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"O Droewige Land!": Memory Landscapes in J.M. Coetzee's *Summertime*

„O Droewige Land!": krajobrazy pamięci w *Lecie* J.M. Coetzee

Abstract

Summertime (2009), the third book of J.M. Coetzee's autobiographical trilogy, is more poetic and more nostalgic in its depiction of South Africa than the writer's previous works, though his vision remains sharp and unsentimental. Written from the perspective of an émigré writer, Summertime is an imaginative mapping of personal memories that reside in various places of South Africa, especially in the ruggedly beautiful landscapes of the Karoo region. For Coetzee, the Karoo is the site of the individual and collective historical past which he attempts to reconstruct and retain. The open spaces of the Karoo provide inspiration for his art and stimulate his search for new expressive means to represent African landscape, subverting the traditional colonialist topos of exoticism and wilderness. While in his first "Australian" novel, *Slow Man* (2005), Coetzee problematized the notion of ethno-cultural identity in an

Abstrakt

Lato (Summertime, 2009), trzecia część autobiograficznej trylogii J.M. Coetzee, przedstawia wizję Afryki Południowej bardziej poetycką i nostalgiczną, niż ta, którą spotykamy w poprzednich powieściach autora; wciąż jednak jest to wizja ostra i pozbawiona sentymentalizmu. Napisane z perspektywy pisarza-emigranta Lato mapuje w wyobraźni osobiste wspomnienia ulokowane w różnych miejscach w Afryce Południowej, w szczególności w surowym, jednakże pięknym krajobrazie półpustyni Karru. Dla Coetzee Karru oznacza zarówno indywidualną, jak i zbiorową przeszłość historyczną, którą ten próbuje odtworzyć i zachować. Otwarte przestrzenie Karru stanowią inspirację dla twórczości Coetzee, prowokują do poszukiwania nowych środków wypowiedzi artystycznej na temat krajobrazu południowoafrykańskiego, dzięki którym pisarz podważa tradycyjne kolonialne toposy eg-

age of globalization and mass migration by presenting multicultural individuals whose destabilized identities defy categorizations of belonging and not belonging, in Summertime he emphasizes the crucial role of native landscape in the construction of self-identity, reveals his strong bond with his native country and portrays the Karoo as an anchoring space in a world of heterogeneity. Although, as Coetzee earlier confessed, South Africa is "a wound within him", in Summertime reflective nostalgia allows the writer to come to terms with his native country and his past.

Key words: J.M. Coetzee, South Africa, regional novel, autofiction, memory, identity

zotyzmu i dzikości. Podczas gdy w swojej pierwszej powieści „australijskiej" *Powolny człowiek (Slow Man, 2005)* Coetzee zakwestionował pojęcie tożsamości etno-kulturowej w czasach globalizacji i masowej migracji, ukazując postaci wielokulturowe jako byty zdestabilizowane, które rzucają wyzwanie kategorii przynależności, w utworze Lato pisarz podkreśla istotną rolę krajobrazu w kształtowaniu tożsamości, wyjawia silną więź z krajem swojego pochodzenia oraz przedstawia Karru jako swoistą opokę w świecie różnorodności. Mimo że, jak Coetzee przyznawał wcześniej, Afryka Południowa „pozostaje w nim raną", w Lecie refleksyjna nostalgia pozwala autorowi pogodzić się ze swym krajem i ze swoją przeszłością.

Słowa kluczowe: J.M. Coetzee, Afryka Południowa, powieść regionalna, autofikcja, pamięć, tożsamość

