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Timely Meditations: Reflections on the Role of the Humanities in J.M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* and *Diary of a Bad Year*

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Abstract: What may be the relevance of the European tradition of the humanities and of humanism today? In his novels, *Elizabeth Costello* and *Diary of a Bad Year*, the South-African writer, academic, and current resident of Australia, J.M. Coetzee, both enriches and puts into question the European traditions that have shaped scholarship, literary writers and academic professions in the humanities. His characters' meditations on the value of literature, humanism, and the humanities, their present crisis and future possibilities, are timely interventions made from a complex, critical, comparative, cultural and geographic distance. The metafictional investigations of the two novels test the limits of the genre in a manner consistent with more experimental strains of postmodern fiction, while the two protagonists reflect two main personae of the author as itinerant, ageing academic and writer. It is the position of this paper that Coetzee constructs a minor literature within the major language of English; this is made evident by the entirety of his *oeuvre* to date though it becomes thematized in these two works. This paper will trace some of the contours, confrontations and dialogs of the two books and explore certain tangents of the radical quests and questions they put to their readership.

Keywords: humanism; humanities; value; crisis; Nietzsche; minor literature; Deleuze; Guattari

1. Introduction

What is the relevance of the European traditions of literature and of the humanities today? This is the question explored in J.M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* [1] [2003] and *Diary of a Bad Year* [2]

[2007], in which I will trace three inextricably related crises: of literature, the humanities, and language.

Coetzee is of Dutch descent but writes in English, not in Afrikaans, and the significance of this choice may be understood in the terms Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari gave to “minor literature”, their example being that of Franz Kafka, a Czech Jew writing in German in Austro-Hungarian Prague. Here is the definition Deleuze and Guattari provide of a minor literature:

A minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language [...] The three characteristics of minor literature are the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation ([3], pp. 16, 18).

An equally striking illustration of minor literature is, in my estimation, the poetic oeuvre of Paul Celan, a Romanian Jew deliberately choosing to write his poetry in German, the language of his education and of his mother's literary preference, despite the traumatic weight of violence and betrayal in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War and Nazi genocidal campaign. Whereas the full impact of the nuances of the deterritorialization of language in the case of Kafka and, especially, Celan, is diminished in translation (hence the significance of the bilingual edition of Celan's poems in the Michael Hamburger translation) [4], it can be directly gauged in the English prose of Coetzee's novels [5]. Like Czech or Romanian German in Kafka or Celan, respectively, Coetzee's South African English is a deterritorialized language; by writing in this language, Coetzee immediately is set at a distance from both his South African, Afrikaans-speaking ethnic milieu and the Apartheid State of the Dutch colonial minority [6].

While German is the language of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and German literature enjoyed a high cultural status in Europe already since the Romantic period, English is similarly a language of empire, and English literature had long been held in regard not only in Europe but in the expansive British empire. Deleuze and Guattari's designation of a minor literature has, however, nothing to do with a minority status of the language in which it is written: “A minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language” ([3], p. 16). Firstly, the language of a minor literature “is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization” ([3], p. 16); writing in German alienates Kafka and, especially, Celan (for obvious historical reasons) from their Czech and Romanian native population context, respectively. Similarly, English alienates Coetzee from his native Afrikaner context (something poignantly illustrated by his autobiographical novel, *Boyhood*). However, the South African context though comparable has an added, ironic twist with respect to this first criterion for a minor literature. As William Beinart notes in his history of *Twentieth-Century South Africa*, despite the imperialist program of increasing the English-speaking population through immigration schemes at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, in the belief that anglicization would strengthen and benefit the State, this racial ideology backfired [6]. The assumption was that “‘race’ or culture determined political interest and behavior” ([7], p. 75), what happened instead was that working-class awareness made many align with anti-imperialist politics and gave rise to class conflict amongst English-speaking whites; “a few even made contacts with blacks in socialist organizations” ([7], p. 75). What is more interesting, following the end of Apartheid, as “black people were drawn into the core political processes, English

increasingly became the shared language of national politics” ([7], p. 281). In the example of Coetzee’s South-African English, what is a schoolbook language, a language “cut-off from the masses” ([3], p. 16), later becomes one of the factors for a revolutionary change in national consciousness since it brought together groups that the Apartheid regime kept apart.

As a second characteristic of minor literatures, Deleuze and Guattari stipulate “is that everything in them is political ... its cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics” ([3], p. 17). Whether one considers the early, overtly anti-colonial novels, *The Master of Petersburg*, the autobiographical novels, or the more recent reflective, philosophical novels, in each text the socio-political is never a background to a personal or familial plot [8]. The political concerns, dilemmas, anxieties are part of the personal situation, they are an overtly thematized aspect of ethical and aesthetic matters, which also means that the latter are never abstract discourses. Notwithstanding the novels’ focus on the individual, there is another way in which everything is political and that is that everything in them “takes on a collective value”, which fulfills the third criterion Deleuze and Guattari set for a minor literature: “the role and function of collective, and even revolutionary, enunciation” ([3], p. 17).

As a South African with links to both an Anglophone and a Germanic (Dutch) European tradition, J.M. Coetzee enriches and puts into question the European traditions that have shaped him as both academic scholar in the humanities and literary writer. If Kafka’s stories render typical meaning-producing narrative and interpretive structures uncanny and unstable, while Celan’s ever greater breakdown and re-assemblage of German words and syntax veers away from representationalism [9], Coetzee’s narratives create fault lines within the fictional universe that force our attention onto the problematics of the poetics of storytelling, making the reader share in the discomfort and anxiety of the authorial creative process. If narrative fiction is a kind of language, a use of language that also depends on a *sensus communis* for its real-life contexts and coordinates, then Coetzee deterritorializes the novel in his prose narratives. Narrative meanings are caught up in a relentlessly metonymic structure just as his characters are caught up in a movement of displacement from which any reassuring or certain sense of origin is unattainable or non-existent. The political immediacy that his individual characters connect to is defined by empire; typically, they are colonizers or colonized, immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, shipwrecked or stateless persons in an environment that is at least vaguely threatening or indifferent to them. Even when his narrators start from the master’s position, they devolve towards the minor: “To hate all languages of masters” ([3], p. 26). The narratives “break forms, encourage ruptures and new sproutings” which, when reconstructed create a “content that will necessarily be part of a rupture in the order of things” ([3], p. 28). We do not find difficulty in assigning *Elizabeth Costello* and *Diary of a Bad Year* to the genre of the novel, if we take all this into account and consider the following description of the genre: “An assemblage, the perfect object for the novel, has two sides: it is a collective assemblage of enunciation; it is a machinic assemblage of desire” ([3], p. 81).

