or mental vision). To isolate the visual dimension, then, could offer a channel to K that is unaffected by the narrator’s intrusion. This possibility of separating the verbal and the

visual, and the effects of such an approach, can be illustrated through the example of *La Jetée*.

As in the narration of *Michael K*, the voice-over track in *La Jetée* embeds passages spoken in the first-person voice within a third-person perspective. The film takes place in a futuristic Paris decimated by World War Three. Survivors are forced underground to escape surface radiation. The unnamed protagonist (the man) is a prisoner selected for time travel experiments that are ultimately intended to send him into the future for help. The scientists first attempt to breach the past, and the man is deemed suitable because of his fixation on an image from the past, which shows a woman witnessing the death of a man (later revealed to be himself). The only direct speech in the film is the occasional, muffled whispering of the scientists who cluster around the man during experiments. All other forms of conversation are relayed by the voice-over. During one of his first visits to pre-war Paris, he walks with the woman of his memory in a garden, and the voice-over switches through the same nuanced subjectivities exhibited in *Michael K*:

She asks about the tag he wears as a combatant in the war that is to come. He invents an explanation. They see a sequoia stump with dated rings. She utters a foreign name; he doesn't understand. As if in a dream, pointing beyond the tree, he hears himself say: I'm from out there. He relapses exhausted.

The passage begins in the third-person voice and then focalises the man's perspective (his inability to understand the woman). Like K watching his thoughts unfold, the man then "hears himself" speak. The sentence "I'm from out there" places the *I* signifier within third-person narration, thereby resembling how K's directly represented thought is drawn into the narrator's voice. In *Michael K*, the phrase "he thought" stresses that one is outside K's mind; in the film, the equivalent message is conveyed audibly because there is only one voice-over speaker. The same, uninterrupted voice says all of the above lines. The film therefore

comprises a single spoken track (excluding the scientists' whisperings) and an independent visual track. The visual and verbal elements of narration are therefore easily identifiable as separate entities.

By isolating the visual point of view, one is able to put aside the voice-over commentary and explore the man's mental processes through an optical channel. The man returns to the garden and finds the woman asleep against a garden fence. Through a dissolve, the woman's face gradually comes into view as a shot of the man in underground Paris fades. The camera looks down on her as she raises her sleeping face towards the sun. Several shots from this angle then overlap through dissolves, and an over-the-shoulder shot confirms that these are from the man's point of view. The smooth editing, soothing music, and soft light convey her calming influence on him. The passage of time furthermore suggests that he refuses to wake her. It is a gesture of affection because he does not disturb her tranquillity even though he is unsure of how long he will be able to stay in the past. When she wakes, they walk through the garden and voice-over says, "They walk like this countless times while a silent complicity grows between them, a complicity unadulterated by memories or purpose." The narrator's complex assessment of their connection avoids the term *love*, which is what the viewer now suspects is developing between them. As they walk in the garden, the man "senses a barrier before them," and he suddenly wakes in underground Paris. The jarring effect of this jump cut conveys his shock at being pulled back to his desolate present where a scientist watches over him. From his point of view in bed, the camera looks up at the looming face of one of his captors, gleaming malevolent in harsh, high-contrast lighting. Through the man's eyes, one witnesses his growing attachment to the past, and it is unsurprising that when he is later offered to stay in the safe future he instead asks to return to the woman in pre-war Paris. *La Jetée* thus helps to show how the viewer can understand a character's inner

narrative by analysing point-of-view shots and their accompanying media aesthetics of framing, camera angle, lighting and editing.

The film furthermore demonstrates how an investigation of optical subjectivity can similarly be applied to the mind's eye. The experiments on the man begin to work when he experiences images from the past. These "images begin to well up, like confessions." In underground Paris, the man lies on a bed with his eyes covered by a mask (somewhat reminiscent of Magda's recumbent pose when she grinds her eyes, although he has no control over these images). The film then cuts to a sequence of stills that show a field with horses, a simple bedroom, children playing, and other, similarly unassuming scenes. Shortly after the first still appears, the voice-over begins by describing these images broadly as "a morning in peacetime" and "a room in peacetime." The voice-over then repeatedly labels each shot as *real* ("a real room . . . real children, real birds, real cats, real graves"), which stresses that these are real memories rather than hallucinations. The voice-over, however, does not address the significance of these scenes and presents each impersonally, leaving unanswered questions about the nature of these mental projections. Was this the man's home? Was he one of those children? Was he the father of one those children? These visions come from within him; they are insights into his past, yet the voice-over merely glosses over these scenes. The mind's eye therefore gestures towards a depth of character that is absent from the voice-over's surface impressions.

The above analysis of *La Jetée* shows how an approach to optical subjectivity can expand on the inner state of a closed character. The composite aesthetics of framing, lighting, mise en scène, and editing are used as tools to interpret subjective points of view. This analytical methodology will be used in *Michael K* to examine camera-eye focalisations and mind's-eye projections. As with *La Jetée*, the focus on aesthetic components will delink the verbal dimension of narration (thought, speech, and the narrator's commentary) from the



visual. The visual track of narration is contextualised as that which K *sees* as opposed to what the narrator describes. Insights into K that are revealed as optical subjectivity can either contradict the narrator's perspective or expand on what is already suggested (particularly with the camera eye), thereby allowing one to consider certain instances of narration as more authentic reflections of K.

### **K's Cinematic Mind's Eye**

The window into K's mind is presented as a cinematic point of view through which one sees his mental projections as if viewing them on screen. This intermedial analogy is enabled by two prose techniques. Firstly, these experiences are specified as focalising a visual perspective: K does not think of these scenes but rather *sees* them. Secondly, mind's-eye projections are inserted into conscious moments through rapid transitions that approximate montage editing. This effect is used in *In the Heart of the Country* when Magda is suddenly overcome by the vision of herself as a grub. Analysis will show that K too is sometimes overwhelmed by a sudden flash of disturbing images. In other incidents, the mind's eye also conveys K's daydreams, revealing his fears and hopes.

The first part of this exploration into K's mind's eye will examine several, diverse visions, including one depicting his mother. The second part will then focus specifically on K's visualisations of his mother following her death. K's relationship with her is deeply troubled from the moment of his birth when she recoils at his appearance: “[F]rom the first Anna K did not like the mouth that would not close and the living pink flesh it bared to her. She shivered to think of what had been growing in her all these months” (3). The cord to his mother is severed by a shiver of rejection that ripples through K's life, and analysis of his

mind's eye will show that he retains an unfulfilled need for her. She remains a strong presence throughout K's narrative.

### *Reflections*

The cinematic mind's eye is introduced early in the novel when K's mother tells him of her plans to leave Cape Town for Prince Albert. Thinking that she needs to convince him, she lays out her savings "before his eyes" (8). K, however, accepts her plan "without question" (8), and as he looks at the money he pictures another life for themselves:

He saw, not the banknotes spread out on the quilt, but in his mind's eye a whitewashed cottage in the broad veld with smoke curling from its chimney, and standing at the front door his mother, smiling and well, ready to welcome him home at the end of a long day. (9)

The narrative shifts from the money "before his eyes" to a scene "in his mind's eye." K is not just thinking about leaving but is *seeing* their possible future. The conjunction *but* contrasts real and imagined scenes with a brevity akin to a film edit, and the imagery switches swiftly from the banknotes to the whitewashed cottage. K's vision ends the paragraph, and the text then changes abruptly to "the next morning" as he is heading with his mother's money towards the train station. (The temporal marker "next morning" recalls the slugline structure and could be understood as a remnant of Coetzee's plan to write *Michael K* as a screenplay.) Within a few lines, the text shifts from external to internal reality and then returns, paralleling two distinctive visual perspectives. Through an examination of K's mental interjection, one can then explore his reasons for leaving Cape Town.

This vision is ostensibly indicative of K's trust for his mother because, although she anticipates resistance and takes out the money to convince K of "her seriousness" (8), he

instantly looks past the money and instead sees the end of their journey. The contrast of imagery, however, suggests that there is perhaps more to his motivation. Prior to K's vision, the narrator notes that K accepts her plan in the same way that "he had believed through all the years in Huis Norenius that his mother had left him there for a reason which, if at first dark, would in the end become clear" (8). Throughout the novel, Huis Norenius is continually associated with darkness. K, for example, dreams that he is back "in pitch darkness in the dormitory of Huis Norenius" and tries to stop himself from falling "back into the perils of sleep," fearful of revisiting his childhood (56). The idyllic image of a whitewashed cottage therefore replaces the dark gloom of Norenius with a vivid daylight scene in which the once-abandoned child is met by a smiling mother who is "ready to welcome him home." The scene in K's mind can be perceived as a revision of his past rather than a fantasy of the future. While K's mother "dream[s] of escaping the careless violence" and other burdens of Cape Town (8), K dreams of leaving behind years of neglect. The transition into the next paragraph then conveys an urgency as K is already en route to the station to purchase tickets; this immediate momentum suggests that K's dream sets their journey in motion. Cinematic analysis thereby suggests a greater complexity to K's decision as he appears to be motivated by more than mere blind trust. To paraphrase *La Jetée*, the image in his mind's eye wells up in him like a confession; it is a confession of K's yearning to undo his past.

K's childhood trauma is again suggested through a mind's-eye projection when he grapples with the guilt of stealing food. After leaving Stellenbosch, he tramps through heavy rain into a neglected orchard and emerges on an occupied farm. As he pulls out half-grown carrots from the vegetable garden, the narrator focalises K's attempt at convincing himself that his actions are benign: "It is God's earth, he thought, I am not a thief" (39). Yet this is followed by a disturbing vision of being caught: "Nevertheless he imagined a shot cracking out from the back window of the farmhouse, he imagined a huge Alsatian streaking out to

attack him. When his pockets were full he stood nervously erect.” The word *nevertheless* takes the effect of signalling a collision montage as the imagery shifts to a scene of K under attack. The repetition of “he imagined” stresses that K is visualising this short, unsettling scene. The sharp edit coupled with the sound of a cracking shot creates the impression of a burst of fear. K’s response is ostensibly reasonable because he is trespassing. Although “ethnic tagging” is present in earlier drafts, these descriptions, with the exception of one reference to K as a CM (coloured male), are removed from the final version of the novel (Attwell, *J. M. Coetzee* 132). The scene in the vegetable garden, however, resonates with the image of the white *boer* feeling justified in using excessive force on the racially inferior K. But K’s fear is also connected to childhood trauma. The children of Norenus were always hungry, and their need for food drove them to desperation: “Hunger had turned them into animals who stole from one another’s plates and climbed the kitchen enclosure to rifle the garbage cans for bones and peelings” (68). The sudden flash of fear that K experiences while eating half-grown carrots suggests that he fears a regression into childhood: he is repelled by the thought of being either a thief or a scavenger.

K’s vision allows for a rereading of an incident in the orchard shortly before. “Dizzy with hunger,” K eats from mottled apples in the derelict orchard, “chewing as quickly as a rabbit, his eyes vacant” (39). The vacant stare shows that he is detached, perhaps focusing his attention inward. In retrospect, one can imagine that he is seeing another, fearful vision. The rapid chewing then shows anxiety rather than dissociation. Even in this abandoned location where the fruit he takes is unwanted, he is still disturbed, perhaps because this act makes him into the hungry animal eating scraps. The past inserts itself into K’s consciousness through fear and guilt as he struggles to reconcile his need for food with the necessity of breaking away from childhood behaviour. This dilemma is repeated after he arrives on the farm.

During his second night there, K kills a goat, and when he recalls the incident the following day, he experiences a disquieting vision of himself. K sees the goats during his first morning on the farm, and it dawns on him that they “would have to be caught, killed, cut up and eaten if he hoped to live” (52). The need for food drives him into an arduous pursuit that drags out late into the night. During this struggle, K feels estranged from himself and finds it “hard to believe that he had become this savage with a bared knife” (52). By nightfall, he is “too deeply committed” (53) to relent and camps near the herd. When he is later woken by the sound of their drinking, he leaps into the dam, grabs a goat, and struggles to drown the animal. The following day, K drags the cumbersome carcass out of the water and recoils at the idea “of cutting up and devouring this ugly thing” (55). As he again struggles to accept his actions, he sees a disturbing image of himself: “He found it hard to believe that he had spent the day chasing after them like a madman with a knife. He had a vision of himself riding the ewe to death under the mud by the light of the moon, and shuddered” (55). The image conveys K’s alienation as he watches himself from an outsider’s perspective. The shudder of revulsion iterates his disgust in himself and gestures towards his desire to sever ties with Norenus, where hunger incited savage behaviour.

K’s mental projections, however, are not all negative, and the mind’s eye is also used to convey a sensibility to beauty. As K and his mother near Stellenbosch, traversing leafless vineyards, K remembers a peaceful moment from his childhood:

A flock of sparrows materialized out of the sky, settled for a moment on the bushes all around them, then flitted off. Across the field they heard church bells. Memories came to K of Huis Norenus, of sitting up in bed in the infirmary, slapping his pillow and watching the play of dust in a beam of sunlight. (26)

The prose simulates a cinematic dissolve into the flashback of K’s childhood. There is a soft transition during which the scene in the orchard and the one in the infirmary briefly overlap.

The phrase “materialized out of the sky” gives the impression that the birds are coming into solidity. K watches a mass of wings in motion and then sees the birds settling down “for a moment on the bushes” before flitting away (dematerialising). The scattering of these dusky forms moving up into the sky is then similar to what K sees in the infirmary: like the birds, dust rises and scatters “in a beam of sunlight.” It is as if the sight of the sky lingers while K’s memory surfaces. The gentle, flowing effect underscores the peacefulness of this moment when K is allowed a moment of light and beauty in the darkness of his childhood confinement. The softness of the dissolve is furthermore complemented by the use of the passive voice. Unlike the previous examples in which “he imagined a shot” or “had a vision,” these images “came to K” as if drifting into his mind gently. The word *play* too evokes the wonderment of the child. The beam of light creates a chiaroscuro effect that is also observed in *In the Heart of the Country* when Magda visits the schoolroom abandoned by Jakob and Old Anna and “watch[es] the motes of dust dreamily ascend a shaft of sunlight” (sec. 91).

Although K’s memory is peaceful, it is also a reminder of his childhood isolation. Unlike the vision of the whitewashed cottage that sparks K’s journey, this one shows him alone in Norenius, and considering that his mother will soon die in Stellenbosch, it becomes portentous of this impending tragedy. The text accordingly soon shifts from the beam of sunlight to the sentence “It was dark when he plodded into Stellenbosch” (26). Light is replaced by darkness, and only *he* is the subject of the sentence, as if K is already alone. The darkness of Stellenbosch therefore becomes symbolic of a return to the darkness of the past, and K will again be left by his mother. After her death, K witnesses several projections of her in his mind’s eye, and these, it will be shown, portray a strong attachment that the narrator attempts to mitigate.



### *Maternal Visions*

The subsequent visions K has of his mother suggest that he never comes to terms with her death, despite indications to the contrary. After a second night of sleeping outside, K returns to find another woman in his mother's bed. He is told about her death and taken to view the body, but he is given no choice as to how her remains are treated and only learns of her cremation when receiving her ashes. The nurse who hands him the parcel moves through the procedure with a cool efficiency, "as if she were reading the words from a card" (32). At the end of her routine she smiles and "look[s] him candidly in the eye" while another woman who had been watching them returns to her work. Through the familiar film technique, K's directly reported thought (voice-over) is parlayed into a vivid, nightmarish vision:

So there is a place for burning, K thought. He imagined the old women from the ward fed one after another, eyes pinched against the heat, lips pinched, hands at their sides, into the fiery furnace. First the hair, in a halo of flame, then after a while everything else, . . . burning and crumbling. And it was happening all the time. (32)

K pictures a conveyor belt of old women fed headfirst into the furnace. A similar setup is used by Coetzee in *Disgrace* when David Lurie loads the corpses of euthanized dogs onto a "feeder trolley" and then operates "the mechanism that hauls the trolley through the steel into the flames" (144). In both novels, the image of assembly line incineration points to a deeply callous system that disposes of bodies with mechanical expediency. Perhaps more disturbing in K's vision is that these women seem alive, lying still with their eyes and lips "pinched against the heat" as if surrendering to their destruction. This grotesque image evinces K's strong revulsion at what has happened to his mother. When he then asks the nurse "How do I know?" he seems both angry and in denial as if he is rebelling against the idea that her body is now nothing more than the mere parcel in his hands.

K thereafter shows signs of grief that the narrator tends to overlook. K lingers about, unable “to tear himself from the hospital” (33), spending “hours at a time” watching the building (34). He slips into long periods of silence, “staring at his hands, his mind blank” (33), and he ties a mourning band around his arm. K’s listlessness evinces despair, and his life appears to have no more purpose. Unable to let her go, he remains near the place of her death. Throughout the above sequence, however, the narrator employs a dispassionate tone and suggests that K’s loss has little affected him: “But he did not miss her, he found, except insofar as he had missed her all his life” (34). K, however, also remains in the town as if compelled “to stay in Stellenbosch for a certain length of time” (34). Then one day he is offered a ride and, “hesitating a moment, peering down the long straight avenue of mist,” K realises that there is “nothing any more to keep him” (35). He appears released from a spell, as if he is now able to move on from the loss of his mother. The apparent ease with which he leaves seems to confirm that “he did not miss her” any more than before, yet the recurring image of the burning halo will show that K’s experience in Stellenbosch continues to haunt him.

This trauma of his mother’s death resurfaces when K is speaking with the small boy of a family that shelters him for a night. After allowing the boy to smell his mother’s ashes, the halo suddenly appears to K in the middle of a brief exchange: “‘Did they burn her up?’ asked the boy. K saw the burning halo. ‘She didn’t feel anything,’ he said, ‘she was already spirit by then’” (48). The child’s question triggers the image of the halo which K *sees* only briefly. It comes quickly, without conscious effort, and this quick insight into K’s consciousness shows that he is still affected by that troubling moment when he first held his mother’s ashes.

When K subsequently arrives on the farm and buries her ashes he appears freed from this disturbing vision. K places the box on the ground and looks at it objectively: “There was

a cardboard box standing in the sunlight on a patch of baked mud, nothing more” (58). This time, handling his mother’s ashes does not induce fantasy, and when he eventually mixes her ashes into the soil, it appears as if he is finally released from her hold, and he no longer sees the burning halo in his mind’s eye (for now). The burial catalyses his new life as a cultivator: “The impulse to plant had been reawoken in him; now, in a matter of weeks, he found his waking life bound tightly to the patch of earth he had begun to cultivate and the seeds he had planted there” (59). The soil and his mother become one, and towards the end of his second stay on the farm, he thinks of her as part of this earth, “drawn up into the leaves of grass” over time (124). K seemingly allows the land to adopt him. The image of a maternal earth is similarly expressed in *Boyhood*: “He has two mothers. Twice-born: born from woman and born from the farm” (81). Attwell also remarks how Michael K has “some of Coetzee’s temperament and inclinations,” which include, among other qualities, “an intense bond with a mother; [and] the farm as an invented place of origin” (*J. M. Coetzee* 135).

K even expands on the idea of a maternal earth and imagines that he is part of a maternal line that stretches back to the beginning of time. Through the cinematic mind’s eye, K reaches back in time to picture his mother and her ancestors. During his second sojourn on the farm, he questions whether this is truly her birthplace. He comes out of hiding to “pay a daylight visit to the farmyard and to the cottages on the hillside and the rectangle of bare earth beside them” (116), a patch that may have been the site of her house. He then tries to picture her origins:

He closed his eyes and tried to recover in his imagination the mudbrick walls and reed roof of her stories, the garden of prickly pear, the chickens scampering for the feed scattered by the little barefoot girl. And behind that child, in the doorway, her face obscured by shadow, he searched for a second woman. . . . (116-17)

The image shifts from the sight of the bare earth to the vision in his imagination as he pictures the farm “of her stories.” His mother is a little barefoot girl feeding chickens while her mother watches from the doorway, and this triggers the idea that when his mother faced death, “she was still a child calling to her mother to hold her hand and help her” (117). He then searches his mother’s maternal line for her primogenitor and “trie[s] to imagine a figure standing alone at the head of the line, a woman in a shapeless grey dress who came from no mother,” but the image is halted when he is unable to conceive of “the silence of time before the beginning” in which she lived (117). The woman’s description lacks any detail beyond the shapeless grey patch where she stands, as if she is an unfocused image. The limitations of his mind’s eye are twice conveyed optically: his grandmother is “obscured by shadow” because he is unable to reach into the past, and the first ancestor is indistinct because she is too fantastical to imagine.