1. Introduction: *Summertime* as the nexus of memory, identity, and region

Summertime (2009) is the third book of J.M. Coetzee's autobiographical trilogy, which also includes *Boyhood* (1997) and *Youth* (2002). *Boyhood* deals with the writer's growing up in the South African town of Worcester up to the age of thirteen; *Youth* describes the period of time between 1959 and 1964, Coetzee's move to England and his experience in London. The action of *Summertime* concentrates on the years 1972–1977 when Coetzee, having taught at university level in the USA, returned to South Africa, took up a teaching position at the University of Cape Town and achieved his first success with the publication of *Dusklands* in 1974. Although some plausible facts concerning the writer's life can be extrapolated from these narratives, their experimental form, with its *counterimpulses of biographical factuality and self-fictionalisation* [Jacobs, 2014, p. 265], subverts conventions of traditional personal narrative. Both *Boyhood* and *Youth* use the form of a third-person, present-tense narrative with a fixed internal focalization (presenting the protagonist's point of view), while *Summertime* indicates its fictionality in a more straightforward manner, being based on the conceit that the famous writer John Coetzee is dead and taking the form of five interviews conducted by his biographer with people who used to know the writer; the interviews are framed by short annotated fragments from John Coetzee's notebooks from the same period. Because of their genre indeterminacy, these books have been variously labelled as fictionalized biography, fic-

tionalized memoir, or autofiction[1] and have been predominantly interpreted in terms of philosophical self-reflexive discourse [Tlustý, 2014, p. 225–227].

On the other hand, *Summertime* is also remarkable for its accurate reproduction of provincial life in 1970s South Africa. Significantly, all the three books of Coetzee's autofiction are subtitled "Scenes from Provincial Life",[2] which unambiguously establishes their links with the realist tradition of regional writing (cf., for example, George Eliot's *Scenes of Clerical Life*, 1857). According to K.D.M. Snell the regional novel is a type of fiction

that is set in a recognizable region, and which describes features distinguishing the life, social relations, customs, language, dialect, or other aspects of the culture of that area and its people. Fiction with a strong sense of local geography, topography or language is also covered by this definition. In such writing a particular place or regional culture may perhaps be used to illustrate an aspect of life in general, or the effects of a particular environment upon the people living in it. And one usually expects to find certain characteristics in a regional novel: detailed description of a place, setting or region, whether urban or rural, which bears an approximation to a real place; characters are usually of working or middle-class origin (...); dialogue represented with some striving for realism; and attempted verisimilitude. [Snell, 1998, p. 1]

Coetzee's memorable depiction of the Karoo, a semi-desert natural region in the centre-west of South Africa, with its ruggedly beautiful landscapes, isolated farms and scattered small towns, as well as realities of segregation and ethnical prejudice, creates a very distinctive sense of place and can be added to the list of famous literary representations of regions such as George Eliot's Midlands, Wordsworth's Lake District, Hardy's Wessex, Bennett's Potteries, or Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County. By weaving together disparate generic conventions Coetzee produces a complex hybrid narrative, which becomes the nexus of memory, identity, and region.

Coetzee's attitude to his native country has always been ambivalent. He was born in Cape Town, in a white English-speaking family that did not identify itself with the Africaner group (that is, Africaans-speaking descendants of the Dutch colonizers) which forms the majority of the white population in South Africa.[3] This dissociation, as Dominic Head points out, placed Coetzee's family on the margins of South African life because "African" and "Africaner" "became the important poles between which the political tussle in the latter half of the twentieth century took place" [Head, 2009, p. 4]. According to Head, although *he felt no affinity with contemporary Africaner identity in the apartheid years, Coetzee admitted that he could be branded 'Africaner', on the basis of historical connection, and as a way of identifying his guilt by association with the crimes committed by the whites of South Africa* [Head, 2009, p. 3]. The writer's prob-

1 *Youth* was published as "fiction" [Head, 2009, p. 9].

2 Some of the editions of *Youth* omitted the subtitle. However, Coetzee himself has indicated the continuity of the trilogy and, according to Sue Kossew, would have preferred to have had this subtitle in all editions of *Youth* [Kossew, 2011, p. 21].

3 Although Coetzee was used to speaking English at home, he spoke Africaans with other relatives.

lematic attitude to his country is expressed by the protagonist of *Youth*: *South Africa is like an albatross around his neck. He wants it removed, he does not care how, so that he can begin to breathe* [Coetzee, 2002, p. 100–101]. Following his graduation from the University of Cape Town, Coetzee, for ten years, lived outside South Africa, first in Great Britain (1962–1965) and then in the USA (1965–1972). After his application for permanent residence in the USA was denied, he returned to Cape Town in 1972 where he continued teaching at the University of Cape Town till 2001. In 2002 he emigrated to Australia and in 2006 he was granted Australian citizenship. The heterogeneity of Coetzee's identity, as well as his experience of dislocation and cross-cultural acculturation, has strongly impacted his writing.