The two novels, *Elizabeth Costello* and *Diary of a Bad Year*, are semi-fictional, not because of the autobiographical dimension they may or may not have, but because much of their writing is non-fictional—in the form of the literary essay, philosophical reflections or academic debate; as such, whether or not the opinions of the fictional authors or speakers are also those of J.M. Coetzee is irrelevant to their generic description and overall import and impact on the reader. Rather than considering them as distinct characters in a conventional sense, the various writers (academic or

literary but even an author of a letter) that feature in Coetzee's novels constitute what Deleuze and Guattari signify by "a collective assemblage of enunciation"; the third criterion for a minor literature. Elizabeth Costello the fictional Australian author who features in most of the novel by that name; Lady Elizabeth Chandos—of the same initials—who is the fictional author and wife of the (also fictional) Lord Chandos, invented by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, of the September 11, 1603 dated letter to Francis Bacon in the post-script to the novel; and Mr. C, the author figure in *Diary of a Bad Year*, indirectly identified as Coetzee himself, all form a *collective assemblage* for the author function.

The meditations of this collective assemblage, or authorial personae, on the value of literature and the humanities, their present crisis and future possibilities, are timely interventions made from a complex cultural critical and geographical distance, which ought to compel our attention. Their timeliness is not restricted to their date of writing or publication. What renders the meditations timely is their untimeliness, understood as both a negation of this restriction and even as their being *contre-temps*, at the wrong time or against the times. More precisely, to use Nietzsche's terms from *Untimely Meditations* [10], "acting counter to our time and thereby acting on our time and, let us hope, for the benefit of a time to come" ([10], p. 60).

On a more thematic level, both books foreground an intense awareness of time or timeliness as a problem for an embodied individual embedded in the modern world: the crossing of time zones, jet lag, old age, ageing and sexuality, saying things at the wrong time and the reverse, repetition and even a parodic fantasy of limbo or the afterlife, but also marking time with one's writing, as in *Diary of a Bad Year*. The question of time is also the question of life, the question of the good life, of ethics. Coetzee brings together in *Elizabeth Costello* but also in *Diary of a Bad Year*, literary writing that is critical and even deconstructive on a subject that can be given the title "The uses and disadvantages of literature for life" [11]. Here, however, we should give to the term "literature", the wider sense of writing that encompasses fictional, historical, and philosophical writing.

The act of writing, the writing of a novel, of lectures, of award speeches, of philosophical reflections for publication, of a confessional statement, and by extension, literature in general (as cultural institution, personal activity, public responsibility, and form of entertainment), is repeatedly, and often dramatically, staged in these two semi-fictional novels, while simultaneously the (institutional) authority and (cultural) power of both the literary and critical author are subverted. Altogether, these works are illustrative of our still being, in the words of Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, living the legacy, whether we are aware of it or not, and indeed the problematic, of Jena, of the Early German Romantics, as set out in the *Athenaeum* and *Critical Fragments*, the *Letter on the Novel*, and other seminal texts of what they rightfully designate as the first modern European avant-garde. What this means is given in part by this statement:

[...] it means that literature, as its own infinite questioning and as the perpetual positing of its own question, dates from romanticism and as romanticism. And therefore that the romantic question, the question of romanticism, does not and cannot have an answer. Or, at least that its answer can only be interminably deferred, continually deceiving, endlessly recalling the question [...] "The romantic kind of poetry [*Dichtart*] is still becoming; that is its real essence: that it should forever be becoming and never be perfected" [12].

In *Elizabeth Costello* (of which *The Lives of Animals* [1999] forms a part), and in *Diary of a Bad Year*, Coetzee's authors act as members of a virtual Republic of Letters; it is with equally serious consideration that they address, engage with and respond to others, irrespective of their social or professional status, their gender, class, or color. The books themselves are the indispensable means of their radical democratization of this humanist, enlightenment and romantic notion of a republic of letters. Elisabeth Costello and her male counterpart in *Diary of a Bad Year*, another ageing but eminent Australian author (born, like Coetzee, in South Africa) debate, contemplate and put into doubt others' or their own strong opinions on what could be said to fall under the general rubric of *studia humanitatis* (an enlarged version of the present day "humanities", to include social and political thought, literature, history, philosophy).

2. Elizabeth Costello

2.1. The Novel's Theses

The lessons that make up *Elizabeth Costello* constitute a critique of literature and the humanities through the (auto)biographical fiction of an authorial figure [13]. In the first six lessons, Elisabeth Costello's lectures on literature are embedded in the personal everydayness of the speaker in a narrative that openly shows the "wiring" behind realism as a literary style by the real author. Though the actual author never interrupts the narrative to rupture the fictional world, the exposure of realism as a fictional mode is achieved by the various metafictional techniques of self-reflexivity. Furthermore, no one is allowed to appear either glamorous or authoritative, nothing goes without being challenged, undermined, passionately and personally criticized. At first, Elisabeth Costello is introduced in good realist form: we are given her date of birth, present age, countries of residence, and marital history, after which follows the explanation that she is traveling all the way from Australia to Williamstown, Pennsylvania, to receive one of the most generous literary prizes, the Stowe prize, at Appleton College, and give a speech at the prize ceremony.

The speech itself is then a total subversion of the already tired realism of this story. The title "What is realism?" immediately launches into a description of Kafka's famous story "Report to an Academy", briefly discussed as proof of the end of realism, of the debunking of the realist illusion by its exposure as just that, an illusion, and by the multitude of uncertainties and ambiguities of Kafka's story that are not merely epistemological ones, but deeply ontological ones, shared by herself and her contemporaries. The son's argument with his mother on the appropriateness and relevance of her topic and its development turns into another kind of argument on realism and animal lives. The chapter ends with his view of the open mouth of his sleeping mother, and while staring down into it and imagining the rest of her inner organs, he protests (in his mind): "No, he tells himself, that is not where I come from, that is not it" ([1], p. 34); yet another rejection of realism. The protest is not merely attributable to a kind of (male) squeamishness with regard to the (female) human anatomy, but against the reduction of reality to a purely materialist vision of being.