The image of the grey, unfocused maternal figure reveals a further intermedial connection to *In the Heart of the Country*. Much of K’s life bears an affinity with Magda’s. They both struggle to form reciprocal connections; they both have a dysfunctional familial connection to a single parent; and they are both devoted to the Karoo. K reflects that something “binds [him] to this spot of earth as if to a home [he] cannot leave” and suggests that he is “from a line of children” compelled “to die here with [their] heads upon [their] mothers’ laps” (124). Magda similarly declares it her fate to lay herself to rest beside her father’s remains. Like K, Magda also tries to call up the image of a maternal figure (her mother, who she has never known) and is met with an indistinct image: “From one of the farthest oubliettes of memory I extract a faint grey image, the image of a faint grey frail gentle loving mother . . .” (sec. 3). The use of grey suggests the resemblance to a black-and-white photograph while the use of *faint* conveys the impression of either a faded or unfocused image. Even when Magda tries to picture the portrait of her mother that hangs in the dining

room she sees “only a grey blur, a strip of grey blur” (sec. 43). (These images will be examined with detail in the next chapter.) Both K and Magda express a need to call forth the impossible and both reach the limits of their imagination, which is suggested through the intermedial analogy of a blurred photograph. In terms of narrative voice, it is difficult to find a resemblance between K’s silence and Magda’s vivid, articulate, bursting interior monologue, yet there is a suggestion that she and K have similarly active and inventive minds, and K’s continues to fixate on the same vision of his mother.

The MO reveals how the burning halo still impacts K when he is hospitalised in Cape Town. In a rare instance of direct speech, K says, “They burned her,” and he then elaborates by adding, “Her hair was burning round her head like a halo” (130). Although the MO is taken aback by K’s impassive tone, he later remarks how K “becomes [distressed] when he has to talk about his mother” (139). The MO is convinced that K’s asceticism will lead him to a death that “is full of pain and misery” (151), and the burning halo comes to support this theory. While reflecting on the nature of K’s unfocused gaze, the MO asks, “What do you see? Is it your mother in her circle of flaming hair grinning and beckoning to you with crooked finger to pass through the curtain of light and join her in the world beyond? Does that explain your indifference to life?” (150). The image of the beckoning, burning figure is similarly used in *Dusklands* as Dawn describes how the faces from his photographs haunt his dreams: “Out of their holy fire the images sing to me, drawing me on and on into their thin phantom world” (34). The MO similarly describes the fiery ghost calling K into the afterlife. The MO believes in K’s passive suicide, but he cannot look inside K’s mind’s eye to see the many other visions that fill his consciousness.

In the end of the novel, K returns to his mother’s small room in Cape Town, where the scene of an idyllic whitewashed cottage first sparked his journey. When he is again in her room, he conjures up the image of his maternal land:

He thought of the farm, the grey thornbushes, the rocky soil, the ring of hills, the mountains purple and pink in the distance, the great still blue empty sky, the earth grey and brown beneath the sun save here and there, where if you looked carefully you suddenly saw a tip of vivid green, pumpkin leaf or carrot-bush. (183)

K pictures the farm from a panoramic vantage point and then looks beyond it to the hills and “the mountains purple and pink in the distance.” This same point of view, it will be shown, is focalised through the camera eye when he first reaches the farm. The above extract is a memory rather than a fantasy. The mountains are patches of colour in the distance, and within this landscape K’s crops are “tip[s] of vivid green” that stand out in the grey and brown soil. The description “looked carefully” creates the impression of an observer straining his eyes to see the small details within this vast scene (much like the zoom function of a camera). At this distance, the type of plant is indistinguishable and K can merely see spots of green.

As in the beginning of the novel, K’s vision kindles his desire to leave for the farm. He begins to imagine this journey and considers taking the vagrant he suspects has been sleeping in his mother’s room: “K imagined him as a little old man with a stoop and a bottle in his side pocket who muttered all the time into his beard, the kind of old man the police ignored” (183). His mind rushes into the future, seeing the moment when he and the man would arrive on the farm and he would clear away the debris left by the soldiers. He then imagines extracting water from the shaft of the decimated pump. As K drifts into fantasy, the final words of the novel are optimistic. K pictures himself tying a string to a teaspoon, which he would then lower into the shaft, “and when he brought it up there would be water in the bowl of the spoon; and in that way, he would say, one can live” (184). Despite the suggestion that K is being called to the farm to die, the novel ends with *live*. If one looks at Coetzee’s novels from *Dusklands* to *Elizabeth Costello*, *Michael K* is the only one of these nine that ends with life rather than death.<sup>14</sup> Even though the above scenario is unlikely an actual plan,

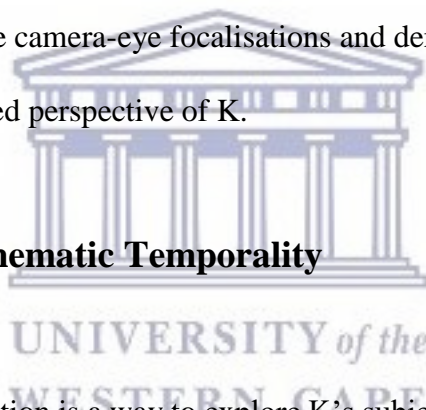


K's blue-sky thinking evinces his optimism as well as his deep attachment to the land, and his desire to return is perhaps best articulated in these affectionate words from *Boyhood*: "He must go to the farm because there is no place on earth he loves more or can imagine loving more" (67).

The above discussion of textual examples shows how the cinematic mind's eye provides a continual window into K's subjectivity. These mentalisations act as visual commentary on K's experiences. Deconstructing the aesthetic composition of these images then creates a broader range of analytical tools for reading K. From this study emerges a picture of inner complexity. Optical focalisations reveal K's dreams, his attachment to his mother, and his struggle through the past traumas that remain part of his psyche. The next section of analysis will explore camera-eye focalisations and demonstrate that these points of view also present a multifaceted perspective of K.

### **K's Camera Eye and Cinematic Temporality**

The camera-eye mode of narration is a way to explore K's subjectivity by looking through his eyes; this aesthetic configuration incorporates cinematographic components such as focus, the alignment of the observer's position with field of view, and accelerated motion. As in *In the Heart of the Country*, the camera analogy is supported by terms connected with seeing (such as *watching* and *sight*), which establish a perceived line of sight between K and the object of his gaze. An example containing several of these components is found when K first views the town of Prince Albert: "On the morning of the fourth day he was squatting on a hill watching the sun come up over what he knew at last to be Prince Albert" (49). K then sees a child "driving two donkeys down the long main street." The word *watching* places K as the viewer of this scene. The scope of this panorama is furthermore configured according to K's



vantage point. Because of his elevated position, he has a wide field of view and is thus able to see the whole town, overlooking its long main road. The temporal marker (“On the morning”) also reveals the use of the slugline format for this establishing view, which could be labelled “EXT. PRINCE ALBERT, FROM POINT OF VIEW HILLTOP. DAWN.” Camera-eye structures of focalisation are also conveyed through optical distortions. When K, for example, looks directly into the sun, his vision is coloured by the prismatic effect of light refracted by the lens of the eye: “Striking all the colours of the rainbow from his eyelashes, it filled the sky” (83). The sun fills K’s field of view and he sees the colours of light cling to the edges of his eyelashes.

The camera-eye construction, it will be shown, communicates the idea that K is continually affected by his experiences. But analysis will also show contrasting moments in which he nears a state of freedom from his past, his fears, and his associated ideas of self. This mode of being is expressed as a mode of seeing that shows K in harmony with existence, no longer experiencing a life veiled in perception. Such a transcendental state, however, cannot ultimately be captured in text because one cannot be free of language (hence he *nears* rather than achieves this ideal). In the novel, K experiences moments of minimal subjectivity that contrast with other expressions of the camera eye and the mind’s eye. K’s fluctuating degrees of interiority also affect his perception of time: he shifts away from the time of the world into the time of nature, engaging the temporal framework discussed in the previous chapter on adaptation.

*Michael K* also presents the juxtaposition of two conceptualisations of time: universal time, which is associated with the spinning of celestial bodies and the motif of an unending river; and the time of civilization in which notions of past, present, and future operate. The latter version of time is interconnected to K’s interpersonal experiences because his present interactions with others and with society (his perceived role in the world) have been

conditioned by his upbringing. This type of causal connection between past and present is discussed by Coetzee in his essay on Kafka's "The Burrow," which has been linked to *Michael K* in critical study,<sup>15</sup> although not in relation to cinematic study. In the essay, Coetzee writes:

We treat the past as real insofar as present existence has been conditioned or generated by it. The more indirect the causal derivation of the present from a particular past becomes, the weaker that past becomes, the more it sinks towards a dead past. ("Time, Tense and Aspect" 575)

Coetzee suggests that the perceived reality of the past depends on the strength of its causal link with the present. This relationship is presented as one of degrees, with the connection between past experience and present behaviour continually strengthening and weakening. The weakening of the past expresses a shift towards universal time. Conversely, a strengthening of the reality of the past takes place through the time of civilization, which ratifies prior conditioning. Analysis will show how such shifts are portrayed in *K*, who vacillates between the weight of his past and the possibility of freedom.

The farm becomes the main site of *K*'s inner struggle and therefore analysis of the camera eye will focus on the two periods when *K* lives there. While Magda is entrapped in her home, the farm of *Michael K* offers the chance of freedom, echoing the faith of *Boyhood*: "All farms are important. Farms are places of freedom, of life" (19). *K* already begins to feel unburdened of his past as he nears Prince Albert. In the Karoo's vast and silent landscape, empty "[f]rom horizon to horizon" (46), *K* finds relief: "The anxiety that belonged to the time on the road began to leave him" (46). His first glimpse of the farm also conveys that *K* is releasing himself from the external world. This point of view will be the starting point of analysis. The camera eye, it will be shown, maps out the changing ways in which *K* apprehends the world unfolding around him.

### *At First Sight*

K's arrival on the farm is depicted through a strongly cinematic sequence in which visuality takes precedence over the narrator's commentary. The camera eye is anticipated by references to the slugline structure, recalling how Coetzee was picturing the novel through a camera perspective during the writing process. The text also simulates a montage-style edit as the narrative cuts swiftly from a shot of K turning down the path towards the farm to a panoramic long shot of the setting:

It was noon before he reached the pointing finger and turned off on to a track that led into desolate grey flats [EXT. SIGN. NOON]; the sun was going down when he climbed the crest and came in sight of a low whitewashed farmhouse beyond which the land rose from rippling flats to foothills and then to the steep dark slopes of the mountains themselves [EXT. THE FARM, FROM POINT OF VIEW HILLTOP. DUSK]. (51)

The farmhouse is introduced through K's eyes, coming into sight as he reaches a vantage point on the hill. (This is the perspective adopted in K's final vision of the farm at the end of the novel). The reader then follows K's gaze as he looks beyond the house to where "the land rose from rippling flats to foothills and then to the steep dark slopes of the mountains themselves." The details of the landscape further the idea that the scene is presented through K's point of view. The flats are rippling because from this height their slight dips and rises appear closer together, thus giving the land a textured effect. The mountains are indistinct slopes against the evening sky because they are too far away for K to see any detail.

The narrative then cuts to an external perspective of K circling the house, taking in the details of its derelict appearance (the closed shutters, the hole in the roof, the barren rockery, and the empty chicken run). The description "A loose plate flapped monotonously in the

wind” recalls the shot in Coetzee’s screenplay that shows Hendrik’s door as it “flaps in the wind” (sc. 124). K’s gaze is furthermore drawn by reflecting light as “[f]ar out in the veld the vanes of a second pump glinted” (51), which bears resemblance to the following image that Magda sees on the night of the shooting: “Far away in the lands the blades of the windmill glint” (sec. 117). K then explores the interior of the shed, which is similarly neglected.

Visuality dominates these scenes as throughout the opening shots emphasis is placed on concrete imagery presented through a neutral tone. There are no interjections by K’s mind’s eye, and the narrator’s commentary slips in only once to note, “There was no old wagonhouse such as he had imagined [and his mother had told him], but a wood-and-iron shed” (51). K’s direct thoughts are then only heard as he settles down on the stoep for the night: “Now I am here, he thought. Or at least I am somewhere” (52). The choice to present this setting in a predominantly silent, objective perspective gives the impression that K is allowing the farm to identify itself to him. It is new, independent, as yet untainted by experience. Soon after, K buries his mother and anchors himself to the land, and he begins to drift away from society and his old place in the world.

As K starts to slip into the flow of nature, the slugline structure is no longer used. Sluglines adhere to the time of civilization (clock time), using labels such as *noon* and *morning* to isolate and order the motions of the sun. But as K settles into his new life, his experience of temporality becomes less marked, and the prose takes the habitual, iterative tense of routine, evident in the lines “His days he spent at the dam” (58) and “His days were divided” (59). K slides into nature, experiencing moments of euphoria that are periodically interrupted by clock time in the form of “a sense of pain that was obscurely connected with the future; and then it was only brisk work that could keep him from lapsing into gloominess” (59). Despite these interferences, he continues to break away from the external world: “He lived by the rising and setting of the sun, in a pocket outside time. Cape Town and the war

and his passage to the farm slipped further and further into forgetfulness” (60). He is beginning to forget his life in Cape Town, his childhood there, and his journey to the farm (including his mother’s death). These experiences disappear “further and further into forgetfulness” as he moves towards a state of freedom in which he lives according to the time of nature. But this transformation is suddenly halted by the arrival of the grandson of the farm’s owners (the Visagies).

This intrusion into K’s life is captured through the camera eye. The effect is introduced with the reappearance of the slugline structure, halting the cyclical time of nature and dragging K back into linear time: “Then one day, returning to the house at noontime, he saw the front door wide open; and while he still stood confounded a figure emerged from the interior into the sunlight, a pale plump young man in khaki uniform” (60). The temporal markers *then* and *noontime* signal the return to chronology as K’s routine is broken. K is positioned as the observer who *sees* the door, and from this camera-eye point of view the man is only discernible in the darkness as a vague figure until he emerges into the light; then the details of his appearance become visible to K. The man adopts a dominant stance “at the head of the steps as if he owned the house” (60). The physical elevation immediately signals his perceived importance over K, and K responds accordingly.

The grandson triggers a resurgence of K’s past self as he is plunged back into his old behaviour. The man asks if K works on the farm and is quick to interpret K’s silence as an affirmation. K fumbles into the familiar role of nervous simpleton. Unable “to bring out words,” he merely nods (60). The man meanwhile keeps his eyes on “K’s bad mouth,” placing K under a critical scrutiny he has known since childhood. That night, K chastises himself for living freely. “I let myself believe that this was one of those islands without an owner,” he thinks miserably, “Now I am learning the truth. Now I am learning my lesson” (61). This lesson stays with K and changes how he sees the farm when he returns.



### *A Past Perspective*

After escaping Jakkalsdrif, K again experiences the healing touch of the vast Karoo plains: “The dry white grass waved in the wind; the sky was blue; his body was overflowing with vigour” (97). K’s exuberance is spurred by the shiver of wind, the freedom of the empty space, and the periodic jolt of surprise when a buck leaps into view and then flees. Apart from the occasional fence, he feels as if he is the first “to tread a particular inch of earth or disturb a particular pebble” on this empty landscape (97). When he reaches the farm, he perceives it through the same camera-eye point of view as before:

He climbed the last rise, his heart beating faster. As he reached the crest the house came into sight below, first the roof and the broken gable, then the whitewashed walls, everything as it had been before. Surely, he thought, surely now I have outlasted the last of the Visagies. . . . (97)

The farm again comes *into sight* from the vantage point on the crest of the hill. K’s field of view expands as he reaches the edge and is able to see over the rim, shifting his gaze down from “the roof and broken gable” to “the whitewashed walls.” After the rush of joy in the veld, it seems that K’s heart beats in excitement. The use of *surely* conveys a sense of confidence that is reiterated when the narrative cuts rapidly from this panorama to the paragraph heading “The back door was unlocked” (98), suggesting that K moves forward without hesitation. At the outset, K appears bold, ready to believe this space is again deserted, yet the camera-eye composition gestures otherwise. Although K sees the farm from the same point of view, he no longer looks to the rippling flats and mountains but rather focuses on the house. The farm is not perceived within an open expanse but is rather a house with an owner, and K is the trespasser. When he then enters the kitchen and sees the same hole in the room,

he considers leaving: “There is still time, he thought, time to brush away my footprints and tiptoe out” (98). To K, the farm is no longer a place of freedom – no longer part of the great landscape that lightened his spirit. It is instead a space with an occupied centre.

As he walks to the dam, however, his impressions change: “Every stone, every bush along the way he recognized. He felt at home at the dam as he had never felt in the house” (98). He lies down, “watching the sky wheel above” (99). This description of circular motion evokes the use of accelerated motion, which was examined in prior analysis of *In the Heart of the Country*. The world is moving around K as he lies still, again centring himself on the farm. The scene furthermore suggests that he is surrendering to the motions of the sun, and the following day he renews his cultivation of the land.

Despite an initial impression of resuming his life as before, K does not slip into the time of nature but rather lives in the time of crisis, which is driven by his past experience. Coetzee describes this temporal modality in his Kafka essay: “Any moment may mark the break between before and after. Time is thus at every moment a time of crisis. . .” (“Time, Tense and Aspect” 575). Life in this state, he notes, is characterised by the anxiety of trying “to anticipate a danger which cannot be anticipated because it comes without transition, without warning.” K forgoes the farmhouse and constructs a hiding place for himself near the dam. As he resumes cultivation, he lives with the constant anxiety of discovery, even in this seemingly isolated place “there was still reason to be wary” (102). Every so often he is forced into hiding by the sound of approaching motors, and on one occasion he is struck by the sudden appearance of “a donkey-cart passing within hailing distance” (102). It is too late to hide and K stands exposed while the cart passes; fortunately, its occupants pay no attention to him. K’s life is disturbed by the need for “incessant watchfulness,” and he fixates on trying to hide his presence: he waters his garden “only by moonlight, or else anxiously at dusk” (102).

Yet K also experiences moments of calm symbiosis with the natural world as he is periodically immersed in the time of nature, which is represented by the familiar motif of the river: “Since time was poured out upon him in such an unending stream, there were whole mornings he could spend lying on his body,” picking out larvae from an ant’s nest (102). K too finds an instinct for choosing harmless roots to eat, “as though he had once been an animal and the knowledge of good and bad plants had not died in his soul” (102). He is often compared to animals, such as by being labelled “an ant” without its hole (83), “a lizard” in the sun (132), and “a stick insect” (149). Magda is also fascinated by ants and other insects (she describes herself as a grub and speaks of beetles as friends). For Michael K, this pattern underscores his affinity with nature. Yet such states are only intermittent; before he can truly settle, his life is once again shattered as, like Kafka’s anxious creature, the enemy is upon him “without warning” (“Time, Tense and Aspect” 575).

K is plunged into crisis when he suddenly sees the farmhouse door open. This scene has the same setup as the one in which the grandson first appears. In this earlier incident, the paragraph heading reads, “Then one day, returning to the house at noontime, he saw the front door wide open . . .” (60). The same point of view is now repeated, but with a stronger emotive response from K: “Then, passing the house one day on a dawn walk, he was thunderstruck to see the front door, which was always closed, standing ajar” (105). This line too mimics the slugline structure (EXT. FRONT DOOR. DAWN), and the verb *see* establishes a line of sight that identifies this as K’s point of view. He faces “the open eye of the door, feeling suddenly as naked as a mole in daylight” (105). The metaphor of the open eye recalls his first encounter with the grandson, who focuses on “K’s bad mouth” (60). Back then, K sees the door wide open and is confounded. In contrast, he is now “thunderstruck” by a door that is merely ajar, showing how deeply affected he is by his prior experience. He later

speculates whether the door is even open, suggesting that this crisis is triggered by the image imprinted on his mind rather than actual evidence of intrusion.