Written from the perspective of an émigré writer, *Summertime* is more poetic and more nostalgic in its depiction of South Africa than Coetzee's previous works. However, the writer's vision of his native country remains sharp and unsentimental. *Summertime* is an imaginative mapping of the writer's personal memories that reside in various places of South Africa. This essay sets out to explore the sites of memory contained in the rural and natural landscapes of the Karoo region presented in the book; moreover, the book itself is read as a site of memory, as an act of remembrance performed through narrative and reconstructing the writer's relationship with the past. The process of putting memory to work is bound with the notions of belonging and identity. As Astrid Erll indicates, *identities have to be constructed and reconstructed by acts of memory, by remembering who one was and by setting this past Self in relation to the present Self* [Erll, 2008, p. 6]. By examining how memory is spacialized and by identifying different layers of meaning that inhere in the various spaces, the essay considers the role that different kinds of landscapes play in the construction of self-identity. In fact, in *Summertime* Coetzee, by imaginatively excavating various places in the Karoo, raises what in his *White Writing* he has called "a Wordsworthian question", namely, *In what ways have I been moulded by the landscape in which I have lived?* [Coetzee, 1988, p. 171]. Pieter Vermeulen, who has detected Wordsworthian traces throughout Coetzee's 1990s writing, claims that Coetzee's autobiographical work – *Boyhood* and *Youth* – situates itself in relation to Wordsworth's pedagogical and poetical positions (as formulated in *The Prelude*, Wordsworth's self-interpretative autobiographical poem) but he actively reconfigures them and formulates a specifically South African (that is, non-English) response to them [Vermeulen, 2009, p. 49, 55]. *Summertime* is Coetzee's further elaboration on the theme of identity and landscape.

2. The Karoo: "a sacred space"

In *White Writing*, Coetzee's book of criticism which discusses a wide range of works written by South African white authors and which constitutes an important subtext of *Summertime*, he distinguishes between two traditions, or, as he puts it, two "dream topographies" within South African pastoral writing:

One dream topography that the South African pastoral projects is (...) a network of boundaries crossing the surface of the land, marking off thousands of farms, each a separate kingdom ruled over by a benign patriarch with, beneath him, a pyramid of contented and industrious children, grandchildren and serfs. But there is a rival dream topography as well: of South Africa as a vast, empty, silent space, older than the man (...) and destined to be vast, empty, and unchanged long after man has passed from its face [Coetzee, 1988, p. 6–7].

Summertime simultaneously makes use of and undermines both of these traditions.

The Karoo is the most distinctive feature of South African landscape. As popular tourist guides *have it,*

(The Karoo) is parched expanse of baked red earth. (...) It is a place of immense spaces, wide-angle horizons, craggy mountain ranges, conical hills, and ancient inland seabed, and a sky so big that at night it feels like you can touch the stars. (...) In the silence you may notice the movement of a herd of Springbok, the croak of a Korhaan or the ever present merino or dorper sheep with their distinctive black heads. ["The Karoo, South Africa"]

Coetzee's striking description of the Karoo in *Summertime* illuminates the effect this "barren part of the world" has had on the shaping of his psychological make-up and his sense of rootedness in the world. For the protagonist, John, the Karoo is "a sacred space" [Coetzee, 2009, p. 134]. He identifies with the natural environment and is deeply affected by the beauty of its wild landscape. This "droewige land" (sorrowful land), where *even baboons, as they stare out over the veld, are overcome with "weemoed"*, fills him with melancholy, "wrenches (his) heart" and "spoils him for life" [Coetzee, 2009, p. 97, 140–141]. Whereas the city is the incapacitating site of racial conflict, social hypocrisy and alienation, the vast spaces of the Karoo are timeless and elating, making John feel at one with cosmos, with eternity. He wants to be buried there, so as to become part of it. It is in such descriptions of the Karoo that Coetzee's love of the South African outback shines through and "the agonised bond" [Wrong, 2009] with the land of his forefathers is strongly felt.