The graphic anatomical orality of this ending is then followed by a look at the claims of orality in African literature. The novel in English lays claim to a very specific matrix of genesis in eighteenth-century England, where the insistence on realism—as opposed to the excess of the romance

tradition in prose fiction—has the most formative and polemical role. The rise of the realist mode in prose fiction however, cannot be separated from the focus on the individual as guarantor of the truth of experience and of individualism in the growing literary industry. These remarks by no means exhaust the parameters, context or conditions for the origins of the English novel, but they do matter in pointing out the radical difference of this genre from other traditions of storytelling elsewhere, and therefore raise the question of its universality. In chapter/lesson 2, “The Novel in Africa”, Elisabeth Costello finds herself accepting an invitation to give a lecture series on a cruise ship. There she encounters an old acquaintance and former lover, the African writer Emmanuel Egudu, whom she describes as having ceased to produce anything of substance for some years now, cashing in on his identity as African novelist to make a living on such cruises. His speech, given in full, offers well-known arguments on orality in African culture, the essential difference and distinction of Africans and other ideas known from the Negritude movement. He presents these in support of the essential difference of the African novel from the European novel. The speech is highly contested by Elisabeth in an exchange she has with the speaker in the presence of two lay members of the audience, who also have their viewpoints. The disagreements of Elisabeth, the elusive answers of her interlocutor, the entirely different approach of the non-writers and the sexual jealousy with which the chapter ends, hinting that perhaps Elisabeth’s vehement disagreements were not entirely fuelled by disinterested aesthetic judgments, all serve to undermine any pretence to rational authority, yet also sustain a polyphonic narrative debate. It is a debate that has affected for some decades now the formerly facile assumptions of academic departments of (English) literature, especially in Anglophone countries. It is worth noting also how this chapter, as the previous one put forward critiques and critical debates that arise from a comparative perspective. The legitimacy of comparativism itself will come under attack in the section to follow.

If the arguments of the previous lesson are partly fuelled by personal feelings, this issue is brought into the foreground of the following two lessons. *The Lives of Animals* picks up and most fully develops the “hobbyhorse”, as her son calls it, of Elisabeth Costello. Again, it is an invitation to speak that she has accepted. This time she is to give two lectures at her son’s college. Rather than talk about her novels, she flouts disciplinary divisions and institutional conventions and talks about animals: their status as living beings, but especially the industrial production, slaughter and consumption of animals, linking this vast topic and its ethical ramifications with literature and philosophy as two different ways humans approach the differences between human and (other) animal being. From an ethical it becomes an ontological and also an aesthetic discussion, breaking down not only the distinctions between humans and animals, but also trampling the prerogatives of disciplinary specialization and, for some, committing sacrilege by making a comparative reference to the mass murder of Jews during the Holocaust with the industrial mass production and murder of animals to fulfill dietary and other purposes of humans. Here, the greatest diversity of ideological positions, are shown, once again, to have personal roots, to be inexorably products of embodied and ideologically embedded existences.

Thus far we have been exposed to the limitations of realism, the hidden and unhidden biases of universalism, the arrogance and error of human supremacism in the animal world, based typically on the spurious prerogative of language. Each chapter underlines and undermines the continuing fallacies of humanism without, however, offering an easy way out, or total refutation, of humanism. The next two lessons are highly complementary chapters and also return us to issues in the previous lessons: the

interrelation of the aesthetic and the ethical. In “The Humanities in Africa”, the writer has a debate with her sister, a Catholic missionary nurse who runs a hospital for dying children in Africa. The debate is occasioned by the indictment of the humanities in her Sister Bridget/Blanche’s acceptance speech for an honorary doctorate. The Sister argues that the humanities failed and are dead, for some centuries now. The contemporary disciplines comprising the humanities, especially literary studies, constitute a form of study that perverted from its original *raison d’être*, i.e., as a means for the salvation of the soul through the development of the knowledge and method needed for Western Europeans to read and interpret the Greek New Testament for themselves, into a secular and fragmented set of disciplines with no ultimate purpose or usefulness in the world. The value of literature, especially the written text, is, thus, contested by two independent cultural histories: Negritude and African oral traditions of performance (the thesis of the Nigerian writer’s talk), and late Medieval and Renaissance Europe or Western Christendom on the other. The aesthetic dimension is prevalent in the African contestation, the ethical dimension in the European one. What then, could be the point, purpose or project of the humanities today? On what basis could one argue for their legitimation? The collective assemblage that constitutes the “machinic desire” of this novel present key facets of this contemporary problem, inviting us, as readers, writers, authors, students and teachers, to engage in the discussion. The outcome cannot be known but the engagement itself implies a commitment to salvaging what is worthwhile, refuting what can no longer be accepted as valid or relevant, and perhaps a move towards a new future for the humanities, a post-humanist one in many respects.

The next lesson, “The problem of Evil”, picks up from the earlier indictment of the Catholic church as promoting an aestheticization of suffering by its manner of focusing on the representation of the Passion and the dying Christ on the cross. It also links up the theme of the Holocaust from the chapters on the lives of animals with the problem of evil in general, and specifically, the question of whether evil should be represented in literature. Elisabeth Costello has been invited to a conference on the theme of evil in Amsterdam, where, just having read a fictional account of the trials and execution of those German officers who had planned to assassinate Hitler, she has been stunned by the author’s uncanny ability to get inside the head of the brutal executioner and Nazi cruelty, to take the readers to scenes that in fact had no witnesses, apart from the executioner, who presumably never gave an account. Feeling “touched by evil”, she intuits that the author must also have been touched by evil in his imaginative historical description of their degradation, suffering and slow deaths. Disconcerted by the unexpected presence of the actual author in the audience, she contemplates a variety of solutions (mostly self-censorship) but in the end decides to go ahead and read the original paper.

Elisabeth argues that of such evil we must be silent, because of the power of its affect not just on the mind, but on the soul, too. Her view is that everything affects the soul; “This soul is”, as Jean-François Lyotard refers to it, “but the awakening of an affectability” [14]. It is a view that also tacitly aligns her with the aesthetics of the classical Greek world, since in ancient tragedy, the representation of extreme violence on the stage was forbidden, thus, the aestheticization of violence was elided. Despite violence and human evil being at the heart of tragedy, it was the meditation on the motives and effects of violence that mattered. The two stances, Elisabeth’s and the classical one converge on the agreement that everything has an effect on the soul, that representation of violence

aestheticizes violence—she describes herself as being excited and carried away by the narration—and that in the case of the graphic depiction of evil, these effects carry too high a risk.

Contrary to the dangers inherent in imagining and depicting evil, the lesson “Eros” probes the sexual relations between humans and gods/goddesses in ancient Greek myths; the greater curiosity behind this attempt to imagine sexual intercourse with a god or goddess is whether such intimacy would allow one “to get a sense of, a god’s being?” ([1], p. 188). Perhaps this is the most untimely of the meditations since, as Costello notes immediately after, it is “a question that no one seems to ask anymore” ([1], p. 188). She then offers her own articulation of this question: “*Other modes of being*. That may be a more decent way of phrasing it. Are there other modes of being besides what we call the human into which we can enter; and if there are not, what does that say about us and our limitations?” ([1], p. 188) In other words, we return to the question of the limits of the imagination that was first raised in the lesson on the poets and the animals. Moving once more in favor of the direction of the sympathetic imagination, of feeling, both as sensation and sentiment, the chapter concludes with a reference to love as offering a vision of the pattern that brings and holds disparate entities together.