K's anxiety is then emphasised through the approximation of accelerated motion when he returns to stare at the farmhouse. He initially grapples with his fear in hiding, but as time passes and the threat appears to fade, he becomes confident enough to approach the house. A day then passes as he fixates on the sight of the door:

He spent a whole day lying under cover watching the farmhouse, while the sun moved in its arc from left to right and the shadows moved across the stoep from right to left. Was the strip of deeper darkness in the centre an open doorway or the door itself? It was too far to see. (106-07)

The rapid progression of time is simulated as the sun sails across the sky “from left to right” and the shadows on the stoep shift rapidly “from right to left” in accordance with its position. The camera-eye perspective is further suggested because, corresponding to this distance, K's vision is limited and he is unable “to see” whether he is looking at “an open doorway or the door itself.” This camera-eye point of view shows K's intense focus on the door. Throughout the scene, the “strip of deeper darkness” remains at “the centre” of his vision. K's sight is anchored by this black rectangle, and he is barely cognisant of the passage of time as the world spins around him.

At nightfall, K finally approaches the house, moving carefully to “the very foot of the steps” to see that the door is open (107). He sleeps in the shed that night and in the morning discovers evidence of people – empty food cans and the lingering smell of smoke. He retreats to his hole and is later surprised by the sudden arrival of guerrillas (this incident will be explored under cinematic lighting). They leave the following day, and in his final stretch on the farm, K is again able to find peace, albeit momentarily.

## *Respite*

In between the various crises that are correlated by an eruption of chronicity, K manages to achieve release from worldly concerns, and these experiences are expressed as a new mode of seeing in which his physical vision is mostly unaffected by past paradigms and undistracted by inner visualisations. This type of vision occurs before the guerrillas invade and is again achieved after they leave. K, it will be shown, reaches for what can be termed *pure sight*. The word *pure* refers to an unadulterated perspective of the world in which one is able to return to an essential state of being. Although *Michael K* alludes to this way of seeing when K is alone, one can consider the idea of pure sight as an answer to the dialectics governing the nonreciprocal gaze in *In the Heart of the Country*. Pure sight is like the elusive language of pure meaning in which notions of subject and object are erased and the onlooker becomes an elemental self released from the language of the gaze.

This concept of pure sight is related to Marais's analysis of how K comes to perform his tasks effortlessly in complete darkness. No longer needing to use the path, K navigates his way around the dam through "[a] sense less of sight than of touch" (115). According to Marais, K's existence here "is purely sensory and marked by the absence of language" (45). Through reference to sight Marais furthermore describes K's experience as a realisation of Magda's "determination to burst through the screen of names into the goatseye view of Armoede" (sec. 38). K seemingly achieves Magda's desire by "overcoming his linguistic separation from" the world (45). Without noting it specifically, Marais is exploring transcendence through vision. K is not actually blind (the absence of sight) but is experiencing an adaptive way of seeing. As noted before, darkness signifies K's childhood in Huis Norenius and is inextricably linked to the fear instilled in him during those formative years. When K first begins to work in darkness (prior to the scene Marais discusses), he

gradually overcomes “all fear of the night” (103). K’s confidence represents a release from the effects of Norenus because his vision is uncontaminated by the fear-inducing veil of the past. It is furthermore significant that K’s mind’s eye is absent during these experiences because this shows that he is fully conscious without the distractions of imagination and memory. This form of seeing represents a minimal subjectivity, and it is therefore the closest K can come to freedom from his past. In his analysis, Marais also notes that true transcendence is ultimately impossible in textual representation: “Any attempt to imitate the mimetic, and thereby overcome the separation between subject and object, necessarily reproduces it” (47). Pure sight, like pure meaning, is unattainable, but K can move towards this state and experience himself and the world more authentically through a minimalised subjectivity.

The camera eye expresses a minimal subjectivity when K begins to slip into the river of time after the guerrillas have departed. K’s transition into nature is introduced as the epitome of pleasure: “But most of all, as summer slanted to an end, he was learning to love idleness . . .” (115). The word *but* signals a contrast of this scene with the prior paragraph depicting K’s haptic dexterity when he moves through the darkness. His mastery of the dark is thus less significant to him than his joy in the idle pleasure of “yielding . . . himself to time, to a time flowing slowly like oil from horizon to horizon over the face of the world, washing over his body.” During these experiences, the prospect of work leaves him “neither pleased nor displeased,” as if his desires are washed away, and with this respite comes peace as he approaches the possibility of pure sight:

He could lie all afternoon with his eyes open, staring at the corrugations in the roof-iron and the tracings of rust; his mind would not wander, he would see nothing but the iron, the lines would not transform themselves into pattern or fantasy; he was himself,



lying in his own house, the rust was merely rust, all that was moving was time,  
bearing him onward in its flow. (115)

His mind does “not wander,” and the image in front of him does not morph “into pattern or fantasy.” This state is contrasted with prior cinematic visualisations because the term *fantasy* recalls the mind’s eye’s and its propensity to pull K into visions and memories. The term *pattern* then suggests a move away from the distraction of language, of labelling and categorisation. It is suggested that K does not place the corrugated lines in the category of *pattern* but rather sees them as they are (the rust is “merely rust”). He is also released from the distortions placed on him by society because, rather than being transformed into something else (the role of simpleton, for example), “he [is] himself.” The suggestion of sight unaffected by language shows that he is closing the linguistically-inscribed distance between subject and object. On the edge of pure sight, there is no more than the minimal state of being needed to witness the image.

The Borgesian motif of time as a river underscores K’s transition into a more natural state of being. The previous study of adaptation showed how the river functions as part of a temporal dichotomy in which real time is contrasted against the false time imposed by the world. As K surrenders to the river of time “bearing him onward in its flow” (115), he is taken “beyond the reach of calendar and clock” (116). These immersions into the time of nature are occasionally disturbed by the sound of a distant jet which reminds him of “the other time in which the war had its existence” (115-16). In the river of time, there is neither past nor present but only the unending duration of existence, and K is able to lie “all afternoon with his eyes open.” He is, however, not entirely free from perception and still acknowledges the distinction of day (afternoon), yet this broad term shows his minimal attention to the passage of time. K is shifting away from the time of the world and its

associated experiences (childhood, crisis, his journey through war-torn South Africa, and his mother's death). He instead surrenders to the idea of pure existence.

From the MO's perspective, which resonates in the novel, these surrendered states represent a passive suicide, with K allowing himself to die through inactivity. Yet to pursue pure sight is to pursue a mode of living. In the mountains, when K imagines dying, the process is simulated through a cinematic fade out: "It came home to him that he might die, he or his body, it was the same thing, that he might lie here till the moss on the roof grew dark before his eyes, that his story might end with his bones growing white in this faroff place" (69). In this scenario, his vision is untenable and the moss darkens before his eyes. The dimming of sight is conceptualised as the dimming of consciousness (into the blindness of death). In contrast, the pursuit of pure sight involves a sustained gaze and is thus a conscious experience.

While in the state of minimal subjectivity, K retains a semblance of self and communicates a deep, experiential pleasure in yielding to existence. The absence of fantasy is tied to joy and freedom and therefore suggests that he has a need for silence from himself. One tends to think of K as trying to escape the world and his place in it. Perhaps what K learns to love most during his isolation on the farm is the silence of his own mind. The happiest moments are when he is able to relate to his environment with neither fear nor memory nor imagination. Considering his numerous mind's-eye visions, many of which are greatly distressing to him, it is unsurprising that he would desire a reprieve from this mental dissonance. It is surprising, however, to think that a character known for his silence is, in a way, too loud for himself.

Yet such reprieves from his mind are untenable, and K immediately slides back into his old concerns. As his health deteriorates, he moves further away from pure vision. Soon after the conceptualisation of K yielding himself to time, he begins to think of Jakkalsdrif and

his mother, and he is again immersed in the cinematic mind's eye as he attempts "to recover in his imagination" the vision of her childhood home (116). K's ascetic lifestyle makes him increasingly ill; he is weak, soporific, dizzy, in pain, and can sense "the processes of his body slowing down" (118). He is then plunged further into fantasies connected with his past. K dreams of a dishevelled old man warning him off the land, a vision that resembles an incident from his journey when he is chased by "an old countryman in a tattered" coat (46). K also dreams of his mother as "young and beautiful," and he begins to realise "that he might not be fully in possession of himself" (119). As his mental faculties decline, he is no longer able to control his imagination and is "visited by trains of images so rapid and unconnected that he could not follow them" (119). After a heavy rain, K's physical sight is also distorted: there is a "swimming in front of his eyes," and he forces himself to picture a cup of tea as he drinks from a puddle (120). As K is pulled through this gamut of different modes of seeing, he moves further from the experience of pure sight and eventually loses consciousness.

A jump cut then conveys K's mental absence as the narrative shifts instantly from K drinking "on hands and knees" to him sitting in place as soldiers near the farm (120). K wakes gradually. At first, he perceives the noise of their vehicles as "distant thunder." Only when they are at the gate is he able to "see them and realize what they [are]." Vision is again tied to cognisance because his eyes and his mind come into focus simultaneously. There is a gap in the narrative during which he disappears while his moribund body is left holding vigil. On the one hand, it seems possible that during his absence he finds transcendence and lives the untranslatable experience of no language (occupying the narrative gap created by the jump cut), but on the other hand, the prior deterioration of his physical vision and his inability to control his mind's eye suggest that K experienced unconsciousness. As the soldiers approach, K is overcome with hopelessness, and his life on the farm thus ends.

In summation, from the moment K reaches the farm, camera-eye focalisations communicate his fluctuating states of mind. The view through his eyes allows access into his inner processes and ultimately suggests that K, apart from seeking isolation from society, also needs a reprieve from his own mind. In the next section of study, however, the analysis of cinematic lighting techniques will suggest that K's relationship to others is ambivalent as he both resists and is drawn towards companionship.

## Cinematic Lighting

In this section of analysis, I will examine the deployment of cinematic lighting techniques in order to examine K's attitude to social bonds (this excludes the primary relationship with his mother). This study will focus on lighting effects during two sequences: K's hospitalisation and subsequent internment in Jakkalsdrif, and the intrusion of guerrillas on the farm. Chiaroscuro lighting techniques, it will be shown, express K's deep estrangement from society yet also raise the possibility that K desires social connections.

Much of this analysis will conceptualise visual obscurity as representing a lack of interpersonal connection, which is a familiar thematic in Coetzee's work. In *In the Heart of the Country*, for example, when Magda is unable to understand why Hendrik comes to her bed at night, she says, "His face is growing more obscure to me every day" (sec. 218). In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the Magistrate and barbarian girl's inability to understand each other is demonstrated through impaired vision: she can barely see, and he is unable to recall her face clearly. He desperately wants to know her story and "tr[ies] to recover an image of her as she was before" being maimed, yet "[his] first image remains of the kneeling beggar girl" (33). In his dreams, she is represented as a hooded child whose face "is blank, featureless," as white as the snow (37). The Magistrate and the girl therefore remain blind to

each other. These examples reveal a pattern of vision that also symbolises the underlying dynamics restricting social interaction. For K, these limitations are represented as the repercussions of his personal experiences.

The analysis of chiaroscuro will show how this optical paradigm is applied in *Michael K*. Chiaroscuro lighting occludes people from K, and this visual obscurity, which is focalised through K's point of view, signifies his inability to understand and thus connect with others. Yet this optical effect is also deployed in a self-reflexive manner, and through the darkness of others K too encounters the darkness within himself that hides his motives. This complex symbolism of darkness will be explored in the guerrilla sequence. In the first part of analysis, which begins with K's hospitalisation, the interplay of light and dark present a more singular impression of K's estrangement.

### *Disconnection*



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When K becomes desperately ill, he leaves the mountains and returns to Prince Albert. He is arrested and then moved to a hospital. K initially slips in and out of consciousness, and this incomprehension is played out visually. As night falls, his inability to grasp the world around him (to see it in its entirety) is conveyed through the elaborate interplay of light and dark:

Dusk fell, and then darkness. Someone switched on the lights in two banks of three. K closed his eyes and slept. When he opened them again the lights were still on. Then as he watched they faded and went off. Moonlight fell in four silver slabs through the four windows. Somewhere nearby a diesel motor sputtered. The lights came on dimly. He fell asleep. (71)

Through K's brief and fractured vision, the world around him is rendered strange, perceived only intermittently. The ceiling "lights in two banks of three" are seen from the point of view

of an observer looking up (K on his bed). K falls asleep after the lights are turned on and then watches them dim when he wakes. There are only brief moments when the room is partially visible to him. The chiaroscuro effect of isolated moonlight (“four silver slabs”) shows that light does not disperse but remains pooled within darkness. A motor (likely for a generator) splutters and the room is poorly lit, but K then falls asleep. The general obscurity of the setting expresses K’s own incomprehension, and the continual shifts between light and dark convey the dissonance of one out of sync with his settings.

When K is then taken to Jakkalsdrif, he describes his ordeal as a regression into childhood. K is firstly subjected to the leers of others. At the camp, he is instantly overwhelmed by “the eyes of a hundred curious inmates,” and he averts his gaze as he is forced “to endure the inspection of the crowd” (73). He is then placed in a dark hut with “no windows” (73). K’s despair at being in close quarters with others in this gloomy space is then articulated as a return to Norenus: “This is like Huis Norenus, he thought: I am back in Huis Norenus a second time, only now I am too old to bear it” (74). As he lies waiting for the afternoon to pass, he is approached by one of the camp’s inhabitants. K flinches at a gentle touch to his arm and then sees the man in silhouette: “Against the dazzle of light from the doorway he could not make out the face.” K’s inability to see the man’s face represents his inability to connect with the man. When he answers “I’m fine” to the man’s concern, K’s “words seemed to come from far away,” reiterating the distance K feels. K’s reintegration into society is harsh and sudden, and he thinks, “I needed more warning, I should have been told I was going to be sent back amongst people.” When he is later standing by the fence, he reiterates the association of darkness with his past: “He thought of the hot dark hut, of strangers lying packed about him on their bunks, of air thick with derision. It is like going back to childhood, he thought: it is like a nightmare” (77).



In Jakkalsdrif, K remains aloof despite the others' initial attempts to welcome him; during these gestures of friendship, chiaroscuro effects underscore K's inability to integrate into camp society. On the first night, K watches groups of people socialising around campfires while he remains in darkness: "At first K hung about in the shadows looking on; then, feeling foolish," he returns to his bunk (77). In the hut, he is again visited by the man who first approached him. K initially turns to face "the dark shape." When K accepts the offer of a cigarette, he sees "[b]y the light of the match . . . a man older than himself" (77). The small glow of light from the flame creates a cameo effect that resembles the first shot of Lemmy when his face is illuminated by the lighter's flame. The man takes K to a fireside group, and K makes an awkward effort to answer their questions. Their attention leaves him, and he is drawn to a vivid show of light nearby: "The tent next door glowed, lit from within by a candle; figures moved in silhouette against the walls larger than life" (79). The surreal image of these dark, anonymous figures conveys K's inability to grasp the reality of the camp. Through his eyes, the world is dreamlike. K then reclines to look "up at the stars" as the fireside group discusses their grievances against society (81). When silence descends, K behaves in a manner incongruous with the groups' serious discussion: "A tiny light flashed across the heavens. K pointed. 'A shooting star,' he said." He is like a child who has wandered into the world of adults – a world which he is unable to comprehend.

K's benighted vision is also an allusion to a prose technique that would not translate into film. As noted before, there are no racial markers in the text, yet the character descriptions are sparser still (this excludes the section narrated by the MO). Only one facial detail is focalised through K: as his mother is lying in her hospital bed, he sees "the string of saliva between her withered lips shorten and lengthen" (30). Such descriptive detail is never repeated, and the other characters that K encounters are presented in broad sketches. When K pleads with an exasperated nurse for permission to see his mother, he "see[s] angry tears

starting in her eyes” (28). Her mood, occupation, and gender are conveyed, but there is no fuller indication or description of what she looks like. Furthermore, the colour of neither her hair nor her eyes is mentioned. K interacts with a series of people, and all are presented through this tunnel vision which latches onto a few basic descriptions to create a rough sketch of the other, rendering the rest of the person’s appearance blank. He meets “a policewoman with weary eyes” (19), “a man in a suit and tie” (31), “a soldier in camouflaged uniform” (36), “an old countryman in a tattered” coat (46), and “a man younger than himself” (47). Even Robert, who K socialises with more than anyone else on his journey, is merely seen as “a man older than himself” (77). The occlusion of faces through lighting effects can be considered as an extension of the obscurity created through sparse character descriptions, which is a prose-specific technique (a film would need to use highly obtrusive techniques to create this effect). This subtle prose pattern renders people only partially visible in the mind’s eye of the reader, thereby focalising K’s dissociation mimetically.

Together, lighting effects and prose choices emphasises K’s inability to see others clearly, thus conveying K’s social disconnection. Through the symbolism of darkness, this paradigm is also made reciprocal. The scenes of K watching and then hiding from the guerrillas will be examined next to show how darkness represents K’s inability to understand his own motives as he grapples with a desire to join them.

### *Ambivalence*

The men arrive days after K discovers evidence in the farmhouse of their presence. As he emerges from his hole at sunset, he catches sight of “shapes moving across the flats” (107) and immediately takes cover. At first, he thinks they are soldiers but soon realises they are one of the guerrilla bands reputedly hiding in the mountains. They camp within hearing

distance of K and leave the following day at dawn. Throughout the night, K is torn between fear of discovery and a desire to join them, but he ultimately remains hidden. Nadine Gordimer was heavily critical of K's decision to stay because someone needs to tend the earth (K entertains this thought momentarily). Gordimer's attack against "K's indifference to the anti-apartheid struggle" would continue to trouble Coetzee decades after (Attwell, *J. M. Coetzee* 142). Gordimer ends her review by asking, "It's better to live on your knees, planting something..." ("Idea of Gardening"). "Why doesn't K go off with the guerrillas?" Coetzee asks and addresses the suggestion that K should have taken up arms: "To a reader taking this line, much of the text of *Michael K* is just one fancy evasion after another of an overriding political question: how shall the tyranny of apartheid be ended?" (*Doubling* 207). He halts the discussion by calling on the writer's creative prerogative, saying, "One writes the books one wants to write." The following analysis of cinematic lighting proposes to revisit this controversial moment and suggest that K's motivation for remaining hidden is more complex than the binary yes or no question of taking up arms.

As K struggles to understand his motives, darkness manifests within him symbolically, and this inner state is juxtaposed against the men's association with light. The sequence begins with them occluded from K's view. After taking a last, surreptitious look at the group and their laden donkeys, K ducks into his hole and is unable to "see anything of them" for the rest of the night (108), yet later in the evening he watches the outline of the ridge above him become "visible against the faint orange glow of their fire" (108). The men bring light, and K is attracted by their presence. He earlier reveals a fascination with the outlaw figure when he stays in the evacuated flat of his mother's employers and sticks the newspaper photograph of a captured killer on the fridge, and "for days afterwards, when he looked up from his intermittent work on the wheels, his eyes continued to meet those of the man" (17). When he thinks of the men outside his cave, he remembers seeing guerrillas in

newspaper photos that show them lying “in pools of their own blood” (108-09). These men outside his cave, however, are more like a jovial football team “after a hard game” (109). K is attracted to their laughter and camaraderie, and he imagines following “them like a child following a brass band” (109). He thinks of becoming a food supplier and being regaled by their campfire tales when they return for a night’s respite. Yet as soon as he checks his shoelaces, seemingly preparing to leave, he realises that he is deluding himself. In an instant, he knows “that he [will] not crawl out and stand up and cross from darkness into firelight to announce himself” (109). K is drawn to the light of social bonds yet is unable to break free from the alienating darkness he knows so well, and he cannot understand what holds him there.