The Karoo is also the site of the individual and collective historical past which Coetzee's protagonist attempts to reconstruct and retain. He knows that the large open areas of the Karoo were in prehistoric times populated. He is conscious of spirituality inherent in the landscape and its subliminal heritage, he feels the presence of "ghosts". The Karoo contains the lost memory of an indigenous African prehistory, disinherited peoples and their forgotten legacy – destroyed indigenous culture, including forgotten indigenous languages. John is interested in the things that have been lost. He has learned Khoi (that is, Hottentot, the language of the original hunter-gatherer inhabitants of southwestern Africa) from books because there are no speakers of Khoi languages left in South Africa. After the arrival of the European settlers in the Karoo during the eighteenth century, the Khoi were driven off their land, which effectively ended their

traditional way of life. To his cousin Margot's question who he can speak Khoi too, he answers, *The dead. You can speak with the dead (...) who otherwise are cast out into everlasting silence* [Coetzee, 2009, p. 104].

John's linguistic attempts to excavate memories from their ruins and to reconstruct a painful collective historical past parallel those of the magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, who devotes much of his free time to exploring ancient ruins near the settlement, where he discovers the wooden slips covered in writings of a long forgotten language. He manages finally to decipher the writing on the slips and realizes the true nature of the horrors that the Empire has done to the barbarians:

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. Empire dooms itself to live in history and plot against history. [Coetzee, 1982, p. 133]

Both John and the magistrate put themselves in opposition to colonial historiography as they try to reclaim history which is denied to indigenous people, and to break the inscrutability of the other.

3. Mapping the Karoo: *platteland* farms and small towns

Coetzee's mapping of the Karoo throws into sharp relief such features of local topography as *platteland* farms and small towns. Especially the Voëlfontein farm and the town of Merweville function as important points of reference in the writer's investigation of the nature of his self-identity and in his depiction of the situation in the country at a time when cracks were beginning to appear in South Africa's policy of racial segregation.

Voëlfontein is the Coetzees' family farm that lies in the Koup region, the most arid stretch of the Karoo. The story of John's visit to Voëlfontein occupies the central place in *Summertime.* It is a third-person narration focalized by his country cousin Margot, whose background is Afrikaner. The description of the farm in Margot's story establishes a particular family world against which and inside which Coetzee defined himself. The farm was founded by their grandfather, a man who was admired by Coetzee for having plenty of (…) *spunk*, more spunk probably than all his children put together" [Coetzee, 2009, p. 106]. The man was a "*go-getter* in a land with few go-getters", who started out as a peddler and finally was able to buy land and settle down as a gentleman horse-breeder and sheep-farmer [Coetzee, 2009, p. 106–107]. On his death the farm passed to Coetzee's Africaner uncle. The Coetzees are easygoing and good company, their Christmas get-togethers are fun but they take the line of least resistance, which leads to the gradual decay of the farm. The young Coetzee's deep attraction to the family farm in the Karoo is described in *Boyhood*: *the farm is called Voëlfontein, Bird-fountain; he loves every stone of it, every bush, every blade of grass* [Coetzee, 1997, p. 80]. In *Boyhood*, the farm is associated with happy holiday memories, while in *Summertime* the decaying farm is perceived as residue of family history and nostalgia.

Significantly, it is on the Voëlfontein farm that the ambiguities involved in Coetzee's ethno-national identity clearly manifest themselves. The duality of his identity is reflected in his bilingual status as both Africaans and English-speaking, and in his vacillation over his choice of language. On the farm John speaks Africaans, the extended family's common language. However, his Afrikaans is "haulting", "stiff and bookish" [Coetzee, 2009, p. 93, 124] because of his English education. At one point in his conversation with Margot he calls himself an Africaner; yet this identification is challenged by Margot's words:

Does he really think of himself as an Afrikaner? She doesn't know many real (egte) Afrikaners who would accept him as one of the tribe. (...) To pass as an Afrikaner nowadays you need at the very least to vote National and attend church on Sundays. She can't imagine her cousin putting on a suit and tie and going off to church. [Coetzee, 2009, p. 95]

Eventually, Coetzee's non-conformism and hatred of apartheid prevent him from fully embracing Africaner identity.