The playful metaphysical musings of the lesson “Eros” are continued in the final lesson. “At the Gate” is a fantasy of the afterlife and judgment in an obvious and signaled postmodern, parodic take on Kafka’s “Before the Law”. Elizabeth Costello must provide a statement of beliefs to a board of judges in order to be allowed to pass through the gate into a realm of brilliant light. Her initial resistance to this demand, on the grounds that belief runs counter to the vocation of the writer, is dissolved in the end by the surprising epiphany that “She lives by belief, she works by belief, she is a creature of belief” ([1], p. 222). Equally surprising, perhaps only to the readers, is her exasperation at her tendency to view everything around her, even in the afterlife, as and through literariness. Her own final words in this lesson are the exclamation: “A curse on literature!” when the vision of an old dog lying beyond the gate prompts the automatic production in her mind of “the anagram GOD-DOG” ([1], p. 222). The writer’s exasperation at her conditioning that produces the hubristic perception of the most sacred word, leads her then to the double hubris of cursing her own confessed faith in literature. Literature, and by extension language, can also block one’s apprehension of reality and should not be mistaken for an adequate path to all truths either since not only the signifier and the referent are arbitrarily linked but the sign may easily slip into or be substituted by another sign.

This curse emitted by Elizabeth Costello nevertheless realizes itself, albeit anachronistically, in the post-script, which refers us to the 1902 letter “*Ein Brief*” by Hugo von Hoffmansthal, in which a fictional character, Lord Chandos, writes a letter denouncing all literary endeavour to a real historical person, Francis Bacon. As is well known, this fictional letter was the proclamation of a truthful statement by Hoffmansthal himself to end his short but acclaimed career as a poet and turn instead to the writing of librettos. Coetzee provides a brief quote from Hofmannstahl’s letter:

At such moments even a negligible creature, a dog, a rat, a beetle, a stunted apple tree, a cart track winding over the hill, a mossy stone, counts more for me than a night of bliss with the most beautiful, most devoted mistress. These dumb and in some cases inanimate creatures press toward me with such fullness, such presence of love, that there is nothing in range of my rapturous eye that does not have life. It is as if everything, everything that

exists, everything I can recall, everything my confused thinking touches on, means something ([1], p. 226).

He then gives a second letter, written by an invented wife, Lady Elizabeth Chandos, some twenty days supposedly after the date of the original by her husband. It is a secret letter to Francis Bacon, in which she confesses to having read her husband's letter, prompting her to write her own in an attempt to override the authority of her husband's account of his subjective experience for the sake of their conjugal happiness, as well as for the good of all.

What is this fictional supplement to the Lord Chandos letter doing as a postscript to a book that has chronicled the crisis of literature and the humanities, as institutions in their present form, through the crises of its academic author-protagonist?

Coetzee's rewriting, or supplementation of the Chandos letter from the perspective of his wife, Lady Chandos, is an appeal on behalf of her husband. Here, postmodernism reads romanticism (more specifically, it is possible to situate the Lord Chandos Letter within romantic decadence or romantic modernism). A comparative reading of the original with this hypertextual version will point to, amongst other things the continued crisis of literature that has now deepened into a crisis of language itself. Retreating from the extreme affectation of the soul in the experience of sublimity, Lady Chandos asks for a return of attention to the exigencies of the everyday, and through its 9/11 dating, to the ethical urgency for action, for words to be *useful* again for doing things. Though the original letter by Hoffmansthal does not include a direct explanation of why the addressee should be the eminent English humanist, Bacon, Coetzee's Lady Chandos provides us with a clue: "he writes to you, as I write to you, who are known above all men to select your words and set them in place and build your judgments as a mason builds a wall with bricks" ([1], p. 230). Here, rather than looking to the gods or God (*i.e.*, the ancient Greek or Judaeo-Christian ultimate form of authority—a Lacanian big Other), the letter issues an appeal to a great figure of tradition (Hoffmansthal, Lord Bacon), an appeal for *salvation*, and it would seem, for a new "golden age" of literature, of culture, in which transcendence will again be possible.

2.2. From the Crisis of Language to the Crisis of Aisthesis

If from the realm of the afterlife Elizabeth Costello has met her fellow in Lady Elizabeth Chandos, the impassioned and direct plea for the relevance of literature, for a new (post-)humanism, and therefore for a newly-oriented humanities, would not be incompatible with the unease, doubts, uncertainties, critique and crises of the more hesitant and guarded postmodern author, Elizabeth Costello. Nor, indeed, would it be implausible to divine some share of that unease in the situation of the factual author, J.M. Coetzee, who between 1997 and 2003, the period of the writing of all the sections of *Elizabeth Costello* had suffered the condensation of these crises of literature and the humanities in his own literary, academic life [15].

Considering how the Greek origin of the word *crisis* (*'krisis'*) signifies both the act of forming a judgment and the condition of suffering, it is possible to identify a link between the last two sections of the book. It is a crisis of legitimation, for the author/creator and for literature/language that links the intertextual dialog with Kafka and Hoffmanstahl in these final sections of *Elizabeth Costello*. If, instead of the allusion to "Before the Law", we consider Kafka's short story "The Silence of the

Sirens”, in which modernism reverses the matrix of the mythical encounter between Odysseus and the sirens in order to create an allegory of its present condition, a further illumination of the postscript can be effected. Here Kafka rewrites the siren song episode as an enigma which, even more uncannily than in Hoffmanstahl’s prefiguring of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s reading of the episode in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* [16]. In their first chapter, Adorno and Horkheimer read the cunning episode where Odysseus has himself tied to the mast of the ship and blocks his crew’s ears so they do not hear the sirens and be enthralled by their song or his own cries to untie him as an early sign of the progressive alienation of modern Western humanity from nature through the subject’s reliance on instrumental reason, and of the relegation of art (epic/narrative art) to impotent decoration. Kafka’s sailor revisits the site of the Sirens’ island but finds tragedy turned into farce since the sirens do not sing to him. Is this an answer/punishment to humanity for resisting their epic/lyrical power of sublimity leading to death? Or is it just Kafka’s perennial fear of not being able to write? The condensed polysemy of this new myth allows for more than one answer. If we consider the Homeric episode, Kafka’s story, Adorno and Horkheimer’s polemical interpretation together with Hoffmanstahl’s “Ein brief” and Coetzee’s supplement as a single palimpsest, we may look back to Kafka’s revisitation of the episode in “The Silence of the Sirens” as the first moment of the absurd, of the siren’s threat having become the threat of meaninglessness, of lack of signification as well as significance. It foretells the opposite of being overwhelmed by the power, meaning and beauty of the original siren song. The end comes not by fire, but by ice; the fear of being consumed by transcendence is replaced by the horror of being abandoned to an impermeable solipsism. However, here again we note the uncanny resemblance of Kafka’s story to the theoretical re-articulation of the sublime by Jean-François Lyotard in terms of the threat of privation, of the “Is it happening?” no longer occurring. Kafka’s story can be read as an exemplary fantastic narration of that catastrophe.