Darkness then comes to represent K’s alienation from himself. He initially toys with the idea that he stays hidden because “there must be men to stay behind and keep gardening alive” (Gordimer quotes this line) so that “the earth would not grow hard and forget her children” (109). K, however, rejects these rationalisations because:

Between this reason and the truth that he would never announce himself, 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 balked, into which it was useless to pour words. (109-10)

The extract reiterates the link between light and society on the one hand and darkness and isolation on the other. K’s self-imposed loneliness is represented by the seemingly insurmountable distance between himself and the light. Through the familiar motif of the gap (the hole), darkness is internalised and thereby signifies the gap within K where the elusive explanation for his decision to remain hidden lies: it is the site where “his understanding balked.” K’s conflicted feelings reveal him as someone who both fears and needs others. Although his social experiences are generally strained and often traumatic, he seems to yearn

for a way to break his loneliness. K's inability to apprehend others (to *see* them both literally and figuratively) becomes reciprocal: the darkness and obscurity he sees in others is entangled with the darkness and obscurity he sees within himself. This paradigm is also the converse of pure vision in which the ability to see clearly allows K to be himself. As K waits inside his cave, the light of his consciousness is insufficient to illuminate the gap within him. As Attwell writes, "Eventually, all rationalizations fail to capture the essence of K, even his own" (*J. M. Coetzee* 141). K ultimately remains benighted.

K retains this inner darkness as he wakes to see the mountains "outlined blue on pink against the sky" (110). He is again tempted to follow the men: "Now, he thought, waking fully, now is my last chance: now." The repetition of *now* expresses an urgency, and K looks over the ridge to see a man emerging from "the cold night-water" of the dam into "the first soft light of day" (110). As K watches them leave, the point of view through his camera eye reiterates his ambivalence:

In a long straggling line they began to move eastwards across the veld heading for the mountains, . . . the sun, now over the rim of the world, catching them full in the face.

K watched from behind the ridge till they were nothing but bobbing specks against the yellow of the grass, thinking: It is not too late to run after them, it is not too late yet.

The men are cast in bright light while K hides behind the ridge. They are walking into the sunrise, leaving him behind in shadow. Through his eyes, they become mere "bobbing specks against the yellow grass." The suggestion that K can still "run after them" seems a paltry afterthought, uttered when it is already too late to catch up to them. The idea to leave is resisted by a body that is unable to cross the divide between light and dark.

In summation, the deployment of chiaroscuro lighting provides a visual manifestation of the inner struggle within K as he wrestles with both a need for and a resistance to social connections. The same conflict, it will be shown next, is configured in the camera-eye

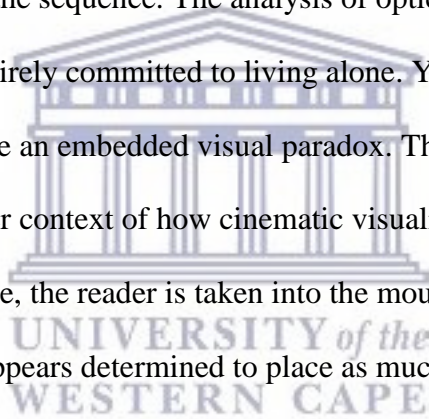
visualisations that accompany K's journey into the mountains, when he appears deeply committed to severing all ties with the world.

## **A Visual Paradox**

This final section of analysis will further explore K's conflicted relationship to society.

Despite his harsh treatment at the hands of others, K retains the semblance of a need to break his self-imposed isolation. The following analysis will examine how this underlying dynamic is suggested when K flees into the mountains. The effect is subtle and only emerges when one reflects on the entirety of the sequence. The analysis of optical subjectivity initially leaves little doubt that K is entirely committed to living alone. Yet after examining this sequence, analysis will propose an embedded visual paradox. This final ambiguity will then be evaluated within the broader context of how cinematic visuality functions in the novel.

Through the camera eye, the reader is taken into the mountains with K, seeing the outside world dwindle as he appears determined to place as much distance between himself and society as possible. After leaving the Visagie farm, he starts his ascent: "In the afternoon he began to climb, till the neat white houses of the town of Prince Albert emerged below him to the west" (65). The houses enter his line of sight when he is high enough to look over them. Clad in his mother's dark coat, K disappears uphill into "dark shadow" (65), as if merging into the landscape. "High above the town," he makes himself a home in a cave previously occupied by campers (65). Then, casting his gaze further afield, he looks upwards: "The funnel of the sky above turned a darker blue and stars emerged" (65). The funnel effect suggests that the sky is depicted through K's eyes. As he looks into the distance, the centre of his vision is in focus while his peripheral vision loses clarity.





Days later, he ascends further still, looking for a place where the steep cliff does not obscure the sunlight till noon: “So he climbed higher, zigzagging up the slope till the road through the pass disappeared from sight, and he was looking over the vast plain of the Karoo, with Prince Albert itself miles below” (66). K’s ascent is again relayed through his camera-eye point of view; as his vantage point changes, the road disappears from his sight and he is then “looking over” the Karoo, seeing the town far below. K’s directly represented thoughts then seem to confirm his intention to escape the world: “He thought: Now surely I have come as far as a man can come . . .” (66). When he is next described looking down on Prince Albert, the camera-eye focalisation again stresses the great distance between K and the town:

Straining his eyes he could sometimes make out the dot of a vehicle crawling down the main street of the toy town on the plain below; but even on the stillest of days no sound reached him save the scurrying of insects across the ground, and the buzz of flies that had forgotten him, and the pulse of blood in his ears. (66)

The description of K straining his eyes to focus on a distant object recalls how Magda too strains her eyes to bring an image into view, twisting and grinding her pupils until a vision takes shape. As in *In the Heart of the Country*, the strain K places on his eyes evokes the image of a camera lens pulled into focus. Yet even under such strain, the vehicle is still a mere dot from this distance and its motion is slowed. The image of a dot “crawling down the main street” resembles the opening tracking shot of Coetzee’s screenplay when the distant figures of Hendrik and his dog appear to “crawl across the empty landscape” (sc. 1). From K’s perspective, the town of Prince Albert furthermore has a toylike façade because at this great distance the structures look small and artificial, lacking the detail of real buildings. K’s isolation is then reiterated through sound as the town is entirely silent, and K can only hear the noises closest to him (the insects, the flies, “and the pulse of blood in his ears”). The

imagery confirms that K has chosen a vantage point that takes him “as far as a man can come” (66). In this solitude, he begins to immerse himself in a new life.

Through accelerated motion, the camera-eye point of view shows how K continues to slip away from the grasp of society as he loses track of time and his body changes. K soon begins to wane physically. He imagines that his “blood would no longer gush from [him] but seep,” and he feels himself “becoming smaller and harder and drier each day” (67). His mind too loses vitality, affecting his vision:

There was nothing to look forward to but the sight, every morning, of the shadow of the rim of the mountain chasing faster and faster towards him till all of a sudden he was bathed in sunlight. He would sit or lie in a stupor at the mouth of the cave, too tired to move or perhaps too lackadaisical. (68)

Time speeds up as K watches the mountain’s shadow “chasing faster and faster” until he is suddenly immersed in sunlight while he lies in a stupor. Accelerated motion is similarly deployed in *In the Heart of the Country* when Magda, her mind numbed by a migraine, lies in her room watching “[d]ays and nights wheel past” (sec. 75). K’s mind too slows, yet while Magda’s torpor represents a dissociation from nature, K’s suggests that he is becoming one with the land. The symbiosis of self and place is noted by Marais, who observes that K’s dryness makes him “like the landscape of the Karoo, a place-name derived from a Khoi word for ‘dry’” (45). Attwell too discusses K’s affiliation with the mountain landscape, suggesting that the setting is an expression of his character: “Some of K’s most distinctive qualities as a figure of elemental freedom – elusiveness, self-sufficiency, resilience – are figured in the description of the Swartberg mountains” (*J. M. Coetzee* 77).

Although K’s journey into the mountains seems predicated on escaping the world, one question remains: if he truly wants to sever all ties with the outside world, why does he continue to watch the town? In the description “Straining his eyes he could sometimes make

out the dot of a vehicle” (66), the word *sometimes* shows that K habitually looks down at Prince Albert. This is also an active gaze as K strains his eyes in an attempt to see the town. Just as when the guerrillas camp on the farm, K is torn between hiding and making contact. Even though K positions himself far away in the mountains, camera-eye focalisation shows that he continues to maintain a link, a line of sight, with society. Is he truly committed to forgetting a place that he keeps in sight? This question remains unanswered, and it becomes further evidence of K’s paradoxical nature.

The above analysis does not offer resolution to K’s ambivalence but rather expands on his complicated personality. Throughout this chapter of study, analysis of cinematic visuality has been employed to elaborate on K and not to negate his elusiveness through forced resolution. As noted in the discussion of cinematic lighting, the gap within K can never be resolved. Furthermore, through intermedial reference to montage the novel emphasises that K will ultimately remain elusive to any modality of analysis. When K reflects on a man who offered him a lift, his memory is fragmented and he “recall[s] only the gabardine hat and the stubby fingers that beckoned him” (49). Through montage, the event is broken into close-up images, and the sequence becomes metonymic of K’s inability to understand his past in its entirety because “[h]is memories all seemed to be of parts, not of wholes” (49). The same paradigm of fractured understanding repeats when K watches a grieving mother in the Jakkalsdrif camp and questions what he is learning, if anything, from this experience. His incomprehension is then expressed as a lack of cohesion between scenes:

It seemed to him that scene after scene of life was playing itself out before him and that the scenes all cohered. He had a presentiment of a single meaning upon which they were converging or threatening to converge, though he did not know yet what that might be. (89)

K suggests that to reach an understanding of himself, the scenes of his life need to cohere. He theorises an elusive “single meaning” that his life is working towards – a myth that montage deconstructs by breaking up events into discrete images. The analysis of cinematic visuality similarly presents facets of K’s psyche. The camera eye and mind’s eye expose a series of visual impressions. Although one can never build a cohesive image of K, the analysis of cinematic subjective states at least makes it possible to reveal more pieces of this dynamic, incomplete picture.

## Chapter Summary

The analysis in this chapter has shown how the intermedial influences on *Life & Times of Michael* have embedded channels of optical subjectivity within the novel’s third-person narration. Film-style projections allow one to see K’s mind’s eye while camera-eye focalisations present the narrative through his physical point of view. The study of these constructions provides a new way to access K’s subjectivity, allowing for greater elaboration on his motivations, emotional states, attachments, and ambivalence towards social connections. The visual thematics of chiaroscuro lighting furthermore reflect these concerns. Beneath K’s cool silence, his active mind grapples with past and present experiences that are rooted within his consciousness, and this is particularly evident in the numerous reflections on his childhood in Norenus and on his mother, who features strongly in his mind’s eye. The study of visuality counters the idea of K as someone who floats through life unhindered; one instead has glimpses into the frailty and fear of someone who seeks peace from himself and the world. He is, however, occasionally able to release himself from this inner turmoil and surrender wholeheartedly into experiencing the farm and its environs by slipping closer to the

mode of pure sight. The final line of the novel then suggests that he will return to the farm and again seek out this way of life.

The intense cinematic visuality that dominates *Michael K* reveals that film and photography were as fundamental to this novel as to *In the Heart of the Country*, suggesting that Coetzee's two Karoo novels can be understood as cinematographic counterparts. Although visually the open expanses of K's world are far removed from the involuted interiority of Magda's, both novels simulate a range of cinematic techniques, including chiaroscuro lighting, montage editing, a cinematic approach to the mind's eye, camera-eye narration, and accelerated motion. The extent to which film and photography have influenced these novels sets them apart from Coetzee's other prose works.

*Michael K* represents the convergence of Coetzee's engagements with visual media. It draws from the film aesthetic of *In the Heart of the Country* as well as its adapted screenplay. The influence of the latter is evident in the remnants of slugline structures and the naturalistic approach to the Karoo landscape. All three of these texts are impacted by camera work and chiaroscuro stylistics. These aesthetic choices also originate in Coetzee's engagements with analogue photography. *Michael K*, *In the Heart of the Country*, and Coetzee's adapted screenplay thus indicate some of the important ways in which Coetzee's early photographic practices have inflected his prose. Throughout this chapter and prior analysis, cinematography has been explored as part of the intersection of film and photography. In the next chapter, I will consider photography as an independent form of creative expression, examining how the processes of capturing and developing photographs are encoded into Coetzee's prose.

# Chapter 4: The Dark Side of the Lens: Becoming the Photograph

## Chapter Overview

The introductory chapter of this thesis discussed Coetzee's interest in the narrative dimension of photography. Throughout his fictions, photographs hold sway over the minds and hearts of his characters as they try to grasp the story within the frame. In this chapter, I propose to demonstrate a unique way in which photography continues to inflect Coetzee's prose by looking at how the technical aspects of photographic processing and capture are encoded into the narratives of three fictions: *Dusklands* (in the first novella "The Vietnam Project"), *In the Heart of the Country*, and *Slow Man*. These narratives are set worlds apart and create diverse contexts in which to explore the photographic medium. *In the Heart of the Country* shows a Karoo farm in the early twentieth century (circa 1910 according to the screenplay). *Dusklands* is set in America during the Vietnam War and depicts military specialist Eugene Dawn in the process of compiling a report intended to advance propaganda efforts in South-East Asia. *Slow Man* takes place in Australia in the early 2000s and follows the story of retired photographer Paul Rayment in the aftermath of a devastating bicycle accident that leads to the amputation of his leg. The technical processes of analogue photography, it will be shown, are simulated in these novels during traumatic events that trigger a transformation whereby Dawn, Magda, and Rayment become like the figures in their personal photographs. Dawn's nervous breakdown and Rayment's accident will be examined as models of photographic capture that result in Dawn's resemblance to the ghostly subjects from his war photographs, while Rayment becomes a grim reflection of the nineteenth-century



photographs he collects. The study of *In the Heart of the Country* will consider how the novel simulates the image of a developing print when Magda, in a moment of surrender to her father's dominance, begins to imitate a prior conceptualisation of her mother as a black-and-white photograph. Unlike Dawn and Rayment, however, she escapes the fate of becoming the photograph.

The above, complex metaphorical constructions are founded on ideas that are evident in several of Coetzee's other fictions. The following chapter overview will place the primary texts of *Dusklands*, *In the Heart of the Country*, and *Slow Man* within this broader pattern of photographic analogy, first outlining how Coetzee uses photographs as tools of characterisation and then discussing the staging of capture within narrative events (the simulation of photographic development is isolated to *In the Heart of the Country*). I will also consider several associated ideas on the nature of the photographic image, examining how the photograph is often approached as a site of metaphysical imaginings. The image is suggested to hold a three-dimensional living world that exceeds the perceived boundaries of the photographic frame. This conceptualisation of the image resists ideas of photographic stasis and containment and thus creates the context for imagining relationships between image and onlooker that are unrestricted by divisions of space and time, which ultimately results in perceiving the novelistic character as a photographic figure. Throughout Coetzee's prose, his treatment of photographs evinces his primary appreciation for "their power over the human heart" (*Dusklands* Ravan ed.). In his fictions, photographs elicit strong, emotive responses that articulate weighty themes and shape narrative elements, beginning with their role in characterisation.

The methodology of photographic characterisation often references photographic genres. In *Elizabeth Costello*, Elizabeth imagines mimicking a type of war photograph in order to express empathy. She is shaken after delivering a lecture in which she criticises a

fellow author for depicting the hanging of conspirators against Hitler. She shuts herself in a bathroom cubicle and thinks that if she were to undress and kneel in front of a mirror, she “would look much like the women in those intimate, over-intimate photographs from the European war, . . . who knelt naked at the lip of the trench into which they would, in the next minute, the next second, tumble, dead or dying with a bullet to the brain” (178). Elizabeth references a familiar image trope, and this generalised representation of suffering enables her to claim a broader kinship with war victims. “She has a feeling for those dead sisters,” and pictures becoming like them, establishing a sympathetic connection by reflecting their photographic image.

This method of mirroring a photograph is often used to convey a character’s obscurity and elusiveness. Dawn, for example, draws from the stereotypical aesthetic of surveillance photographs in order to describe a stranger that he believes brushed against him in order to steal his briefcase:

I would not mistake the face. I know it well: if not that one, then the genre to which it belongs. It belongs in long-focus crowd photographs, enlarged till the blur of its cropped hair and black eyeholes emerges among the thugs and agents circling the back of the crowd. (47)

Dawn articulates the man’s face as one that belongs in the genre of “long-focus crowd photographs,” which are enlarged in the hopes of revealing the subject’s identity. The face remains a blur, but the man is recognisable enough in the role of agent “circling the back of the crowd” to be menacing. The surveillance image conveys Dawn’s paranoia as he remembers this incident within the familiar conspiracy-driven narrative of the lone government employee out of favour with his superiors and now under the watchful eyes of their agents. Ultimately though, the man in the image and the story behind this encounter will remain a mystery.

This approach to articulating an unknowable persona through a blurred image is also found in *Age of Iron* when Elizabeth Curren suggests that her stern and inscrutable companion Vercueil would escape photographic representation:

He is like one of those half-mythical creatures that come out in photographs only as blurs, vague forms disappearing into the undergrowth that could be man or beast or merely a bad spot on the emulsion: unproved, unattested. Or disappearing over the edge of the picture, leaving behind in the shutter trap an arm or a leg or the back of a head. (193)

Vercueil is associated with the type of inconclusive photograph that sparks tales of monsters and myth: to some, the image is proof of the supernatural, but to others, the figure within is merely explicable as a technical fault (“a bad spot on the emulsion”). Alternatively, the camera would only be able to catch part of him “in the shutter trap,” and he would ultimately evade the snare. The photograph would show only a teasing, ghostly trace of that which is unidentifiable. This use of a blurred aesthetic recalls Michael K’s mythical ancestor in the shapeless, grey dress. This type of indistinct image will also figure prominently in later analysis of *In the Heart of the Country*, which will examine how the figure of an unfocused, grey image signifies Magda’s deceased mother, who she can no longer remember and has never seen in an actual photograph.

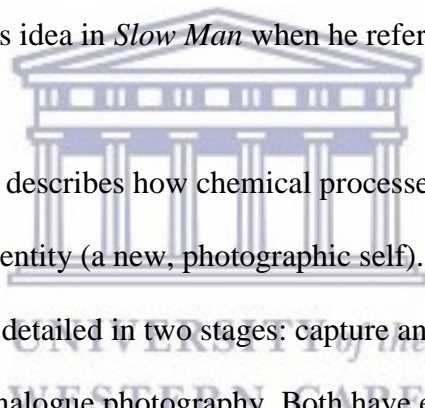
Connected to these ideas of character representation is that of transformation: the photographic subject is transformed through photographic processes into a new self. (This change will be studied in Rayment, Dawn, and Magda). In his commentary on the photography collection *A Vision of the Past* (1992), Coetzee suggests that the photographic subject undergoes an identity shift. In many of the nineteenth-century images he examines, Coetzee observes a stillness created by subjects who “are strikingly conscious of themselves as objects of the gaze of the lens and strikingly composed before that gaze” (*Stranger Shores*

345). Due to technical limitations, they were forced to hold their poses for long periods, which affected their bearing. Coetzee suggests that during this practice, the subject becomes another self that is transferred into the photograph:

In the interval between this command [Keep still for the camera!] and the click of the shutter, the subject had nothing to do but compose himself, becoming a self-for-the-camera whose trace, formed by the lens, given substance by chemical processes, would re-emerge into the world as a photograph. (344-45)

The subject changes into “a self-for-the-camera whose trace” is “formed by the lens.” The camera creates an image of him that is then “given substance by chemical processes” and fixed into the photograph. The subject rematerializes as a photograph – a new and tangible object. Coetzee expands on this idea in *Slow Man* when he references analogue processes in more detail.