Margot's story follows the tradition in white South African literature that concerns itself with the farm and *platteland* (rural) society. In *White Writing*, Coetzee points out that in Africaans novels (especially those written in the 1920s – 1940s), the farm is conceived as the sacral place where the soul can expand in freedom [Coetzee, 1988, p. 175]; he identifies the typical motif in Africaans literature – *the isolationist romance of the return to the family farm –* as *part of the dream-fare of the petit-bourgeois descendants of (...) landless farmers* [Coetzee, 1988, p. 6]. His own depiction of Voëlfontein draws on this tradition in its evocation of a spirit of nostalgia and looking back to the calm and stability of the farm.

The appeal of farm and devotion to land are also encapsulated in the description of Middelpos, the farm owned by Margot and her husband Lucas. Situated in the barren, drought-ridden Roggeveld, the farm does not bring much profit any more. To help make ends meet Margot has to work as a bookkeeper at the one hotel in the town of Calvinia and she has to spend Monday through Thursday at the hotel separated from her husband. However, she is never discouraged and endures all the hardships with stoicism supported by her idealistic belief that "(a) farm is not a business" [Coetzee, 2009, p. 141]. She has a very strong bond with her land, and both she and her husband feel they are at home in Africa. Their treatment of the "Coloured people" who work on the farm is more equitable than in racial relations in town:

If Lucas chooses (...) to drive trucks for the Coop, if she keeps the books for the hotel, it is not because the farm is a doomed enterprise but because she and Lucas made up their minds long ago they would house their workers properly and pay them a decent wage and make sure their children went to school and support those same workers later when they grew old and infirm; and because all that decency and support costs money, more money than the farm as a farm brings in or ever will bring in, in the foreseeable future. [Coetzee, 2009, p. 141]

Voëlfontein and Middelpos are contrasted with a more prosperous farm mentioned in Julia's tale. Her husband Mark's parents *lived in the rural Eastern Cape in a farmhouse ringed by a two-metre-high electrified fence. They never spent a night away from home for fear the farm would be plundered and the livestock driven off, so they might as well have been in jail* [Coetzee, 2009, p. 67]. The juxtaposition of these two different kinds of farms symbolically stands for two groups of European settlers in South Africa, their different attitudes to land, and refers to a highly problematical issue of white South African – colonial identity. As Coetzee has observed, the Africaner claims to be native to South African land, while the English makes no claim to being native to Africa [Coetzee, 1988, p. 174]. In the last two hundred and fifty years, the Karoo was populated with both Dutch (Afrikaans) and English speaking settlers who established themselves primarily as stock farmers. The Dutch settlers, who produced the new material forms and meanings of landscape (dams, wind-pumps, farms, etc.), changed the landscape, left their marks on the terrain and claimed the land as their own. As Margot reflects:

What are we doing here?: that had been the unspoken question all the time. (...) What are we doing in this barren part of the world? Why are we spending out lives in dreary toil if it was never meant that people should live here, if the whole project of humanizing the place was misconceived from the start?

This part of the world. The part she means is not Merweville or Calvinia but the whole Karoo, perhaps the whole country. Whose idea was it to lay down roads and railway lines, build towns, bring in people and then bind them to this place, bind them with rivets through the heart, so that they cannot get away? Better to cut yourself free and hope the wound heals, he (John) said when they were out walking in the veld. But how do you cut through rivets like that? [Coetzee, 2009, p. 140]

However, the Afrikaners owe their prosperity to the exploitation of black labour. Both Margot and John experience shame and the sense of historical guilt about the crime of apartheid, which is also part of their South African inheritance. As Jan Tlustý points out, by means of his narrative, Coetzee says, *this is me too*. Stories of a country where apartheid destroys human dignity are my stories too" [Tlustý, 2014, p. 234]. Moreover, *Summertime* reveals the detrimental effects of the political situation in South Africa on the formation of character: the protagonist's weaknesses and inability to open himself up to people are strongly resonant of South Africa's national isolation and staunch denial of history in the apartheid period [Urquhart, 2009].