Thus, in the postmodern moment we have a revisitation of both modernist and late romantic anxieties. In Lyotard there is the fear or dread of privation; in Kafka the terrifying silence of the sirens is dreadful for the utter lack of emotional affect. Yet both stories report the disaster of aesthesis, a phrase used by Lyotard to describe the Burkean and Kantian interface in the discourse of the sublime. The disaster of aesthesis indicates a problem with subjectivity; what happens if/when there is no “anima minima” to enable sublimity and the “Is it happening?” of art/literature? Additionally, if one moves on from Lyotard’s consideration of the issue, we must ask, as do Coetzee’s later works in their entirety: how does literature/the arts in general and their study in the university figure in the project of sustaining this “anima minima”?

Truth, anima minima, the arts and humanities, the future (of the) university, but also literature and sublimity, from which we started, are, for these writers, and the connections I’ve drawn between them, intricately and inextricably linked. For those postmodernist or late modernist writers and thinkers, such as Coetzee and Adorno, the sublime becomes either the object of an impossible yearning/haunting, inadmissible and irreconcilable with the negativity bequeathed by much modernism (Coetzee’s view) or plain irrelevant if not ridiculous for the contemporary consideration of aesthetics, art, literature, the humanities. However, though Adorno contends, in his *Aesthetic Theory*, that suffering is the secret and inalienable *raison d’être* of art, its special prerogative that justifies its continuing relevance, he virtually rejects the sublime, out of the bias held against Romanticism [17]. To refer once more to Paul Celan, it is his work that vindicated lyrical poetry after Auschwitz; in his poetics the necessity and

possibility of a sublimity stemming from extreme suffering is present even as it impossibly shrinks representational poetics into near-immateriality, thus intensifying the emotive and performative force of the poem in the direction of a very Kantian, very Lyotardian also, understanding of the sublime. For Lyotard, the sublime is not just now, to cite the title of Barnett Newman's 1948 essay, "The Sublime is Now", which he refers to, it is also necessary [18]. For Kafka, too, it was necessary; without it no literature was worthwhile. Is this not what his 1904 letter to his schoolmate Oskar Pollak famously says when he disdainfully dismisses books that leave him indifferent, declaring as his principle of poetics a principle of *aesthesis*: "a book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside us" [19]? Aesthetics has replaced, and guides, poetics in modernity and postmodernity alike.

If not achieving the sublime, these works gesture towards it, or point to its absence, since it is also not only the task of the writer, the task of the book, but also the task of the reader. As Maurice Blanchot reminds us, the book does not exist until it is read [20], which means that in the hands of the reader, the book may or may not become the work, may or may not attain the function of the axe, since, in Heideggerian terms, the axe-book would remain a mere tool, not a work of art, without a "sea inside us" to act upon, even if frozen. What happens if, where once there was a frozen sea, there now is a desert? What good may an axe be in the desert? Here, I refer once more to Lyotard's postulation of the *anima minima*, of the bare modicum of subjectivity still needed, with all its metaphysics, if there is to be *aesthesis*.

Thus, in these last three parts, what seemed initially perhaps to be a strange series of three digressions due to their formal and uniformal palimpsestuousness, turn out rather to be a literary enactment of the previous chapters' more diegetic, dramatic and theoretical discourse of Coetzee's Costello, who on and off had referred to literature as salvation, to the entire history of the humanities in Europe as having been such an attempt. A failed and perhaps mislead attempt, to put it in other words, to achieve what Plato called "the care of the soul"; an ideal, but the only ideal that could ever make Europe worthwhile according to the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka in *Plato and Europe* [21]. What directions this solicitude over the *anima minima*, the *psyche* or, as one prefers, the spirit or soul, may take can be gauged by the impassioned contestations and experiments in the history of humanist scholarship and the contemporary humanities, which Coetzee's highly metafictional novels manage to distill and dramatically convey outside the ivory tower of the university.

Coetzee dramatizes the relations between lay and professional readers, literary authors and academics, poets and philosophers, religious thinkers and secularists in an intricate web of personal relations that underpin and affect the professional disputes. Laying all bare, getting into the consciousness now of the son of the famous mother, now of the writer herself, Coetzee issues a challenge to two major pillars of the world of letters and the humanities *per se*: academe and the institution of the author. Both are powerful institutions emerging from modern European history that nonetheless today and, arguably, for more than a few decades now, are experiencing a severe crisis.

Elizabeth Costello's linking of the question of literature to the purpose of the humanities and to the university—a link which, according to Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe in *The Literary Absolute* characterizes (Early German) Romanticism, and by extension therefore, our own, still, concept of the liberal arts in the university—continues in the next novel Coetzee published, *Diary of a Bad Year*.

3. Diary of a Bad Year

3.1. Simultaneity and Fragments

In *Diary of a Bad Year*, Coetzee approaches the figure of the writer from a different gendered perspective, but much more importantly in fact, from a different visual perspective: that of contrast and simultaneity. The novel is divided into two parts. The first part “Strong Opinions”, derives its title from a book commissioned by a German publisher, in which six authors from different countries “say their say on any subjects they choose, the more contentious the better. Six eminent writers pronounce on what is wrong with today’s world” ([2], p. 21). For the first twenty pages, we read two parallel texts; each page is divided into two sections by a line: above the line are the texts of *Strong Opinions*, while below the line is a continuous “common denominator” of the author’s personal life in diary form. Thus, we are given the impression of spying on the author at work, in his home surroundings. While the diary shows a continuity of interest instigated by his accidental encounter with an attractive young woman in the laundry room of the communal block of flats, the texts of “strong opinions” have an impersonal and episodic structure since they are all different entries. From the fifth to the 25th entry, the pages are split into three sections, the addition at the bottom of the page is a novelistic text in which features the personal life of Anya, the 29 year old Filipina from the laundry room, now becomes his personal typist and, therefore, reader of the *strong opinions*, and her boyfriend, Alan, a well-read 42-year-old Anglo-Australian broker. The top part of the page is taken up by a series of numbered, short essays on 31 different contemporary issues, landmarks of socio-political thought or institutions: The origin of the state, anarchism, democracy, Machiavelli, terrorism, guidance systems, Al Qaida, universities, Guantanamo Bay, national shame, the curse, pedophilia, the body, the slaughter of animals, avian influenza, competition, intelligent design, Zeno, probability, raiding, apology, asylum in Australia, political life in Australia, the left and the right, Tony Blair, Harold Pinter, music, tourism, English usage, authority in fiction, the afterlife.