In *Slow Man*, Rayment describes how chemical processes affix the subject into the image, thereby creating a new entity (a new, photographic self). The creation of substance through chemical processes is detailed in two stages: capture and development. Rayment and Coetzee share an affinity for analogue photography. Both have experience in darkroom work. Rayment has a “preference for black and white and shades of grey” (65), and Coetzee expresses a similar sentiment about film, referring to “the power of the large-screen image, particularly in black and white” and adding parenthetically that “color, by comparisons, seems to [him] simply too overwhelming and diffuse” (“Homage” 5). Coetzee’s assertion that the subject’s trace is “given substance by chemical processes” is also repeated through Rayment: “The camera, with its power of taking in light and turning it into substance, has always seemed to him more a metaphysical than a mechanical device” (65). Light is central to his appreciation of the medium, and he marvels at “the old magic of light-sensitive emulsions” (65), observing in one historical image the “distribution of particles of silver that



records the way the sunlight fell, one day in 1855, on the faces of two long-dead Irishwomen” (177). The camera is imbued with an almost otherworldly (a *magical* and *metaphysical*) power that can capture and hold a piece of light. This moment is then created anew during processing, which is detailed by Rayment when he remembers being a darkroom technician:

. . . his greatest pleasure was always in darkroom work. As the ghostly image emerged beneath the surface of the liquid, as veins of darkness on the paper began to knit together and grow visible, he would sometimes experience a little shiver of ecstasy, as though he were present at the day of creation. (65)

He witnesses the figure manifesting before his eyes, and he shivers in joy at what seems to be nothing short of pure creation. The photograph is miraculous on a cellular level: “Each [print] becomes a new thing, a new real, new in the world, a new original” (245). The photographic medium facilitates an almost metaphysical transformation during both development and, as was noted earlier, photographic capture.

The narrative device of staging an event on photographic capture is evident in Coetzee’s screenplay adaptation and in *Slow Man* (in a brief scene that is not part of the main analysis of the novel). In the screenplay, capture is simulated as Magda’s father sits drinking his morning coffee: “While he drinks she stands behind him. For an instant the two compose themselves, as if for a formal portrait” (sc. 15).<sup>16</sup> The term *portrait* is used in the screenplay to refer specifically to a photograph. Magda’s bedroom wall has “an oval portrait of a woman in Victorian-style dress” (sc. 12), and she later finds “a photograph, a smaller copy of [this] portrait” (sc. 102). In the kitchen, she and her father face forward and “compose themselves” as if posing for a camera. This moment lasts for only “an instant,” and the scene then ends with the description “The light has grown brighter,” which is suggestive of a camera flash. In *Slow Man*, Rayment and his female companion are also described as posing for a photograph. Elizabeth Costello arranges a sexual encounter between him and this woman, who he once

photographed but cannot remember; for the encounter, he is blindfolded so that he cannot see her facial disfigurement. As they sit beside one another on the sofa nervously, Rayment observes:

A minute passes. Nothing more happens. A one-legged man and a partially disrobed woman waiting for what? For the click of a camera shutter? Australian Gothic.

Matilda and her bloke, worn down by a lifetime of waltzing, parts of their bodies falling off or falling out, face the photographer one last time. (108)

They hold their pose as if waiting “[f]or the click of a camera shutter.” The phrase “Australian Gothic” is an intermedial reference to Grant Wood’s *American Gothic*, a famous painting of a farmer and his daughter that is striking in part for its “rigid frontal arrangement of the figures” as they face forward (“American Gothic”). Rayment and the woman similarly hold a stern pose to “face the photographer one last time.” They resemble the self-conscious, nineteenth-century subjects who are “strikingly composed before [the lens’s] gaze” (*Stranger Shores* 345). Rayment too regards this stance in the historical image of miners (dressed in Sunday clothing) who “confront the camera with the look of grave confidence” (48). The scenes from Coetzee’s screenplay and *Slow Man* that simulate photographic capture take place in a three-dimensional narrative space that is part of a sequence. The same type of moving scene is observed within the photographic frame.

The photograph, as noted in the introductory chapter of this thesis, always shows the present tense and cannot be perceived as static by a spectator receptive to its narrative dimension. The figures are not frozen but rather keep still. Baetens and Bleyen explain this idea through Robert Frank’s famous photograph of a covered car in a parking lot: “One could convert the notion of immobility in that of ‘immobilization’ and therefore of ‘a moment of rest between two more dynamic moments’” (168). The figures in Coetzee’s photographs similarly hold a pose before their lives are shown to resume. This perspective of the



photograph is striking in “Nietverloren.” The story begins with the narrator reminiscing about his childhood visits to the family farm (suggestive of Coetzee’s visits to Voëlfontein), and he remembers his fascination with what he eventually discovers is a threshing floor. While paging through photographs years later he finds “a [1920s] photograph of two young men with rifles, off on a hunt” (30), and he is elated to see the threshing floor in the background. He then perceives this image within a greater narrative:

If the photograph could come to life, if the two grinning young men were to pick up their rifles and disappear over the rim of the picture. . . . [t]he man with the hat, and the two donkeys, would resume their tread round and round the threshing floor, a tread that would, over the years, compact the earth so tightly that nothing would ever grow there. (30-31)

He creates the vivid image of a photograph “come to life.” The men leave the frame and the donkeys “resume their tread.” He then envisions how this action will continue into the future, until the land is forever changed. He also perceives the more immediate effects: “They would trample the wheat, and the wind . . . would lift the chaff and whirl it away . . .” (31). Then the grain “would be gathered,” cleaned, ground, and baked into bread (31). The photograph’s frame is therefore a window into a full and living space. In *Age of Iron*, Elizabeth Curren is also attuned to the three-dimensional world beyond the frame. As she looks over her childhood photograph, she asks, “Who, outside the picture, leaning on their rakes, leaning on their spades, waiting to get back to work, lean also against the edge of the rectangle, bending it, bursting it in?” (111). She furthermore calls attention to the photographer, asking, “And who holds the camera? Whose formless shadow leans toward my mother and her two offspring across the tilled bed?” (112). She envisions the space behind the camera and around the scene while emphasising the present tense of the image and the idea of immobilization. The men are “leaning” and “waiting,” and the photographer “holds” the camera while his

shadow “leans” forward. There is a great deal of tension (potential energy) as the people in and around this scene hold their positions.

In their representations of space, both *Age of Iron* and “Nietverloren” raise the ethical question of selection in photographic representation. What the photographer excludes, whether intentionally or subconsciously, is significant. Coetzee, as noted in the introduction, addresses the farm novel’s “silence about the place of the black man in the pastoral idyll” (“Farm novel” 17). “Nietverloren” calls attention to this exclusion by noting that the man and donkeys are “not supposed to be in the picture” (30). Their presence is thus accidental and unwanted. Elizabeth Curren similarly calls attention to the unseen labourers “waiting to get back to work” (111). Her awareness of these men is considered representative of a greater awareness (she hopes) encompassing late apartheid South Africa as she imagines that thousands of photographs across the country “have become negatives again, a new kind of negative in which we begin to see what used to lie outside the frame, occulted” (112). The camera excludes that which society wishes to ignore. This idea is also raised in Coetzee’s essay “Into the Dark Chamber” (1986) in which he discusses the apartheid prohibition against photographing prisons, “as though it is decreed that the camera lens must shatter at the moment it is trained on certain sites; as though the passerby shall have no means of confirming that what he saw . . . was not a mirage or a bad dream” (*Doubling* 361).

Apart from exclusion, there is also the ethical question of what should remain unphotographed. There is a selfish, rapacious side to the camera that Coetzee often explores. In *Elizabeth Costello*, Elizabeth asserts that “the artist should not invade the deaths of others,” which she feels is a reasonable “position in a world where routinely the wounded and the dying have the lenses of cameras poked into their faces” (174). The camera imposes on their suffering for its own gains. A similar function is evident in the camera’s role as voyeur. In *Diary of a Bad Year*, JC’s friend writes about a prohibition against cameras in public

places, which is supposed “to protect children from the predatory attentions of paedophiles” (176). In this scenario, there is a danger associated with the camera that comes from its ability to steal someone’s image. This type of theft is presented in *Age of Iron* when Elizabeth Curren describes Vercueil’s identity card: “He looks like a prisoner torn from the darkness of a cell, thrust into a room full of blinding lights, shoved against a wall, shouted at to stand still. His image raped from him, taken by force” (193). The violent imagery emphasises how Vercueil was the unwilling subject, his image “taken by force.” The identity photograph has a further, sinister implication as it relates to the state’s relentless control of its subjects’ liberties and motions. Curren reiterates the idea of the camera as a thief when she looks at her childhood photograph and asks, “Am I merely squinting into the sun or, like the savages of Borneo, do I have a shadowy sense that the camera will rob me of my soul?” (110-11). She even extends the camera’s role as enemy by suggesting it harboured her illness (the crab): “[T]hey pressed the button, and the crab sprang out and entered me” (112). In all of the above scenarios, the click of the shutter connotes violence, and the experience of being photographed has damaging implications.

These darker associations of photography will be central in this chapter to the analysis of the three primary texts. *Dusklands* will be examined first, showing how Dawn’s interactions with his war images drive him into a nervous breakdown. The final change in his life is then staged on capture, and he comes to resemble the figures from his images in all their ghostly pain. A similar pattern will then be explored in *Slow Man*. The moment of capture, however, will be considered as beginning the novel and ushering Rayment into a ghostly second world where he exists as a reflection of the figures from his historical images.

Analysis will then explore several photographic analogies in *In the Heart of the Country*, beginning with Magda’s characterisation of her mother. This initial analogy is based on a scene in which Magda describes her mother as “a faint grey frail” woman (sec. 3).

Chiara Briganti also views this imagery as a photographic representation: “When [Magda] reminisces about her mother, she casts herself into the role of orphan gazing lovingly at the mother’s portrait and conjures up a suitably sepia-colored portrait . . .” (38). Briganti’s study, however, is not intermedial, and she instead adopts a psychoanalytical reading of the novel and considers this image in terms of representing literary tropes. She neither analyses the photograph closely nor explores the associations that I will make with the photographic medium as well as with Coetzee’s other fictions. I will also explore Magda’s mother’s characterisation as a black-and-white rather than sepia photograph and examine how this vision is part of a greater pattern whereby Magda reflects her own narrative through photographic visuality.

This grey picture will then be incorporated into an extensive metaphorical configuration whereby Magda’s father is characterised as a photographic negative, and the relationship of Magda’s parents is then modelled on the technical relationship of negative and print. Magda is furthermore caught between them, and as she confronts her own desire to surrender to her father’s will, she undergoes a moment of inanition that resembles a figure manifesting during photographic development.

In the dire circumstance that Magda, Dawn, and Rayment face, the photograph’s destructive power is brought to the fore. For Dawn, who will be studied first, the image precipitates the loss of his freedom, his identity, and his sanity.

## **Collateral Damage**

In *Dusklands*, the simulation of photographic capture accompanies the final stage in Dawn’s nervous breakdown, which is precipitated by exposure to the disturbing war photographs of his research. At first, he responds to the subject matter of these images irreverently: he

sardonically labels the image of a sex act between a US soldier and a Vietnamese woman as “Father Makes Merry with Children” (13), and to the image of U. S. soldiers posing with the heads of Vietnamese fighters, he merely remarks that there is “something ridiculous about a severed head” (15). Yet soon after this comment, his mood changes dramatically as he examines two enlarged film stills of a prisoner in a tiger cage (a concrete cell with bars across the ceiling). The term *still* has a different meaning in this analysis than in prior chapters, where stills were examined as photographic images used in a film. In contrast, Dawn’s stills are images taken from a film. The following paragraphs of analysis will show how Dawn’s imagination animates the narrative behind these photographs, which then unfolds before him in an emotionally scarring manner. Through his engagement with these prints, Dawn opens up a channel between himself and the “mad floating people of the [prison] camps” (17), and their world subsequently spills over into his dreams. Overwhelmed, he abducts his four-year-old son and stabs the child while being arrested. This scene will be examined as an event modelled on photographic capture which initiates Dawn’s transition into the same pitiable state as those men from the prison. In the end, Dawn too is incarcerated, placed in a psychiatric institution. Although he has never fought in combat, the trauma of war appears to have reached him through his photographs.

Dawn’s exposure to war imagery also represents a greater phenomenon visited on ordinary people through the media. The Vietnam War was a highly-publicised conflict that entered the lives of civilians through print and television. In *Youth*, John encounters this public display of war photography: “In a photograph on the front page of the Guardian a Vietnamese soldier in American-style uniform stares helplessly into a sea of flames. ‘RAIDERS WREAK HAVOC AT U.S. BASE,’ reads the headline” (271). Dawn receives photographs through his military work, yet similarly disturbing images already pervaded media coverage at the time, and Coetzee was exposed to these while living in America.

Kannemeyer discusses this period in Coetzee's life when "the US was involved in a military offensive in Vietnam, with constant air strikes on the capital, Hanoi, which he and [his wife] Philippa witnessed every night on television" (160). In a 1974 interview, Coetzee comments on the effect of watching these airstrikes: "The violence erupted at you, the massiveness of thousands of tons of high explosives dropped. The war was an avenue through which a lot of pent-up aggression, sadism, let itself out, not only on battlefields but in people's living rooms" (qtd. in Kannemeyer 160). Photographer Martha Rosler reflects on how this media flood ushered in a new cultural phenomenon:

[Vietnam] was the first living room war, where we saw timely footage of battles and huts on fire and so on every evening at dinner hour, broadcast by a television into our living rooms. And I was absolutely traumatized by this, thinking how are we supposed to eat our dinner watching a war?

Rosler addresses this exposure in her photomontage series "House beautiful" (1967-72) by inserting scenes from the war within images of beautiful, safe modernist homes, thus representing the media invasion visited on them in nightly broadcasts. When Dawn's psychiatrists propose that the guilt from his work led to psychosis, he calls their attention to this living room war: "Guilt was entering our homes through the TV cables. We ate our meals in the glare of the beast's glass eye from the darkest corner. Good food was being dropped down our throats into puddles of corrosion. It was unnatural to bear such suffering" (48). Dawn suggests an internalisation of the destruction witnessed on television: the food is "dropped" down their throats like bombs, and like the landscape bathed in Napalm, they hold seas of corrosion within themselves. Dawn's collection of photographs, therefore, are part of this greater spectacle of bringing home the war.

Yet it is through photographs rather than television that Dawn is ultimately pushed into psychosis. Dawn has a propensity to identify with visual media, such as when he uses the



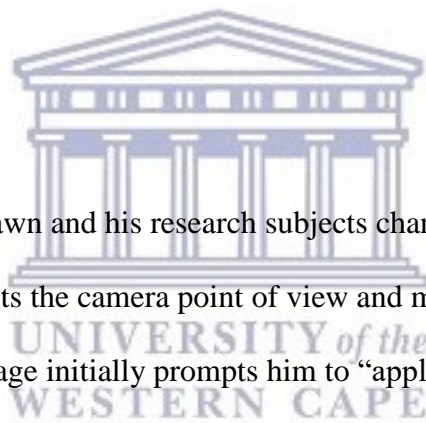
surveillance photograph trope to articulate his brush with the strange man. Also, just before his arrest, he tries to assess his situation by asking, “Out of what movie is it?” (41). He is particularly connected to his collection of photographs, and while working on his report, he has faith that even in his most uninspired moments “these pictures could be relied on to give [his] imagination the slight electric impulse that is all it needs to set it free again” (13). When Dawn examines the tiger cage still, the photograph sparks his imagination and catalyses the destabilisation of barriers between him and his photographic subjects. He loses the detached perspective of the military strategist and instead develops a personal affinity with these photographic figures.

### *Breaking Through*

The disconnection between Dawn and his research subjects changes when, while watching a military documentary, he adopts the camera point of view and meets the eyes of a prisoner through its gaze. The war footage initially prompts him to “applaud [him]self for having kept away from the physical Vietnam: the insolence of the people, the filth and flies and no doubt stench . . .” (16). His remarks are initially contemptuous, but his attention is then drawn to the camera itself and his mood shifts:

But when in this film the camera passes through the gate of the walled prison courtyard and I see the rows of concrete pits with their mesh grates, it bursts upon me anew that the world still takes the trouble to expose itself to me in images, and I shake with fresh excitement. (16)

The manner in which “the camera passes through the gate” suggests that this is a handheld shot, and therefore the viewer is more attuned to the human presence behind the lens. When Dawn aligns himself with this perspective, he is no longer the disengaged viewer watching



images on a screen but rather identifies with the camera: as it enters the gate, he *sees* a world that chooses “to expose itself to [him]” (to the camera). His emotions are stirred, and he “shake[s] with fresh excitement.” When an officer then prods a prisoner through the bars, Dawn continues to associate himself with the camera point of view, first saying, “We come closer and peer in,” and then noting, “The man in the cage turns languid eyes on us.” Dawn then fixates on piercing through this man’s gaze as he examines photographic enlargements of the prisoner’s face. When he is no longer watching a film but rather pouring over a photograph, the prison scene elicits a strong emotional response from him.

Through enlarged images, Dawn begins to close the psychological distance between himself and the prisoner. Unlike an on-screen image, a photograph is an object that can be held, touched, brought close, and scrutinised for long periods of time. Magnification already brings the man nearer to Dawn as he examines “a 12” X 12” blowup of the prisoner,” detailing his appearance:

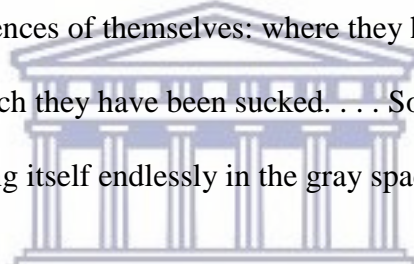
He has raised himself on one elbow, lifting his face toward the blurred grid of the wire. Dazzled by the sky, he sees as yet only the looming outlines of his spectators. His face is thin. From one eye glints a point of light; the other is in the dark of the cage. (16)

The bars in the foreground are blurred because the camera is focusing on the man’s face, which he lifts towards the onlookers. Dawn starts to form a connection with this prisoner by adopting his point of view, picturing how “he sees as yet only the looming outlines of his spectators.” The scene in the tiger cage is similar to the setup Elizabeth imagines for Vercueil’s identity photograph, which depicts him “like a prisoner torn from the darkness of a cell, thrust into a room full of blinding lights, shoved against a wall, shouted at to stand still” (*Age of Iron* 193). The man in the tiger cage is similarly forced to face the camera lens, blinded by light as he lifts his face out of the darkness of the cell.

The composition of this image reflects Coetzee's interest in the photograph's connection to reality. The man's reaction is authentic because, seeing only shapes looming above him, he is unaware of the camera. Furthermore, the "point of light" reflected in his one eye is accidental. Dawn is drawn to these elements of the real and explores the spot of light in "a second print, of the face alone in greater magnification." (As a child, Coetzee incidentally had an enlarger in his darkroom.) Dawn looks intensely at each aspect of the face: "The glint in the right eye has become a diffuse white patch; shades of dark gray mark the temple, the right eyebrow, the hollow of the cheek" (16). The "diffuse white patch" and "shades of grey" in the image are reminiscent of the blurred surveillance photograph that Dawn will later describe. Such enlargements frustrate the viewer's desire to explore the subject. While more of the prisoner's face is visible through magnification, the image's clarity is diminished, and thus the man remains masked.

At this point, Dawn turns to the tactile nature of the photograph in order to read the image. He closes his eyes and slides "[his] fingertips over the cool, odorless surface of the print." His sensory experience of the photograph, heightened through closed eyes, creates an intimate encounter as he smells and touches the photograph, feeling its coolness. He iterates his desire to enter the image: "The glint in the eye . . . is bland and opaque under my fingers, yielding no passage into the interior of this obscure but indubitable man" (16-17). The terms *obscure* and *indubitable* convey the tension created in the photographic enlargement as it both resists and invites closer inspection. The point of light "is bland and opaque," impervious to his efforts, while the solidity of the print substantiates the irrefutable presence of a man that Dawn wants to find "passage into" (a mind he wants to decipher). Dawn persists, saying, "Under the persistent pressure of my imagination, acute and morbid in the night, it may yet yield" (17). His faith in the photograph's ability to set his imagination free is then rewarded as the photographic narrative opens up before him.