During the course of the writing/typing up of the commissioned reflections, Anya, well-aware of the attraction she holds for the 80-year-old writer, is slowly drawn into conversations with him about the content of *strong opinions*, and even about the purpose of thought and writing, in general and with respect to specific topics. Out of a growing sympathy and charitable feelings, she assumes occasional tasks of housekeeping and cleaning for him. He cares about her opinions, where others did not, including herself, and she cares for his living conditions, where no one else will, including himself. The romance plot is thickened by the intensifying jealousy of her boyfriend and the “competition” or “contest” of the two men for her affections culminates in Alan’s nefarious plans to swindle the writer of all his money, willed to be bequeathed to an animal care organization, “the Anti-Vivisection League of Australia” ([2], p. 146), which he has discovered by installing spyware on the writer’s computer through the unwitting medium of Anya. Once he reveals his information and plans to her, she is faced with the ethical dilemma of betraying one or the other man’s confidence: becoming Alan’s conscious accomplice and also future receiver of stolen funds or revealing all to the writer.

In the second part of *Diary of a Bad Year*, there are once again, numbered reflections on the top part of the page and two further sections, the writer’s personal diary and Anya’s personal story of the same events: a total of 24 further topics appear, that start with the personal “A dream”, “on fan mail”, “my

father” and “insh’ Allah”, on which pages the middle section, in which the writer’s personal diary had appeared, is still divided by two lines but left blank, and end with reflections on “Dostoevsky”. In the development of the novelistic plot there is change and a denouement; Anya has persuaded her boyfriend not to rob the writer, the writer invites the two over to celebrate sending off the completed manuscript to the German publisher, where Alan makes a drunken scene and none-too-cryptically gives hints of what he had planned to do. Finally, Anya leaves Alan and goes to stay with her mother in another city. She says goodbye to the writer and later writes to him, signing the letter, “admiring fan”. This second part, formally entitled “Second Diary”, but which we discover on reading Anya’s letter to him from Brisbane, contains the pieces he had edited out because he did not judge them as being “proper Strong Opinions”. These “Soft opinions”, as she calls them, are her favorites and they are all more personal, more revealing of the author, than those that make up “Strong Opinions”: after the first four already mentioned are “mass emotion”, “the hurly-burly of politics”, “the kiss”, “the erotic life”, “ageing”, “idea for a story”, “La France moins belle”, “the classics”, “the writing life”, “the mother tongue”, “Antjie Krog”, “being photographed”, “having thoughts”, “the birds of the air”, “compassion”, “children”, “water and fire”, “boredom”, “J. S. Bach”, and last “Dostoevsky”. In an essay considering the Nietzschean overtones in the book’s critical and often skeptical engagement with opinions, Paul Patton observes that the novel is “a celebration of life” and, the ending in particular, which valorizes Anya’s preference for the “soft opinions”, points towards “an affirmation of everyday life, the life that we share with animals, but that is also expressed in our opinions, thoughts, fantasies and dreams” [22].

Diary of a Bad Year has, together with *Elizabeth Costello*, a modest place reserved for the fictional plots of novel writing. The novelistic frame grants the meditations an embedded existence. They seem also, so far at least, to herald a reflective pause in Coetzee’s novel writing. In this sense too, they could be described as timely meditations. They are a kind of reckoning. His next book, *Summertime* (2009) [23], was a posthumous-styled biography of Coetzee the author. In the much-awaited novel, *The Childhood of Jesus* (2013) [24], Coetzee resumes a more predominantly fictional manner of narrative, but for that no less intensely committed to an interrogation of the relevance of education and academic learning to the immediate meaning and decision-making needs of ordinary people, while also insisting through a convincing literary narrative, on the absolute necessity of literary and philosophical discourse (whether one designates it as some form of humanism or not) if one is to be able to cope with the complexities and contingencies of real life and satisfy the desire for constructing life-sustaining meanings.

The “opinions” in *Diary of a Bad Year* recall, by their terse and pithy style, their provocation to thought and their personal inflection, both the fragments published by the Jena circle and Nietzsche’s aphorisms and fragments. The fragment evades the dangers of even inadvertent authorial paternalism; they are an invitation to thought, to dialogue and debate. A double, then triple precaution against the tendency towards mastery of theoretical discourse is further taken by the tripartite division of the page and the space, and voice, allocated to the personal/autobiographical and to the interest of the plot: *i.e.*, interaction with others. As Jonathan Lear explains, “the aim of the style is [...] to defeat the reader’s desire to defer to the ‘moral authority’, the ‘novelist’ John Coetzee [...] Coetzee’s authority lies in his ability to divest himself of authority” [25]. Referring to the definition of rhetoric in the *Phaedrus* as “a peculiar craft of leading the soul with logos” and the purpose of education set forth in the *Republic* “as turning the *whole* soul around”, Lear considers how the page divisions constitute “a rhetorical move in

the Platonic sense. This is Coetzee's attempt to lead the whole soul" ([25], p. 70). The three parts of the page read vertically expose to the reader "a *spectacle of embedding* [...] we see how the moral stances that are officially to be presented in book form are embedded in the fantasies, happenings, musings, and struggles of the author's day-to-day life" ([25], p. 70). The point of this is also to take a stand against the danger of thought, especially ethical thought, becoming a mere academic or literary exercise and a substitute for genuine thought and engagement [26]. Adding to Lear's just appraisal of the philosophical (Platonic) objectives of Coetzee's strategies, it is worth remarking that by turning the pages sequentially in order to follow the real-life entanglements of the author in the surprises, disappointments and dangers of his entanglement in the lives of others, our reading follows a spiral trajectory, returning to familiar but never identical acts. Thus, whether intellectual contemplation, the business of everyday life or interpersonal encounters that may awaken what Lear calls "metaphysical ache", a desire for reality no matter how unpleasant it may at times be for us; but it is equally entails "a living recognition of the reality of others [...] not only recognizing their dignity but crying out against their humiliation, degradation, and torture" ([25], p. 86). It is not difficult to recognize how what Lear describes as the purpose of the textual strategies Coetzee adopts in *Diary of a Bad Year* can be identified also throughout his novelistic work, including the most recent, *Childhood of Jesus*.