The world within the photograph exposes itself to Dawn and extends far beyond the scene in the frame. Immediately after *yield*, a vivid narrative of psychological torture unfolds: “The brothers of men who stood out against proven tortures and died holding their silence are now broken down with drugs and a little clever confusion. They talk freely, holding their interrogators’ hands and opening their hearts like children” (17). Dawn envisions prisoners broken down into pitiful cases. Unlike their brothers who “died holding their silence,” these men are like children, “holding their interrogators’ hands” as they confess freely. They are then shipped to rehabilitation camps where they “hide in corners” and walk along the fences muttering to themselves. The severity of their psychosis is then suggested through the aesthetic of a black-and-white photograph:


 They are ghosts or absences of themselves: where they had once been is now only a black hole through which they have been sucked. . . . Something is floating up from their bowels and voiding itself endlessly in the gray space in their head. Their memory is numb. (17)

In the enlargement of the tiger cage, the prisoner’s face is cast in “shades of dark grey [that] mark the temple, the right eyebrow, the hollow of the cheek” (16). In the above extract, the men have a “gray space in their head,” as if internalising the monochrome of the image to represent their lifelessness. “They are ghosts or absences of themselves,” feeble traces of who they were. The concept of absence is often associated with photographs in a much broader sense. Sontag notably writes of the photograph as “both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence” (*On Photography*, “In Plato’s Cave”). Her description runs counter to Coetzee’s perspective of the photograph’s substance, its authentic presence, which is held in a present-tense narrative. Within *Dusklands*, the photographic absence refers to a loss of essence within the photographic subject: they are “absences of themselves,” their identity drained from their

being as if sucked through “a black hole.” In the world of shadows, these men are moving shades of themselves, and these ghosts soon possess Dawn’s mind.

Through his metaphysical imaginings, Dawn opens a channel between himself and the men in his photographs. At first, he imagines them aware of his gaze: “They know only that there was a rupture, in time, in space, . . . that they are here, now, in the after, that from somewhere they are being waved to” (17). Conventional notions of time and space are broken and he is now looking at them directly, breaching the present tense of the photograph. He is shaken by their presence, and they become “the occasion of all [his] woe” (17). The figures then invade his dreams. In troubled sleep, he watches them drift out of their frames: “Faces from my photographs of Vietnam come floating toward me out of hazy matt backgrounds, smiling soldiers, stolid prisoners . . .” (34). Yet he does not recoil and instead tries to connect with them. “In euphoric gestures of liberation,” he reaches out to them but they slip from his grasp; he then repeats this gesture as he drifts in and out of consciousness:

The faces come back, they loom before my inward eye, the smiling teeth, the hooded gaze; I stretch my hand, the ghosts retreat, my heart weeps in its narrow slot. . . . Out of their holy fire the images sing to me, drawing me on and on into their thin phantom world.

They are no longer mere objects of a physical gaze but part of his psyche as they “loom across [his] inward eye” (a term recalling the mind’s eye of Magda and Michael K). As if urging him to follow, “the ghosts retreat,” luring him “into their thin phantom world.” The word *thin* shows how easy it would be for Dawn to slip into their realm, which is only a whisper away, and he desperately wants to grasp them. Their rejection of him is thus painful, and “[his] heart weeps.” The figures he once mocked are now sacred, swimming in “holy fire,” and they have power over him. This “holy fire” image is repeated in *Michael K*, when the MO imagines K’s mother in a fiery halo as she calls K into the other side. Prior to the

moment when Dawn's still image yields to his imagination and reveals the narrative of the camps, he is cautious of imbuing the photograph with an aura, saying, "The glint in the [prisoner's] eye, which in a moment luckily never to arrive will through the camera look into my eyes . . ." (16). This feared moment, he reveals, comes during his dreams, "The man in the tiger cage flashes a black eye at me" (34). Dawn will soon mirror these mad floating people when he crosses over into a world of shadows, becoming the ghost of himself. This moment of transformation, which occurs during his arrest, is styled on photographic capture.

### *Capture*

The police incursion into Dawn's motel room is a psychological and visual assault, and Dawn relays this episode in a manner that evokes photographic capture. "[I]n the middle of a dark room," Dawn stands holding his four-year-old son (41). The door bursts open, the light is switched on, and he is dazed by this light that is "much too bright for people used to the dark." The glare silences him and "all motion stops in the bright light," as if he is immobilized under a camera flash. The setup resembles the prisoner who is dazed by the blinding sky. "I no longer have to think so fast," Dawn says, and he focuses instead on the details of the man approaching him: his voice, his clothes, "and the pieces of metal, buckles and badges, that flash" (41). The scene is a visual manifestation of Temple's comment about Coetzee's mode of writing in *Dusklands*: "He has the ability to halt his story, as it were, in mid-frame, to zoom the narrative in from a great height to capture and hold the single moment" ("J. M Coetzee: Major Talent"). While Temple is referring to a general, cinematic style, the scene in the motel shows a more literal representation as the action is stalled, the single moment is held, and Dawn zooms in on the details of the setting, noticing the pieces of metal on the officer's uniform. The tableau in the room is staged like a scene within a



photographic frame. The figures hold still as a bright light flashes over them; they are immobilized during “a moment of rest between two more dynamic moments” (Baetens and Bleyen 168).

During this pause, Dawn experiences a shift in consciousness that marks his transition into a new state of being. The impact of this event triggers a dissociative state as he senses himself “beginning to drift” (41). His proprioception diminishes, rendering his body as a foreign object with lips that are “two cold parted slabs” and a tongue that is “a thing” to be manoeuvred. He feels as if “[his] consciousness is shooting backwards” out of his head while the people in the room “are growing smaller” and “also tilting” (42). Because of his numbed mental faculties, Dawn articulates his experience through laboured details. After a page of these heightened prose descriptions, the man continues to approach Dawn as if no time has passed. The real time of this event is then contrasted against Dawn’s perspective as he reflects on the scene:

The man is still walking towards me. I have lost all heart and left the room and gone to sleep even and missed certain words and come back and here the man is still walking across the carpet towards me. How fortunate. They are indeed right about the word *flash*. (42)

While Dawn has experienced several stages of unconsciousness, his dissociation from reality was only a mere flash in external time. The term *flash* refers to the rapidity of this experience while also suggesting that the flare of light can be viewed as a camera flash. Through his altered perception, time is stalled but then resumes as he becomes aware of the man approaching him. As in “Nietverloren,” the scene continues, and immediately after the term *flash*, Dawn stabs his son and is arrested; his life is then altered irrecoverably. Moments before, while standing affixed in the glare, Dawn passes through the liminal space between freedom and capture, between who he was and who he becomes.

Dawn's transformation renders him like the figures from his photographs as he figuratively enters their ghostly realm and becomes an echo of himself. During the motel room incident, Dawn narrates his mental and physical changes through the same language and imagery used to describe the "mad floating people of the camps" whose minds are numbed (17). Dawn too feels himself floating, drifting from his body as it begins "to go numb" (41). The vortex trope also connects Dawn to the men. They stand before "a black hole through which they have been sucked" (17) while he feels as if "[his] consciousness is shooting backwards" out of his head (42). Like the prisoners, who are "absences of themselves," Dawn reflects on his absence during the event, saying, "I was not myself. In the profoundest of senses, it was not the real I who stabbed Martin" (44). Dawn's response to the police officer also links him to the prisoners, who open up completely and become like children "holding their interrogators' hands" (17). Dawn's affections are similarly misplaced as he reverts into a childlike state and remarks on the officer's "kind, confident voice that [he] [is] coming to love" (41). When he is subsequently institutionalised, he becomes an almost comically eager patient, "a model of friendly co-operation" (45).

Yet Dawn also diverts his psychiatrists' attempts to uncover the root of his breakdown, nurturing his secret in the belief that it "makes [him] desirable" (48), and he will thus remain "a cipher to them" (45). The term *cipher*, although more commonly seen as either a code or a key to a code, also means "[a] zero; a figure 0" ("Cipher," def. 2). Like Magda, he is the O that cannot be understood within patriarchal discourses, and he resists his doctors' attempts to psychoanalyse him. Dawn will remain an absence of himself, a zero that cannot be restored. Apart from his own interference, he is unable to heal because he remains deeply connected to the figures from his photographs.

## *Aftermath*

In the final pages of Dawn's narrative, he remains possessed by the photographic subjects who are "the worst of [his] tormentors" (48). Although his psychiatric treatment keeps them from his dreams, he fears the day that he will be outside the safety of the hospital and they will return to torment him:

But what will I do . . . when they come flashing their black eyes and their serene smiles? I exert myself, I span in all my psychic force to call them up, for I must face them, face them down, exorcize them while they are weak and I am strong. If I had my photographs to remind me I would find it easier. (49)

The "black eyes" belong to the men from the camps while the "serene smiles" belong to the disembodied heads. Dawn tries "to call them up" so that he can "exorcise" these demons from within himself. But he needs his photographs to free his mind, to spark his imagination. His full "psychic force" is insufficient compared to the power of the photograph. Perhaps he will ultimately join their unholy fire and "see them in hell" (48). Dawn inadvertently predicts this fate when he watches the military documentary and observes how the prisoners are "watching the camera with naïve curiosity, too unconscious to see it as ruler of their destiny" (16). This camera provides the visual material that will direct Dawn's fate. It therefore rules the destiny of those on both sides of the lens. The devastating impact of this media exposure on Dawn furthermore reflects the trauma of a generation exposed to the living room war. For Dawn and many others, these images will never be exorcised.

In summation, the power of the photograph triggers Dawn's mental breakdown, and he becomes the absence of himself (a zero), thereby reflecting the figures from his photographs. This significant and perhaps irreversible shift in his life mirrors the act of photographic capture as he crosses into the deathly realm of the photograph. Although

medication holds his tormentors at bay momentarily, there are no longer any boundaries between him and these ghosts who wait to reassert themselves. They are living entities lurking within him. The next section of analysis will consider a similar pattern of capture and transformation in *Slow Man*. Unlike *Dusklands*, which chronicles Dawn's life before, during, and after the simulation of capture, *Slow Man* deploys this photographic analogy from the beginning of the novel.

## Slow Death

The turning point in Rayment's life begins with the first sentence of the novel as a car collides with his bicycle. He lapses thereafter into a morose state of regret and fatalism. While in the hospital, he laments being childless, thinking himself frivolous because "[h]e will leave no trace behind, not even an heir to carry on his name" (19). He afterwards becomes infatuated with Marijana, his nurse and housekeeper, and tries to help and befriend her three children but always remains the outsider. Through a metafictional twist, he meets the apparent author of his story, Elizabeth Costello. Rayment frequently engages with photography by recalling his work as a professional photographer and by looking over his collection of nineteenth-century photographs, particularly those by Antoine Fauchery. Rayment, it will be shown, is characterised as a reflection of these images, with the moment of his accident representing photographic capture. Although he reminisces warmly about "the old magic of light-sensitive emulsions" (65), depression ultimately overshadows his life, and he becomes preoccupied with death. When he looks at his photographs, he accordingly sees "images of the dead" (51): "dead miners" (50) and "two long-dead Irishwomen" (177).

During a particularly morbid reflection, Rayment suggests that his fate resides with the photographic figures in a disturbing series of images. Four months after his accident,

when his nurse has left him and he is in a dishevelled, sickly state, he remembers seeing “photographs of patients from the Salpêtrière,” who suffer from severe mental illnesses and terminal diseases, and he recalls how “he at once recognised in them soul mates, cousins who had gone ahead down a road he would one day follow” (164). Rayment implies that he, like Dawn, will “one day follow” the figures of the photograph into their gloomy world.

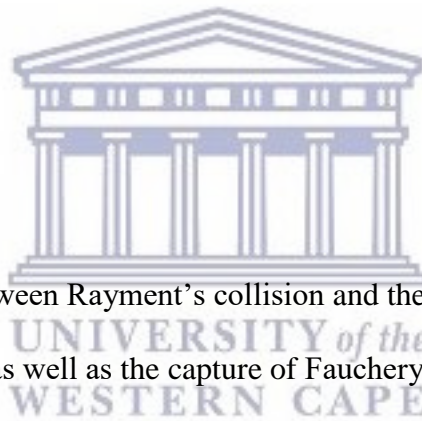
But Rayment, it will be shown, mirrors one image in particular from his collection of Faucherys: “the one that haunts him most deeply,” which depicts “a woman and six children grouped in the doorway of a mud and wattle cabin” (51). As he regards these immigrant settlers, he presents a grim picture of the photographic process:

All of them wear the same expression: not hostile to the stranger with the newfangled picture-machine who a moment before this moment plunged his head under the dark cloth, but frightened, frozen, like oxen at the portal of a slaughterhouse. The light hits them flat in the face, picks out every smudge on their skin and their clothes. (52)

Rayment, like Dawn and Coetzee, is drawn to a photograph that has an element of spontaneity (that which is real rather than art). Unlike his other photographs of miners who have dressed neatly and “confront the camera with the look of grave confidence” (48), this photograph shows frightened figures in their everyday, tarnished clothing. He also notices the smallest child’s dirty hand, which she “brings to her mouth.” The scene furthermore raises the ethical question of exploitation. These subjects are terrified, and there is no way to know what being photographed means to them. The description of a “newfangled picture-machine” conveys their unfamiliarity with the medium, and the analogy of the slaughterhouse suggests that they are being offered up to the camera’s greed. The act of taking a photograph is violent, and like Dawn, the woman and children are stunned by a glaring light that “hits them flat in the face” and marks their transition through the portal to death. Rayment, it will be shown, also encounters a portal (a vortex) through which he is thrown into a deathlike state.

The following study of *Slow Man* will first examine Rayment's bicycle accident and then discuss how the above photograph of the woman and children comes to articulate his life thereafter. *Dusklands* will also form part of this analysis as the two novels present very similar photographic references. Analysis will then consider the trope of becoming the photograph in the context of Rayment's desire to connect with the past. Rayment intends to bequeath his collection of historical photographs to the State library when he dies, thereby leaving some form of legacy to substitute his childlessness. He accepts, however, that they might just "gather dust in the basement of a library" (51). His desire to establish historical origins, then, becomes far more pressing than his concern for the future, and this affects how one understands the novel's deployment of photographic analogy.

### *Capture*



There are several parallels between Rayment's collision and the staging of photographic capture during Dawn's arrest as well as the capture of Fauchery's subjects. All of these events equate a flash of bright light with assault. Dawn is stunned when the electric light is suddenly switched on, and in the Fauchery, "light hits [the figures] flat in the face" (52). In *Slow Man*, the impact of the car is similarly presented as a shock of light: "THE BLOW CATCHES him from the right, sharp and surprising and painful, like a bolt of electricity, lifting him up off the bicycle" (1). The bolt of electricity suggests a striking light (like lightning). Later, he thinks of the driver who hit him as "Wayne something-or-other, Bright or Blight" (20). His uncertainty about Wayne's surname momentarily suggests that he was struck by something "Bright," again alluding to a violent light. Costello too makes this association when she speaks of "Wayne Bright or Blight" (81). As with Dawn, the collision causes Rayment to dissociate from his body and "he hears rather than feels the impact of his skull on



the bitumen.” When he comes to rest, he loses consciousness as “the world tilts beneath him, rotates; he goes absent” (1). Dawn too perceives the others in the motel room “tilting” (42). The traumatic episodes of both novels are furthermore linked through the term *flash*. When Rayment wakes momentarily, he asks about his bicycle, concerned because “a bicycle can disappear in a flash” (2). As with Dawn, the term takes on a dual signification, referencing both the flash of light associated with a camera and the brevity with which he passes out and then wakes. When Rayment later reflects on this event, he provides further details that strengthen the intermedial reference to photographic capture.

Rayment expands on the moment of impact, simultaneously providing two key elements to photographic analogy: he presents this episode as a transition into “a second world that exists side by side with the first” (122), suggesting that like Dawn he is displaced into another site of existence; and he recalls a period of immobilization between dynamic events, which is a description often applied to the scene within a photograph’s frame. These foundations for analogy are described as Rayment chronicles the event:

One chugs along in the first [world] for a certain length of time; then the angel of death arrives in the person of Wayne Blight or someone like him. For an instant, for an aeon, time stops; one tumbles down a dark hole. Then, hey presto, one emerges into a second world *identical with the first*, where time resumes and the action proceeds – flying through the air like a cat, the throng of curious onlookers, the ambulance, the hospital, Dr Hansen, et cetera. . . . (122)

The car sends him flying and “time stops” as he is held between the moment of impact and the continuation of his fall. The image is similar to a photograph Rayment later sees in Drago’s room, which “shows eight lithe male bodies caught in midair as they dive into a swimming pool” (249). In this type of photograph, as in those which are posed, the moment of capture is not frozen but rather held. The image has a great deal of potential energy

because of index vectors, which Zettl describes as “directional forces that lead our eyes from one point to another within, or even outside of, the picture field” (121). Index vectors are created by arrows, pointing, and “looking in a specific direction,” and they are even present in “still photographs of runners or somebody riding a motorcycle” (121-22). In the latter, the eye is drawn in the direction of the implied motion of the projectile. While in suspension, Rayment evinces the same temporal distortion as Dawn and is unsure whether the experience lasts for “an instant” or “an aeon.” Despite his altered perception, the moment is as quick as the click of a shutter (“hey presto”), and “time resumes and the action proceeds – flying through the air.”

As in *Dusklands* and “Nietverloren,” the moment of immobilization is understood as part of a continuing narrative, and Rayment describes how the fall leads to “the ambulance, the hospital, Dr Hansen, et cetera.” The impact sends him on an irreversible trajectory, and his life now becomes one unending fall. Looking at the doctors and nurses, he asks, “*How did I come to fall into their hands?*” (12). When he later falls in the shower, he perceives that “the future holds further mishaps, further falls, further humiliating calls for help” (208). When Marijana comes to his aid, she confronts him about his prior confession of feelings for her. He reflects what he believes to be her opinion of him, saying, “I fall, excuse the word, in love with [the first sympathetic woman]; I fall in love with her children too, in a different way. I, who have been childless . . .” (210). The accident sends him falling into the future, where he exists as a lesser version of himself.

Rayment’s transition through the space in which “time stops” is presented as a shift into a new mode of being. He “tumbles down a dark hole” (the portal) and “emerges into a second world *identical with the first*” (122). The emphasis on *identical* shows that he is displaced into what appears to be the same space, yet he perceives it as an entirely different domain. Like the scene in a photograph, the new world’s appearance is the same as the one it

reflects, but this verisimilitude is part of “a new thing, a new real” (245). Rayment too is changed, and this new identity is benighted by thoughts of death.

### *The Afterlife*

Rayment repeatedly equates his accident with dying. In the same way that Fauchery’s subjects stand “like oxen at the portal of a slaughterhouse” (52), Rayment encounters “the very portal to the abode of the dead” at the site of his accident (83). The driver who hits him is the “the angel of death” (122) come to usher him into the afterlife, where he wakes in a hospital bed “in a cocoon of dead air” (3), wondering among other things “what exactly it was that happened on Magill Road to blast him into this dead place” (4). He subsequently asks Costello, “Am I alive or am I dead?” (233). When he reflects again on the change in his life, he speculates that “death is a mere hiccup in time after which life goes on as before” (123), reiterating how time pauses (a hiccup in time) after the collision and his life then resumes. Rayment asks, “Is one allowed to refuse it – refuse this deathlessness, this puny fate? *I want my old life back, the one that came to an end on Magill Road*” (123). He lives in a place of “deathlessness,” where actual death is denied and yet life (his old life) has ended. Like the floating people in Dawn’s photographs, Rayment becomes the absence of himself: “A man not wholly a man, then: a half-man, an after-man, like an after-image; the ghost of a man looking back in regret on time not well used” (33-34). An *after-image* is the “impression of a vivid image retained by the eye after the stimulus has ceased” (“After-image”). Like an image caught by the lens of the eye (or camera), Rayment is the reflection of himself: he is clear and present, yet his essence, his vitality, is absent.