3.2. Timely Meditations

The novels involve us in a rich historical and ideological debate that compels us to reconsider the role of literature, with respect to the author and the critic function represented in these texts. At the same time, they raise the question of the post-modern re-integration of the aesthetic with the spheres of ethics and science, and challenge us by setting before us one very ubiquitous yet ugly alternative to the *raison-d'être* of the humanities: that of the banker/speculator. In *L'Université sans condition*, Jacques Derrida contemplates the significance of the profession of the Professor, of the verb "to profess", at the root of each, and chooses to "underline less the authority, the supposed competence and assurance of the profession or of the professor than, once more, the commitment, the declaration of responsibility" [27].

Could the role of literature, of the humanities, and of the university itself be related to that other mission also of the university, so frequently, as Derrida notes in *L'Université sans condition*, emblemized in many particular institutions' coat of arms, that is, the mission of "*veritas*", truth? Truth, and the ancient adage, "the care of the soul", renewed in modern terms/times by Michel Foucault and Jan Patočka, but also by others, Lyotard, Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas amongst them, is the regime for the *anima minima*, the "substance-soul" as Lyotard names it, and for that purpose, there must be, in the way that Derrida stipulates, a university without condition, an unconditional university, and that unconditionality is a condition for its future state, one which is not yet embodied by its present condition, and one which designates that the conditions of this unconditional university could just as well pertain outside, or beyond the university institution(s). That this is feasible, Coetzee's work gives us just one such example. One should be able to question everything, to include the most heretical views. In *The Master of Petersburg*, Coetzee's homage to Dostoevsky, the anarchist student Sergei Gennadevich, states his exasperation with universities: "A university is a place where they teach you to argue so that you'll never actually do anything" [28]. He and his comrades reject words as having the

power of physical action, as having any significant effect. This is contrary to the view of literature that Elizabeth Costello has held, as it is contrary to the understanding of literature in *Diary of a Bad Year*. Literature, the humanities and the university can have a transformative effect on the individual, can constitute an event. For Derrida, this event, in its unknowability, its unpredictability, would go even beyond the force of language in performative speech acts. As for Coetzee's own views of Dostoevsky, in *Diary of a Bad Year*, the last word he has to say, the last of the "soft opinions" is on the importance of Dostoevsky's novels:

I read again last night the fifth chapter of the second part of *The Brothers Karamazov*, the chapter in which Ivan hands back his ticket of admission to the universe God has created, and found myself sobbing uncontrollably. ([2], p. 223) These are pages I have read innumerable times before, yet instead of becoming inured to their force I find myself more and more vulnerable before them. Why? It is not as if I am in sympathy with Ivan's rather vengeful views [...] So why does Ivan make me cry in spite of myself? ([2], p. 224) The answer has nothing to do with ethics or politics, everything to do with rhetoric [...] Far more powerful than the substance of his argument, which is not strong, are the accents of anguish, the personal anguish of a soul unable to bear the horrors of this world. It is the voice of Ivan, as realized by Dostoevsky, not his reasoning, that sweeps me along. ([2], p. 225) And one is thankful to Russia too, Mother Russia, for setting before us with such indisputable certainty the standards towards which any serious novelist must toil, even if without the faintest chance of getting there: the standard of the master Tolstoy on the one hand and of the master Dostoevsky on the other. By their example one becomes a better artist; and by better I do not mean more skilful but ethically better. They annihilate one's impurer pretensions; they clear one's eyesight; they fortify one's arm' ([2], p. 227).

Here, beauty and compassion, the two things that Costello had singled out as the moving, life-affirming qualities of art bequeathed to us from the ancient Greek and Italian Renaissance cultures, are once again held up in their monumentalistic significance—in Nietzsche's sense, for whom the use of this conception of the past for someone is that "He learns from it that the greatness that once existed was in any event once *possible* and may thus be possible again" ([10], p. 69).

Derek Attridge points out, in his introduction to the collection of Coetzee's critical reviews, *Inner Workings*, "Coetzee's non-fictional and semi-fictional writing taken as a whole represents a substantial and significant contribution to the continuing discussion of literature's place in the lives of individuals and cultures" [29]. I would add: of institutions and of traditions. Coetzee responds in defense of literature, not only by staging all the different angles from which literature, and its traditional institutional study within the humanities, can be discredited, but also by showing that literature, especially the novel, can still be the space for this event. It is a space that cannot be provided by any other textual or wider cultural form, the space in which any manner of discourse can be given a platform, in the real contexts of intimate histories of individuals, and with the unique attention to the beauty of language by which we as humans inhabit the world, providing delight, even when the limits and limitations of language, or of our animality, throw up a seeming dead-end or inscrutable mystery.

4. Conclusions

Coetzee's writers carry on vulnerable, imperfect, aged and weary shoulders a demand that they should unassumingly, ingloriously, and even at the risk of disgrace, render literature a matrix through which all, whether writers or readers, may realize that they themselves can become what they are: the unacknowledged legislators of the world, and so complete the revolutionary project of Romanticism, what Novalis called the romanticization of the world [30]. Going even further back than the Romantics, the Renaissance Humanists' creation of an imaginary, virtual Republic of Letters is a significant predecessor to the ethical ideals of this kind of postmodern novel. The literary worlds of Coetzee's books, in which we, as readers, participate, suggest the continuing relevance but also need for a virtual, imaginary, republic of letters, radicalized so that neither classical or encyclopedic erudition nor letters or introduction are needed. In this renewed humanist republic of novel writers and readers, what we all do have, and what Coetzee's novels insist upon, are opinions and beliefs. What we often lack, is the chance to question, or sometimes, to even become aware of the nature of our beliefs and opinions, to articulate them coherently but also freely, to compare them with those of others, on all subjects, without fear of censorship or condemnation [31]. With unflagging ethical concern to realize the radical democratic potential of the novel form, Coetzee's novelistic aesthetics deploy a set of strategies that divest the authorial figure of any authority to dictate opinion and belief. In equally dark times as those of the original Renaissance humanist republicans, perhaps even darker, in view of the imminent threat of ecological apocalypse, "little communities" [32] dispersed throughout the global readership can, through the medium of the "fragile craft" of the book, realize the legitimacy and validity of their own claim to "maintain a different kind of society, with its own rules and values", ([32], p. 5) to question the authority held by a person or an institution, in the extreme plasticity and sociality of this kind of novel.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References and Notes

1. J.M. Coetzee. *Elizabeth Costello*. London: Vintage, 2004. All further citations will be from this edition.
2. J.M. Coetzee. *Diary of a Bad Year*. London: Vintage, 2008. All further citations will be from this edition.
3. Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Translated by Dana Polan. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1986. First published as *Kafka: pour une littérature mineure*. Paris: Les éditions de Minuit, 1975.
4. Paul Celan. *Paul Celan: Selected Poems*. Translated by Michael Hamburger. London: Penguin, 1996.
5. One could also include the works of James Joyce (*Ulysses* and, especially, *Finnegan's Wake*) and Samuel Beckett (both English and French writings). Deleuze and Guattari's category of minor

literature can thus clearly be said to pertain to anti-realist modes or tendencies in modernist and late-modernist literature.