Rayment’s characterisation mirrors his descriptions of the woman and children in the Fauchery. These figures are “frightened, frozen,” and the woman in particular “looks

drained of life, exhausted of loins” (52), which leads him to suspect that the oldest child is really a second wife intended to replace the first. He too reflects on his purpose, telling Costello “I am of no use to you, to anyone, of no value. Too pale, too cold, too frightened” (232-33). Like the woman, he sees himself as having “no value” and is also “frightened” and “drained of life.” He is pale and enervated and lives in an ersatz state of death. Although it is unclear whether this Fauchery is a black-and-white or sepia print (Fauchery used both), either aesthetic choice would express the woman’s inanition visually: she is drained of colour just as she is “drained of life.” This association is emphasised when the photograph’s replica is placed on Drago’s wall beside another photograph “in colour” (249) that shows healthy bodies diving into a swimming pool. In contrast to this dynamic, colourful image, Fauchery’s figures appear even more lifeless. Rayment too expresses his enervation through a lack of colour. The accident leaves him “trapped with the same old self as before, only greyer and drearier” (54). Costello echoes this visual pattern when she says that if Rayment remains static, “[h]is days will be cast over with a grey monotone,” and he will become “a shadow of himself” (139). Furthermore, the “black helpless eyes” of Fauchery’s subjects signify his depression: his “fits of lugubrious self-pity that turn into black gloom” (52). Like this photograph, Rayment’s monochromatic life is perhaps also “fixed, immutable” (64-65). While paging through one of Costello’s novels, he comes across a man rolling plasticine clay who poses the question “*Why . . . does the bright grow dull and the dull never bright?*” (119). Rayment’s answer is that “the red and the blue and the green will never return because of entropy, which is irreversible and irrevocable and rules the universe” (119). He too will remain grey and dreary, characterised, like Dawn, through the darker associations of the photographic medium.

Rayment’s likeness to Fauchery’s figures, however, has additional, damaging implications because of the great importance he places on this photograph, specifically in its

relation to the past. His investment in this image will be discussed next and then used to provide a final perspective of how the novel's deployment of photographic analogy embodies Rayment.

### *Displacement*

The Fauchery of the woman and children is significant because Rayment perceives the photograph as a way to connect with history: to discover his origins and thereby create a sense of belonging. This desire to locate the past through the photograph appears to stem from "the immigrant experience" which he feels "imprinted itself quite deeply" on him (192). Rayment came to Australia as a child, then moved back to France, and finally settled in Australia. With each journey, he tells Costello, he would ask, "*Is this where I belong? . . . Is this my true home?*" (192). If he could be part of the history Fauchery documented, then he would have roots in Australia. Yet he asks, "Would the woman in the picture accept him as one of her tribe. . . ? Is the history that he wants to claim as his not finally just an affair for the English and the Irish, foreigners keep out?" (51-52). This desire to connect with history through the photograph is also emphasised through his dedication to preserve the photograph's materiality. He restores the prints, keeps them safe, "and sees to it, as far as he is able, as far as anyone is able, that they will have a good home after he is gone" (65). When Drago makes digital montages of the Faucherys, including the one of the woman and children, Rayment is immensely distressed. Marijana defends her son by saying, "Camera is like photocopier" (245), yet he responds by asserting that the originals are those "touched by Fauchery's hand" (249-50). Indeed, before seeing the difference in the fakes, he identifies them because "one of the Faucherys has the wrong feel to it" (218). The photograph of the

woman and children has passed from Fauchery's hand to his, carrying with it a historical trace.

The "history that he wants to claim" through the photograph is also his lifeline to the world. When he speaks to Drago of bequeathing the collection, he refers to it as "Part of our historical record" and becomes deeply emotional (177). Turning his gaze to another Fauchery, he hopes that perhaps this photograph "that records the way the sunlight fell, one day in 1855 . . . may, like a mystical charm . . . have the power to draw them together. (177). This photograph, like his entire collection of Faucherys, could create a valuable connection between him and Drago by giving them a shared history.

The suggested power of the photograph to connect generations emerges strongly in *The Master of Petersburg*, which also explores the materiality of the photograph as a link to the past. Dostoevsky finds a daguerreotype of his landlady with her late husband and "deliberately smudges the glass, leaving his thumbprint over the face of the dead man" (70-71). Towards the end of the novel, he works through his grief by writing in his stepson Pavel's diary. He imagines a young man like Pavel, and pictures this boy encountering the same image:

[The boy] wanders around the apartment opening drawers, fingering things. He comes upon a locket with pictures of his landlady and her dead husband. He spits on the glass and shines it with his handkerchief. Brightly the couple stare at each other across their tiny prison. (243)

Although this character is not the real Pavel, the scenario suggests Dostoevsky's fantastical yearning for the photograph to pass from his hand to Pavel's. The thumbprint that marks the glass would then be cleaned by his living stepson. As in *Slow Man*, the photograph is envisioned as a way to reach into the past while linking the elderly father figure to the boy he loves but cannot call his own. The photograph holds the promise of the impossible.



In *Slow Man*, the characterisation of Rayment as like the Fauchery suggests the hopelessness of his finding a historical grounding that can join him to Drago. By suggesting that Rayment mirrors the Fauchery of the woman and children, the novel emphasises that he remains an outsider (he is *like* them but not them). The woman would not, as he hopes, “accept him as one of her tribe” (51). He is in the same scenario observed in *Elizabeth Costello*, when Elizabeth imagines kneeling before a mirror and seeing herself as “like the women in those intimate, over-intimate photographs from the European war” (178). Although her gesture is intended to express “a feeling for those dead sisters,” it also seems an attempt to claim their history – to write herself into their narrative. The extensive references throughout *Slow Man* that parallel Rayment with Fauchery’s figures reiterate his suspicion that their past cannot truly be part of his present.

In summation, Rayment’s accident sends him into a state of deathlessness where he is the grey, depleted after-image of his former self. He is confronted by what he perceives as the lack of value in his life and turns to his historical images to find a sense of belonging. His characterisation as Fauchery’s figures, however, is the ultimate confirmation that he will never be able to appropriate their historical significance, and he is left as a mere reflection existing outside their history. For both Rayment and Dawn, the photograph becomes a site of negotiated identity, which leaves them displaced and wounded. As will be shown in the next section, Magda too attempts to locate her sense of self through photographs, and, like the others, she is confronted with the deathly fate of becoming the photograph.

### **The Empty Frame**

Unlike Dawn and Rayment, Magda’s life is influenced through the absence of photographs, which she substitutes by inventing her own photographic narratives. She often engages with

the spaces left behind by the family photographs, “daguerrotypes perhaps” (sic), that could give her “evidence of a credible past” (sec. 83). When she reflects on the memory she has of herself as a six-year-old “wearing a hideous bottlegreen frock” (sec. 86), she is convinced that this clarity could only have come from seeing a photograph: “I must have been photographed at that age, I have no other explanation for it; there must be a photograph of me in one of those trunks or desks . . .” (sec. 86). Yet soon after this statement, she declares, “Or perhaps I had a vision, I must not rely too much on photographs,” and she imagines being “watched over gravely by a little ghostly double” who captured “the snapshots of [her] childish self that” she now sees (sec. 86). In her role as narrator, Magda is the ghost that replaces the absent camera which failed to capture her past. She fixates particularly on the narrative gap left by her deceased mother, and she hopes that one day after her father’s death she will find among his belongings “photographs of the dead woman [her mother] inscribed ‘With all my love’” (sec. 84).<sup>17</sup> Although she and Hendrik later find photographs, none depict her mother.<sup>18</sup> The only photographs of her mother, then, are the ones that Magda invents.

These visualisations of her mother will be examined first, with a focus on how Magda characterises her mother as a black-and-white photograph. Like Rayment and the narrator of “Nietverloren,” Magda perceives photographs as a way to access her origins, although for her this relates to a more intimate and immediate family history. The photographs she conceives, however, create narratives that mirror her present circumstances, particularly in reference to her conflict with her father. Rather than allowing herself to picture a time before his “heart must have turned to stone” (sec. 84), she creates photographic narratives that support her perspective of him as a cruel and domineering man. Magda explores these past and present family dynamics further by presenting her father as a photographic negative. The photographic image of her mother, which comes to signify death and surrender, is then juxtaposed against the robust and regenerative quality of the negative. When Magda later

finds herself threatened by his power, she is confronted with the same fate as her mother: to become the deathly figure of the photograph. The scene in which she faces this threat, it will be shown, simulates the act of photographic development.

### *The Photograph*

Magda's mother is a ghostly presence from the novel's first line "Today my father brought home his new bride" (sec. 1). Because he has a new wife, "the old one [Magda's mother] is dead" (sec. 3). Magda accordingly draws from the photograph's association with death and absence when she pictures her mother, who she can "barely recall," as the figure of a black-and-white photograph:

I must have been very young when she died, perhaps only a newborn babe. From one of the farthest oubliettes of memory I extract a faint grey image, the image of a faint grey frail gentle loving mother huddled on the floor, one such as any girl in my position would be likely to make up for herself. (sec. 3)

The "faint grey" tone gives the appearance of a black-and-white photograph while also imbuing Magda's mother's skin with a corpse-like hue. The floor seemingly acts as a framing device as it fills the background with a solid colour, mimicking the rectangular borders of a photograph. Her grey countenance and silent immobility suggest that she is either dead or dying. The use of *faint* also implies a soft focus that makes the overall picture slightly indistinct, thereby expressing Magda's inability to know her mother by deploying the familiar visual motif of an unfocused image. Like K's grey ancestor and "those half-mythical creatures that come out in photographs only as blurs" (*Age of Iron* 193), her mother remains unseen. The terms *faint* and *frail* furthermore emphasise Magda's mother's vulnerability.

This delicate image is possibly envisioned as a daguerreotype (the type of photograph she hopes to find). Although daguerreotypes are pristine, detailed, and incredibly lifelike photographs, their images can easily break apart with a change in perspective. Elizabeth Curren describes this tentative visuality in a daguerreotype of an unknown relative: “Held open at a certain angle to the light, it reveals a young man with long hair in an old-fashioned suit. Change the angle, and the image decomposes into silver streaks behind a glass surface” (*Age of Iron* 190). The daguerreotype offers clarity, yet only if viewed from the correct angle. It demonstrates quite literally how the observer must choose between regarding the photographic subject as a presence or a ghostly figure: with a single tilt (of perspective), one can render the living subject into a trace. Dostoevsky, who vacillates between impressions of his stepson as alive and dead, fittingly has a daguerreotype which signifies how his shifting perspective shows either Pavel or his ghost. Perhaps, like the figure in Curren’s photograph, Magda’s mother “decomposes into silver streaks.” This distortion represents Magda’s inability to adopt an angle (narrative viewpoint) that will overcome her mother’s obscurity.

The same effect is repeated in another representation of Magda’s mother as a blurred photographic subject, which Magda visualises while regarding the full-length mirror she inherited from her mother:

[M]y long-lost mother, whose portrait it must be that hangs on the wall of the dining-room over the heads of my silent father and my silent self, though why it is that when I conjure up that wall I find below the picture-rail only a grey blur, a strip of grey blur, if such is imaginable, traced out by my eye along the wall . . . Inherited from my long-lost mother, whom one day I shall find. . . . (sec. 43; 1st ellipsis in orig.)

Magda uses the phrase “must be” as if trying to convince herself that the portrait is real. Yet even if it is, she is unable to visualise more than “a grey blur, a strip of grey blur.” Regardless of whether or not the portrait exists, Magda’s mind can only fill the frame with an obscure

figure. The use of ellipsis mimics the motion of her gaze “along the wall” as she follows the grey blur; this punctuation also foregrounds the gap (the absence of text) created in Magda’s narrative by the absence of her mother.

Magda, however, will supplant this absence with her own reflection. Her description of the blurred, dining-room portrait is made between references to her mother’s mirror. As Magda seeks out her mother, she encounters her own reflection. This signification is reiterated by the fact that she hopes to find daguerreotypes, which have reflective surfaces. On the one hand, the mirror reference is portentous of the possibility that she will die and take her mother’s place in the photograph (this will be examined in later analysis), but on the other hand, this juxtaposition of mirror and photograph calls attention to Magda’s decision to inscribe her own narrative in the missing photographs: rather than seeing the portrait, she chooses to face the mirror. This idea is repeated when she tries to find her origins within her mind’s eye and instead encounters her reflection:

I grope around inside my head for the mouth of the tunnel that will lead me back in time and memory past images of myself younger and younger . . . through youth and childhood back to my mother’s knee and my origins, but the tunnel is not there. Inside my skull the walls are glassy, I see only reflections of myself. . . . (sec. 82)

The journey into the past is envisioned as a vortex of images as she speeds back in time past images of herself “younger and younger, fresher and fresher.” Yet she cannot reach her maternal origins and is instead left to “see only reflections” of herself. The image of her mother is again replaced by a mirror. When she tries to picture the dining-room portrait, the suggestion that it might actually exist raises the question of whether Magda is intentionally resisting the photographic evidence of her past, which could undermine her understanding of her present. Magda is particularly committed to presenting her father as a cruel man, and the

visualisation of her “faint grey frail” mother (sec. 3) is central to the narrative in which she holds her father accountable for her mother’s death.

Magda uses this grey image to confirm that her father is a dangerous and overbearing brute. She extracts the vision of her mother “[f]rom one of the farthest oubliettes of memory” (sec. 3). An oubliette is “[a] secret dungeon with access only through a trapdoor in its ceiling” (“Oubliette”). The bedroom floor thus becomes a cell where her mother is locked away to suffer in silence. Magda’s mother is depicted “huddled on the floor,” lying in a helpless, cowering position as if fearing a blow or fallen from one, and perhaps she is even dead already. This scene leads into the next section where Magda elaborates on her father’s crime by saying that “[h]is relentless sexual demands led to her death in childbirth” because she had been unable to produce a male heir (sec. 4). The visual emphasis (she is *faint*) on Magda’s mother’s frailty is parlayed into evidence that she “was a frail gentle loving woman who lived and died under her husband’s thumb” (sec. 4). The faintness of this image then gestures towards the more specific meaning of blood loss when Magda pictures her mother “composed on her deathbed, patient, bloodless, apologetic.” As with the floor in the black-and-white image, the bed frames Magda’s mother in a rectangular space, furthering the association between the photograph and death: she is captured within her deathbed as if within the photographic frame. The terms *patient* and *apologetic* emphasise the severity of Magda’s father’s dominance and his ability to subjugate another completely. Even in death, Magda’s mother is apologetic at being unable to produce his heir.

Magda repeats this story when she imagines a family portrait. She pictures a daguerreotype showing “a scowling baby with its hair in curls sitting in the lap of a woman, hesitant, obscure, and behind them the stiff figure of a man, and, who knows, beside them a scowling lad too, . . . a brother who must have died in one of the great epidemics” (sec. 83). In accordance with her present experience, her mother is “obscure,” her father is a “stiff,”



unyielding man, and she is the “scowling,” morbid infant. The son “who must have died” is then the catalyst for her mother’s death: “[T]he woman must have died trying to give birth to a third child, died as she feared she would, afraid to deny the man his detested relentless pleasure in her. . . .” The photograph tells the story of a sole daughter left behind to contend with a stern father who did not want her.

This fiction Magda creates about her mother remains part of the unbroken monologue of the present. Her photographic visualisations are heavily influenced by her perception of her father as the antagonist of both her past and her present. She accordingly matches the figure of her mother as a photograph against the characterisation of her father as the negative. Although in the above analysis Magda’s mother’s photograph could be understood as a daguerreotype (a direct positive image), in the following section her mother is portrayed as a photographic print, which is created through contact with the negative.



### *The Negative*

In contrast to Magda’s mother’s photographic inscription, Magda’s father is depicted as the photographic negative. This correlation of negative to positive is suggested when Magda says, “My father is the absence of my mother, her negative, her death” (sec. 81). The word *negative* calls attention to this sentence as a photographic reference, which can then be expounded by considering the technical relationship between negative and print. This stage of photographic processing is outlined in *Slow Man*: the treated photographic paper “is exposed to light under the glass negative” and then “chemically fixed” (175). (The negative here is glass because he is describing the historical process used by Fauchery). In order to develop a photograph, blank photographic paper is brought into contact with a negative; this produces a latent image which is then developed in a chemical solution. The negative is the source of the

positive print (the photograph). Magda similarly believes that the relationship between her mother and father resulted in her mother's death from childbirth. In the same way that the interaction of photographic negative and paper produces the photograph, the *contact* between her parents resulted in the black-and-white image of the bloodless woman on her deathbed.

The term *negative* secondly takes a photographic connotation visually in the sentence "She the soft, the fair; he the hard, the dark" (sec. 81). The adjectives *hard* and *soft* are also technical terms used in photography. As Michael Langford explains, *hard* refers to "harsh tone values" (327) while *soft* suggests either "[l]ow contrast" or "[s]lightly unsharp or blurred" (331). The terms *soft* and *fair* also recall the "faint grey image" of Magda's mother (sec. 3). In contrast to this indistinct, fair print, the negative is rigid and well defined. This juxtaposition is also underscored through syntax. The sentence "She the soft, the fair; he the hard, the dark" employs a semicolon to separate two identical phrases that use antithetical terms. The words *she*, *soft*, and *fair* are thus mirrored syntactically by *he*, *hard*, and *dark*. Magda's mother and father thereby become reverse images of each other linguistically, which is suggestive of how a negative is the reverse image of a print. The visual contrast of light and dark is also a contrast of personality. The harshness of the negative imparts the domineering nature of Magda's father's personality, while her mother is frail and gentle, delicate like a soft print. This representation of Magda's father's as a photographic negative, however, is not limited to his relationship with Magda's mother. He is a type of universal negative: "Wherever he goes he leaves absence behind him. The absence of himself above all – a presence so cold, so dark, so remote as to be itself an absence, a moving shadow casting a blight on the heart" (sec. 81). He is a dark version of himself, the negative of his own image, and this characterisation evinces his ability to overcome death.

Magda's father shares the regenerative quality of the photographic negative as he is able to imprint himself in multiple ways on the narrative. While the photographic print

remains singular, the photographic negative can be used to develop new images. Magda's father is similarly able to resurrect in the narrative. Magda presents two vivid images of her father as a corpse: after the hatchet murder, his head and arms hang "over the edge of the bed, black with his heavy blood" (sec. 33); and he is similarly described after his second death as "hideously draped over the edge of the bed" (sec. 149). This death-image is always revoked and replaced by a new version of Magda's father. After his first return to the narrative, when he appears in the sunset, he assumes the role of powerful master in his pursuit of Anna. His second return from the grave towards the end of the novel then shows him in the passive role of elderly invalid. Each time that he reappears, the use of light completes the metaphor of the photographic process. In order to create a print, photographic paper is exposed to light during contact with the negative. When Magda's father reappears, his new character manifestations are marked by exposure to sunlight: he "rides in out of the sunset" (sec. 36), and Magda carries him onto the stoep because the day is "sunny but not too warm" (sec. 261). The exposure to light accompanies his rematerialisation.

Because the negative refuses to be displaced from the narrative – refuses to yield its presence into absence – it becomes a threat to Magda, whose relationship to her father is also presented as the pairing of absence and presence. She establishes this contrast shortly after the deathbed image of her mother by saying, "To my father I have been an absence all my life" (sec. 6). She then refers to herself as "a zero, null, a vacuum towards which all collapses inward, a turbulence, muffled, grey, like a chill draft eddying though the corridors, neglected, vengeful" (sec. 6). Magda presents herself in similar imagery as her mother, describing herself as grey and unfocused (muffled); she too is rendered absent in the eyes of her father. The term *muffled* furthermore points to the silence imposed by him on both women. Her father's neglect makes her into a ghostly presence, "a chill draft" haunting the corridors of the farmhouse. Although Magda's absence is the figurative expression of neglect, the possibility

arises that she will share her mother's death by re-enacting the scene of her mother huddled on the floor.