6. *Apartheid*, or racial segregation, and its concomitant set of laws that forcibly relocated “black”, “coloured” and “Asian” people into separate areas, and eventually deprived black Africans of citizenship, was enforced by the National Party that held power from 1948 to 1994. It came to an end with the first democratic elections in 1994 when the African National Congress won and Nelson Mandela became president.
7. See William Beinart. “War, Reconstruction and the State from the 1890s to the 1920s.” In *Beinart, Twentieth-Century South Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, Chapter Two (First edition published in 1994).
8. For a reading of three of Coetzee’s anti-colonial novels, *Dusklands*, *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Foe* which juxtaposes postcolonial theory with Deleuze & Guattari’s work, see Grant Hamilton. *On Representation: Deleuze and Coetzee on the Colonized Subject*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011. My own interest here however is in the relevance of Deleuze & Guattari’s theorisation of a minor literature with the revolutionary potential of such literature to speak to the crisis of the humanities in his late, self-reflective, writerly novels (postmodernist *Künstlerromane*), *Elizabeth Costello* and *Diary of a Bad Year*.
9. By “representationalism”, what is meant here is the linguistic unity of signifier-signified-referent, which enables the immediate comprehension of a word by its automatic link to an existing meaning in a shared linguistic community of the speakers of that natural language. By cutting up words, separating morphemes and using highly elliptical syntax, Celan’s poetry eventually develops further and further away from conventional ways of inferring meaning from poetic language through reliance on the representation of a common world of shared meanings that the ordinary use of words and the rule-abiding formation of phrases would facilitate. In an essay on Celan that focuses largely on translation, Coetzee writes of Celan’s “unremitting, intimate wrestlings with the German language, which form the substrate of all his later poetry” and so “translation of the later poetry must always fail” (J.M. Coetzee. *Inner Workings, Essays 2000–2005*. London: HarvillSecker, 2007, p. 131).
10. Friedrich Nietzsche. *Untimely Meditations*. Translated by Reginald John Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983. This essay was originally published 1874. All further citations will be from this edition.
11. Here I am paraphrasing the title of Nietzsche’s essay, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life”, in *Untimely Meditations*.
12. Athenaeum Fragment 116, cited in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, and Jean-Luc Nancy. *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*. Translated by Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988, p. 83. First published as *L’absolu littéraire*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1978.
13. Six of the lessons/chapters of *Elizabeth Costello* and its postscript had appeared in some form, typically in critical academic journals or as lectures (*The Lives of Animals*). Of these, the last three chapters: “Eros”, “At the gate” and the postscript, “Letter of Elisabeth, Lady Chandos”, depart significantly from the style of the previous six sections, having the form of extended personal meditations on encounters with the radically other, or a radical othering of the self.

14. Jean-François Lyotard. *Postmodern Fables*. Translated by Georges van den Abbeele. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, pp. 242–43. First published as *Moralités postmodernes*. Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1993.
15. The order of the publication of the last four lessons and the postscript are as follows: Lesson 5, “The Humanities in Africa” (2001); Post-script, “Letter of Elizabeth, Lady Chandos” (2002); Lesson 6, “The Problem of Evil” (2003). “Eros” and “At the Gate” appeared only with the novel itself, in 2003.
16. Theodor Adorno, and Max Horkheimer. “Excursus I: Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment.” In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Translated by John Cumming. London: Verso, 1997, especially pp. 32–36. First published as *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. New York: Social Studies Association, 1944.
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23. J.M. Coetzee. *Summertime: Scenes from Provincial Life*. London: Vintage, 2010.
24. J.M. Coetzee. *The Childhood of Jesus*. London: Vintage, 2014.
25. Jonathan Lear. “Ethical Thought and the Problem of Communication: A Strategy for Reading *Diary of a Bad Year*.” In *J.M. Coetzee and Ethics: Philosophical Perspectives on Literature*. Edited by Anton Leist and Peter Singer. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, p. 67.
26. See, especially, Jonathan Lear. “Ethical Thought and the Problem of Communication: A Strategy for Reading *Diary of a Bad Year*.” In *J.M. Coetzee and Ethics: Philosophical Perspectives on Literature*. Edited by Anton Leist and Peter Singer. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, pp. 65–66.
27. Jacques Derrida. “Dans le lexique du ‘professer’, je soulignerai moins l’autorité, la compétence suppose et l’assurance de la profession ou du professeur que, une fois encore, l’engagement à tenir, la déclaration de responsabilité.” In *L’Université sans condition*. Paris: Galilée, 2001.
28. J.M. Coetzee. *The Master of Petersburg*. London: Vintage, 2004.
29. Derek Attridge. “Introduction.” In J.M. Coetzee: *Inner Workings*. Edited by Derek Attridge. London: HarvillSecker, 2007, pp. ix–x.

30. Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg), Fragment 66, Logological Fragments I. In *Philosophical Writings*. Translated by Margaret Mahony Stoljar. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997, p. 60.
31. In their “Introduction” to the collection, *J.M. Coetzee and Ethics*, Anton Leist and Peter Singer survey the historical contest between philosophy and literature and conclude on “the advantage of literature”: “To shift the puzzles of philosophical reflection [...] could be at least a first step toward tackling them in a more realistic and practical manner” (p. 14). In the same collection, the essay by Michael Funk Deckard and Ralph Palm, “Irony and Belief in *Elizabeth Costello*”, convincingly argue for the centrality of Romantic irony in the novel as: “The fundamental opposition, between the beliefs held and the way these beliefs are expressed [...] An ironic attitude imposes a distance between belief and its expression not for the purpose of simple evasiveness but rather for self-awareness of a special sort” (p. 343).
32. Anthony Grafton. “A Sketch Map of a Lost Continent: The Republic of Letters.” In *Republic of Letters: A Journal for the Study of Knowledge, Politics, and the Arts*. Stanford: Stanford University, 2009, vol. 1, no. 1, p. 5.

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