### *Development*

Magda's conflict with her father comes to a head on the night he brings Anna into his bedroom. Although she is initially angry, when he taps on her bedroom door she is overcome by weakness and witnesses the disturbing montage of herself as a grub cowering beneath his raised boot. She soon after collapses on the floor of her dark bedroom, where her inner struggle is enacted through photographic development.

This photographic simulation is built gradually through several key elements of staging, including lighting, motion, and water imagery. Magda's bedroom is firstly dark, suggesting the space of a photographic darkroom. The scene begins with her in turmoil: "I toss about in the dark whipping myself into distraction" (sec. 100). She then introduces the idea that she is submerged in water by saying, "But tonight I have beaten the waters too long. . . ." The terms *whipping* and *beaten* convey the type of sporadic motion associated with the agitation of a photographic print in developing fluid, which is an important step in the development process. Robert Hirsch writes that to obtain an even image, "prints should be agitated constantly by rocking the developer tray in different directions" (132). As Magda moves through this stage, she envisions entering an afterlife in which she will become a replica of herself:

[T]onight I am going to relax, give up, explore the pleasures of drowning, the feel of my body sliding out of me and another body sliding in, limbs inside my limbs, mouth inside my mouth. I welcome death as a version of life in which I will not be myself. There is a fallacy here which I ought to see but will not. For when I wake on the

ocean floor it will be the same old voice that drones out of me, drones or bubbles or whatever it is that words do in water. (sec. 100)

She will drown and enter a new life in which her core is replaced by “another body” sliding into her. This idea that death will be “a version of life” is similar to Rayment’s theory that “death is a mere hiccup in time after which life goes on as before” (123). For Magda, this transformation will render her as an inferior copy because her strong voice will be muted by these waters. Her position resonates with the enigmatic ending of *Foe*, when an unnamed narrator finds Susan Barton and Friday underwater in a sunken ship. Only Friday is awake as if living in the afterlife, but he is unable to speak: “[T]his is not a place of words. Each syllable, as it comes out, is caught and filled with water and diffused. This is a place where bodies are their own signs” (157). Magda’s body will also become a voiceless sign if she slips through the portal into the underworld. Although not mentioned in this scene, the portal trope is linked to water after the hatchet murder, when she searches the dam “for the sinkhole which . . . leads to the underground kingdom” (sec. 31). In her dark bedroom, Magda appears to slip into this tunnel, changing, like Dawn and Rayment, into the absence of herself.

The transformation begins, and Magda’s body gradually manifests into a ghostly form, thereby simulating the appearance of a developing print: “The moon shines on the black folds of a woman on a cold floor. From her rises like a miasma a fiend of ashen face.” “The moon shines on the black folds,” illuminating the outline of her form and adding depth (shadow) to the image. The outline of her body then begins to fill as “[f]rom her rises like a miasma a fiend of ashen face.” This face “rises” from the darkness, resembling how the light areas of a photographic print emerge from the contrasting dark areas. The term *miasma* conveys how the nascent image is initially unclear. This face does not just appear suddenly but rather takes shape gradually, which furthers the association to photographic development. The effect is similar to Rayment’s memory of watching “[a]s the ghostly image emerged

beneath the surface of the liquid, as veins of darkness on the paper began to knit together and grow visible” (65). Magda’s image too emerges beneath water through the interplay of light and dark. Her ghostly countenance then reflects her mother’s death-image. Magda too is partly blurred, and like her mother, she is huddled on the floor, crushed into submission by her father.

During this transformation, Magda, like Dawn and Rayment, dissociates from her body, and she looks down on “a woman on a cold floor.” The shift to third-person perspective, with her hovering over her body, shows that she is joining “the absent, who congregate now in the sky in a whirlwind of absence” (sec. 31). Elizabeth Curren echoes this trope by asking if there is enough “space in the skies for the souls of all the departed” (158). For Dawn and Rayment, disembodiment precedes unconsciousness, and Magda too is teetering on the edge of disappearance as she faces a turning point in her life. Should she abandon her body to these waters and allow this new image of herself to become “fixed, immutable” (*Slow Man* 64), like a photographic print?

Although the possibility of escaping pain and suffering is tempting, Magda does not let the image on the floor become permanent and instead re-enters her body, breaking the spell by asserting her connection to the image. “The words that whisper through those blue lips are mine,” she says, reclaiming her voice with the possessive pronoun *mine*. The transition is also accompanied by recognition of the colour blue, which separates her from the grey image of her mother. The term *drowning* then takes a new connotation when she says, “Drowning, I drown into myself.” It now applies to the hovering entity that falls (drowns) into the shape on the floor. Sinking into her body, she again occupies the subject position as *I* and begins the process of rediscovering and reclaiming her form, detailing the experience: “A phantom, I am no phantom. I stoop. I touch this skin and it is warm, I pinch this flesh and it hurts. What more proof could I want? I am I.” She moves her body and feels her “warm”



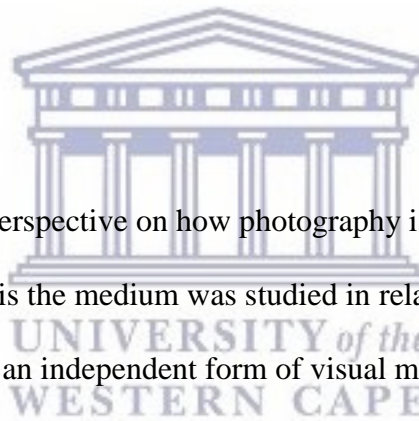
skin. This warmth shows her return to life from the cold verge of death. When she pinches herself and feels pain, she has “proof” that she is alive in her body. “I am no phantom,” she declares, disassociating herself from the ghostly realm of her mother’s image. She concludes this experience with the assured statement “I am I.”

The image comes to life, the metaphorical waters are abandoned, and she rises from the floor to redirect her narrative. She is no longer helpless like her mother but ready to confront her father, and she asserts her presence immediately in the next section: “I stand outside the door of their room. . . . They know I am here. The air is alive with my presence” (sec. 101). The forcefulness of her being charges the air around her into life. She then knocks on her father’s door, beginning the chain of events that will lead to the shooting.

Magda escapes from becoming the maternal photograph, and her resistance to this characterisation is also expressed linguistically. The black-and-white photograph of Magda’s mother is narrated in the past tense: she “was a frail gentle loving woman who lived and died” (sec. 4). Although photographs always show the present tense, the observer can impose a past-tense reading on the image, such as by focusing on the fact that the subject has since died. After returning to her body, Magda continues to use the present-tense voice (“I am I”), showing how she refuses to be relegated to the past tense by her father. She furthermore says, “I am here” (sec 101), which recalls her earlier statement, “I live, I suffer, I am here” (sec. 10). The idea of a photographic reading of Magda’s metaphysical transformation on her bedroom floor is enhanced when one considers that Rayment later transfers these words into a photographic context. As he contemplates the historical photograph of “two long-dead Irishwomen,” he interprets the message of the image as “*I was here, I lived, I suffered*” (177). Through this parallel, Magda and these photographic subjects become counterparts. They furthermore live within a similar historical period. Magda, however, refuses to become a relic of history.

In conclusion, *In the Heart of the Country* presents a complex framework of photographic modelling as the photograph, the negative, and the development process are inscribed within the novel's prose. As in *Dusklands* and *Slow Man*, photographs play a significant role in Magda's interpretation of her past, her present, and her identity. Unlike Dawn and Rayment, however, she lives through her trauma and escapes becoming the reflection of her mother. She evades the version of death offered by the photographic afterlife and continues her narrative as herself, regenerated. Although she will continue to struggle and suffer, experiencing even more disastrous events, the scene in her bedroom represents at least one, significant victory over her father.

## Chapter Summary



This chapter provides a final perspective on how photography is fundamental to Coetzee's prose. Whereas in prior analysis the medium was studied in relation to cinematography, in this chapter it was explored as an independent form of visual media, with a focus on analogue photography. In *Dusklands*, *In the Heart of the Country*, and *Slow Man*, photography is referenced through the simulation of technical processes and through the exploration of photographs. In these novels, there is an inherent violence to the medium, with photographic capture and development presented as physical and psychological assaults that threaten to damage the photographic subject irrecoverably.

Although throughout Coetzee's prose the photograph expresses both life and death, Magda, Dawn, and Rayment are overcome by difficult circumstances and thus their narratives foreground the darker aspects of the medium. In these novels, photographs are afforded strong power over their hearts and minds and ultimately their narratives. Dawn's susceptibility to the image triggers his breakdown and he enters into the same state of being

as the figures from his war photographs. Although medical treatment keeps their faces at bay, they remain an intrinsic part of him, and it is unclear whether he will ever be able to exorcise these demons. Rayment's transformation into the absence of himself also appears fixed. He lives as an after-image and becomes a reflection of the photograph that haunts him most deeply. His resemblance to Fauchery's image is furthermore a strong reminder that he will not find his origins with these photographic subjects. He can mirror their despair, yet he cannot claim their history. In contrast to Rayment and Dawn, Magda feels the power of the photograph through its absence. She is pulled deeply into the empty frames of the images she cannot find, and she fills these blank spaces with her own narrative, yet she stops short of allowing the ghostly image of her mother to become her fate.

Together these novels reveal Coetzee's extensive and versatile deployment of photographic references which encompass every stage of the photographic process, following the subjects from before the image is taken, to their immobilization during capture, and then to the moment their lives recommence. The photograph is then developed, held, explored, kept close, and finally transferred to the next generation and perhaps further into the future. Within Coetzee's fictions, one finds the entire journey of the photograph from conception to the moment it will outlast its creator. The most fundamental way in which photography has inflected Coetzee's prose, it seems, is through this photographer's gaze that perceives the medium in its entirety.

## Conclusion: A Final Perspective

Film and photography have had a significant and lasting effect on the writings of J. M. Coetzee. In this study, it was shown how central these media are to *Dusklands*, *In the Heart of the Country*, *Life & Times of Michael K*, and *Slow Man*, as well as being referenced in many of Coetzee's other fictions and discussed in several of his critical studies. In addition to intermedial references, Coetzee's interest in film has yielded a fascinating adapted screenplay of *In the Heart of the Country*, which has been a valuable resource in understanding the repercussions of cinematic form on the treatment of narrative and time in the novel. *In the Heart of the Country*, it was shown, is indispensable to identifying the intermedial foundation of Coetzee's prose. The exploration of film and photography therefore allows for a greater appreciation of this text and its importance in understanding Coetzee's visuality.

Of Coetzee's novels, *In the Heart of the Country* and *Life & Times of Michael K* have the strongest cinematic aesthetic. Both texts demonstrate the pervasive use of camera-eye points of view, chiaroscuro lighting, and the cinematic mind's eye. Through the convergence of several media effects, *In the Heart of the Country* locates its aesthetic in the avant-garde style of 1960s European and world cinema. In contrast, *Michael K* has a more naturalistic look. These novels appear very different, but the extent to which they are shaped by film is unparalleled by Coetzee's other fictions.

The cinematic references in *Michael K* provide valuable channels into K's interiority. K is an obscure character, rendered enigmatic by his own silence and by the narrative strategies that resist his interpretation. With futility, the MO batters at K's reticence, hoping for the confessions that will never come and ultimately bowing to a mystical conceptualisation of K. But the study of optical subjectivity, which has been inscribed in the novel through film form, yields insight into K's inner world. Camera-eye focalisations and

mind's-eye visions suggest that this supposedly mystical waif who drifts through life unhindered is actually a fearful, conflicted, troubled human being, held by his past and devoted to the maternal presence that haunts the land he loves.

In *Michael K* and *In the Heart of the Country*, cinematic form furthermore enables Coetzee to create various modes of seeing and thereby explore the dynamics and significations of looking. In interpersonal interactions, both Magda and K struggle to connect with others. K's isolation is conveyed through chiaroscuro effects that obscure others from his view and signify the darkness embedded in him from childhood. Magda's inability to connect with Hendrik and Anna authentically is portrayed through the nonreciprocal gaze, which is discussed as a representation of the underlying social hierarchies that govern her subject position. Whether through language or sight, she will never find a means of equal exchange. Magda theorises a language of pure meaning, and in *Michael K* one finds this idea adapted into the concept of pure sight – a mode of seeing that represents an elemental way of being. These states of transcendence, however, are beyond the grasp of perception.

The cinematographic approach to *Michael K* can also be understood as an extension of Coetzee's prior involvement in adaptation. Coetzee's notebook entries reveal how the screenplay format inserted itself into the writing process of *Michael K*, and he even considered writing the whole novel as a screenplay. The strong correlation between *Michael K* and Coetzee's adapted screenplay is evident in the treatment of landscape photography. While the Karoo landscape is rendered symbolic in *In the Heart of the Country*, the screenplay imbues this space with a presence by adding outdoor scenes, employing several long shots, and following seasonal changes. Through the lens, the land is allowed to be itself: barren and intimidating, forceful and familiar, an echo of Voëlfontein, the setting that enters *Michael K* and later *Boyhood*.

The screenplay's approach to nature is furthermore essential to a creative rereading of narrative and time in *In the Heart of the Country*. The screenplay contains a fascinating example of narrative experimentation whereby events are linked in a cause-and-effect chain that ultimately joins Magda's father's death to his final return. The screenplay thereby concretises the structure hinted at by the novel's projector eye, which demarcates Magda's external reality from her mind's eye. The screenplay furthermore resists familiar interpretive strategies because its fictionality operates outside of Magda's control. This destabilisation of successive temporality is also significant as part of the dualistic understanding of time presented by Borges and Coetzee through the river and wheel motifs. Both *In the Heart of the Country* and its screenplay distort time through cinematic reference, yet these formal choices occur against the backdrop of seasonality. Borges's astronomical universe remains unassailable, and the river of time continues outside the grasp of language, leading irrefutably to death.

The contributions of Coetzee's screenplay to this project are also reminders of how the field of intermedial study has far more to offer Coetzee scholarship. The scope of this thesis necessitated excluding his screenplay of *Waiting for the Barbarians*. As with *In the Heart of the Country*, this screenplay could offer keen insights into its source novel. There is furthermore a film treatment for *Life & Times of Michael K* that could be explored fruitfully. In addition to adaptation, there is space to explore the dynamics of sight further. What comes to mind initially is the blindness between the Magistrate and the barbarian girl, as well as the unseen barbarian hordes that never arrive. In terms of cinematography, the study of chiaroscuro lighting could also generate a new perspective of *The Master of Petersburg*.

Finally, there are many references to photographs within Coetzee's fictions that have yet to be explored closely. The influence of photography on Coetzee's work is evident across his prose. Coetzee embraces and expands on the narrative capabilities of the medium in three



ways: by using photographs within his fictions to tell narratives, by employing photography as a means of characterisation, and by staging the technical processes of analogue photography. In Coetzee's writings, the photograph is envisioned as a dynamic and flexible three-dimensional space that invites exploration and imagination. It reveals a living and continuing scene, and Coetzee extends this quality into the metaphysical when Rayment, Dawn, and Magda seek access to the photographic world. The repercussions of their fateful encounters with the image are played out through an inventive mode of writing that simulates photographic processes to cue these characters' transformation into a photographic state.

In summation, film and photography have influenced Coetzee's fictions substantially. These media, it was shown, have embedded themselves in the visuality of Coetzee's prose through the following, multifaceted intermedial references: camera-eye narration; projector analogies (slide and film); optical effects such as fades, dissolves, magnification, and manipulations of focus; screenplay sluglines; chiaroscuro lighting techniques; special lighting effects; montage editing; accelerated and slowed motion; references to cinematic and photographic genres; the technical processes of analogue photography; the photographic negative; and the numerous photographs whose narratives dominate the hearts and minds of so many of Coetzee's characters. Considering this wealth of diverse intermedial references, it is clear that Coetzee too has much to offer intermedial study. If one wants to understand the relationship between film, photography, and prose, his fictions are perhaps the perfect place to start.

## Notes

1. For the rest of this thesis, I will refer to and quote from the Penguin edition (1996).
2. These photographs are currently being curated by Hermann Wittenberg.
3. Whitmarsh takes this quotation from a 1969 text by Susan Sontag, and it is therefore possible that Coetzee, as an admirer of Godard's work, was familiar with this humorous quip.
4. In canto XLII, Pound writes "S. P. SENENSIS" ("The senate and People of Siena").
5. For *In the Heart of the Country* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*, see Wittenberg Introduction (*Two Screenplays*). For *In the Heart of the Country*, also see Kannemeyer ch. 9 (sec. 6). For *Life & Times of Michael K*, see Dovey and Dovey 58.
6. Reported for *Deadline Hollywood* by Anita Busch.
7. For a discussion of how this prejudice against voice-over evolved, see Kozloff ch. 1.
8. See Wittenberg, *Two Screenplays* 21-22.
9. Hoder-Salmon constructs an extensive three-act screenplay of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), which she considers "an analogue of the novel" (xii).
10. Discussed in Andrzej Brzozowski's documentary *The Last Pictures* (2000), a rare look at Munk and the filming of *Passenger*. The documentary is included in the DVD of *Passenger* used for this thesis.
11. For a thorough discussion of issues surrounding narration and focalisation in film, see Deleyto "Focalisation in Film Narrative."
12. Magda also references painting when she rejects her description of a cityscape and explains, "[I]t is too painterly, and I am not a painter" (sec. 29).
13. *Passenger* too raises the idea of an eternal present but then swiftly breaks this illusion by diving into the reality of Liza's past.

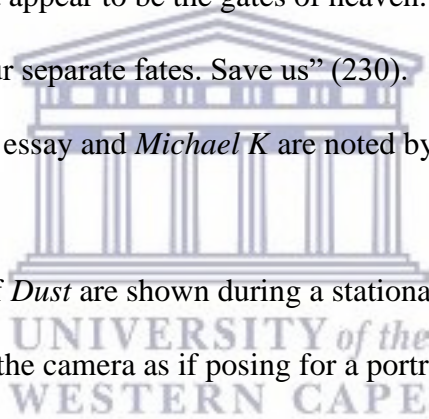
14. *Dusklands* ends with Jacobus Coetzee speaking of the deaths of others and his own death. Magda's last line in *In the Heart of the Country* declares it her fate to die on the farm. Before his final dream, the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* thinks that future generations "will be more interested in the relics from the desert than in anything [he] may leave behind" (155). In the end of *Foe*, the narrator finds dead bodies in an eerie, watery underworld. The end of *Age of Iron* signals Elizabeth's death, her letter to be read posthumously. *The Master of Petersburg* ends with a distraught Dostoevsky comparing himself to a wounded soldier who asks, "Am I dead already?" (250). In *Disgrace*, David Lurie carries a crippled dog that is to be euthanized. *Elizabeth Costello* ends with Elizabeth pleading her case outside what appear to be the gates of heaven. The postscript letter ends, "Drowning, we write out of our separate fates. Save us" (230).

15. The links between the essay and *Michael K* are noted by Attwell in *Doubling the Point* (197-98, 204).

16. The opening credits of *Dust* are shown during a stationary shot of Magda standing beside her father while facing the camera as if posing for a portrait. This is not in the novel, so Hänsel likely adapted it from Coetzee's screenplay.

17. In the screenplay, when Magda searches her father's desk, she finds a photograph of her mother "inscribed, 'With all my Love – Lily'" (sc. 102).

18. She and Hendrik find daguerreotypes of several family groups, but Magda does not say whether any of "the brothers and sisters and half-brothers and half-sisters" are hers (sec. 161).



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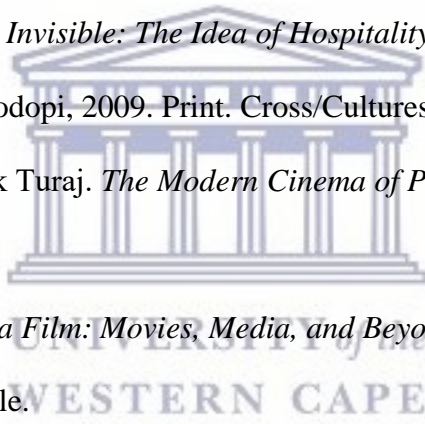
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