The 1970s was a time of high tensions in South African society. *Summertime* refers to the political changes in the country and the consequences of those changes for Africaners, who traditionally dominated South Africa's agriculture and politics. Margot is fearful of the growing instability in the country and anxious about the future; her words prefigure the tragedies of many white farmers in post-apartheid South Africa when demands for the confiscation and redistribution of the land, as well as violent *plaasmoorde* (farm attacks), caused significant white emigration:

Is it (the Karoo) meant to fall back into the hands of the volk, who will proceed, as in the old, old days, to roam from district to district with their ragged flocks in search of grazing, trampling the fences flat, while people like herself and her husband expire in some forgotten corner, disinherited? [Coetzee, 2009, p. 120]

The shifts in the racial relations in South Africa in the middle of the 1970s are epitomized in an episode in the Apollo Café during John and Margot's visit to Merweville, a hot Karoo town where their grandfather used to be mayor. When they go to the café to have a cup of coffee, they are surrounded by a dozen barefoot children, *staring with unabashed curiosity*; one child filches a cube of sugar, smiles merrily at Margot and licks the sugar [Coetzee, 2009, p. 105]. This episode reiterates a scene from *Boyhood*, but with a marked difference. In *Boyhood*, John is given some money to take his friends for an ice-cream in a café, as a birthday treat. There are *the ragged Coloured children standing at the window looking at them*. Their faces betray no "hatred", they are *like children at a circus, drinking in the sight, utterly absorbed, missing nothing*. These children are chased away, but *it is too late, his heart is already hurt* [Coetzee, 1997, p. 72–73]. Dominic Head, analyzing this episode, remarks that *in the implied analogy with circus animals Coetzee assesses the privileged situation of himself and his friends as a kind of aberration, a form of fascinating exoticism* [Head, 2009, p. 6]. In *Summertime*, however, the Coloured children's uninhibited behaviour is symptomatic of the new situation in the country; it demonstrates how old racial boundaries have started to be crossed and how changes in the attitudes of Coloured people have appeared, in which Margot detects *a new and unsettling hardness* [Coetzee, 2009, p. 117].

Despite his loyalty to the Karoo and powerful feelings about its landscape, Coetzee's protagonist, disgusted with *the loud, angry place (his) country has become* [Coetzee, 2009, p. 151], comes to a determination to cast off the burden of his South African identity:

"Of course, in the midst of this" – he does not gesture, but she (Margot) knows what he means: this sky, this space, the vast silence enclosing them – "I feel blessed, one of a lucky few. But practically speaking, what future do I have in this country, where I have never fitted in? Perhaps a clean break would have been better after all. Cut yourself free of what you love and hope that the wound heels". [Coetzee, 2009, p. 131–132]

The sense of constraint in South African society made Coetzee finally disown his country and live a life of an exile.

4. South African landscape and the aesthetics of representation

While in Merweville, John reveals to Margot his intention of buying a house there, so that living in Cape Town he could spend weekends and holidays in Merweville. Merweville is a typical *platteland* town:

Merweville is a smaller town and in decline, in such decline that it must be in danger of falling off the map. There can be no more than a few hundred people left. Half

the houses they drove past seemed unoccupied. The building with the legend Volkskas (People's Bank) in white pebbles studded in the mortar over the door houses not a bank but a welding works. Though the worst of the afternoon heat is past, the sole living presence on the main street is provided by two men and a woman stretched out, along with a scawny dog, in the shade of a flowering jacaranda. [Coetzee, 2009, p. 105]

The house John is thinking of buying *is a nondescript cube with a corrugated-iron roof, a shaded veranda running the length of the front, and a steep wooden staircase up the slide leading to a loft. The paintwork is in a sorry state. In front of the house, in a bedraggled rockery, a couple of aloes struggle to stay alive* [Coetzee, 2009, p. 108–109]. Margot, who finds the whole situation ridiculous, tries to dissuade him. She sees John, with his idea of writing poetry in Merweville, as a failure:

Sitting in that dusty old house in Merweville looking out on the empty, sunstruck street, rattling a pencil between his teeth, trying to think up verses. O droë land, o barre kranse... O parched land, o barren cliffs... What next? Something about weemoed for sure, melancholy. [Coetzee, 2009, p. 120]

John and his poems again! She can't help it, she snorts with laughter. John sitting on the stoep of that dreary little house making up poems! With a beret on his head, no doubt, and a glass of wine at his elbow. And the little Coloured children clustered around him, pestering him with questions... [Coetzee, 2009, p. 128–129]

Coetzee's self-portrait as a Romantic poet writing melancholic verses in a hot African town has parodying connotations, whereas the picture of a dilapidated house in Merweville as a place of poetic retreat offers an ironic contrast to Wordsworth's Dove Cottage in Grasmere or Keats House in Hampstead. However, this image of a white poet in Africa has a serious intention, too. For one thing, it acts as a metonymy signifying the incompatibility of traditional European aesthetic patterns with the realities of South Africa. For another, it testifies to the presence of a white poet in the African landscape for whom the open spaces of the Karoo provide inspiration and stimulus in his search for new expressive means to represent South African landscape. In fact, *Summertime* can be read as fictionalization of Coetzee's critical discourse presented in *White Writing*:

(...) the lone poet in empty space is by no means a peripheral figure in South African writing. In the words he throws out to the landscape, in the echoes he listens for, he is seeking a dialogue with Africa, a reciprocity with Africa, that will allow him an identity better than that of visitor, stranger, transient. [Coetzee, 1988, p. 8]

Summertime acts out some of Coetzee's ideas from *White Writing* concerning the symbolic dimensions and aesthetics of South African landscape. In *White Writing* Coetzee maintains that for European settlers in South Africa the main question was how to appropriate through imagination, to represent in art and literature this part of Africa for the white man if South African landscape, because of its barrenness and emptiness (especially the flat, arid Karoo), resisted the imposition of familiar European aesthetic schema – the categories of the beautiful, the picturesque and the sublime – *the three*

great categories under which specimens of European landscape were classified [Coetzee, 1988, p. 52].

Coetzee's response, as Pieter Vermeulen notes, is *(t)he writing of a 'web of connected prose' (...) because descriptions of South African landscape cannot take the form of Romantic 'poetical harmonies'. (...) It is only through prosaic enumeration, and not through the imposition of the Wordsworthian sublime, that the particulars of South Africa are allowed to remain (...) and are not given up to poetical harmonization* [Vermeulen, 2009, p. 57]. Coetzee himself identifies the existence of the tradition of prosaic description of landscape in Africaans writing, which he appropriates and develops in his own work: *One should not overlook (...) a mode of natural, or at least rural, descriptive writing in Africaans that has no parallel in South African English literature: a deft, quick, highly metonymic itemization of particulars whose effect is to evoke the mood (...) of the scene (...)* [Coetzee, 1988, p. 176].

Coetzee's feelings about the landscape, in which awe weighs heavily, are brought into prominence in the descriptions of how landscape transforms from day to night to day in the episode of Margot and John stranded on the Merweville road, in the middle of nowhere:

It is December, and in December it does not get dark until well after nine. Even then – so pristinely clear is the air on the high plateau – the moon and stars are bright enough to light one's footsteps. [Coetzee, 2009, p. 94]

What presences surround them – bushes or trees or perhaps even animals – she senses on her skin rather than sees. From somewhere comes the chirping of a lone cricket. Stay with me tonight, she whispers to the cricket. [Coetzee, 2009, p. 114]

She wakes as first streaks of mauve and orange begin to extend across the sky. (...) The air is cold and still. Even as she watches, thornbrushes and tufts of grass, touched by the first light, emerge out of nothing. It is as if she were present at the first day of creation. [Coetzee, 2009, p. 120]

Coetzee's short prosaic descriptions of South African landscape have the quality of haiku in their minimalism and focus on a single image; for example, the description of the cricket quoted above can be compared to Basho's Cricket Haiku:

Such utter silence!
even the crickets'
singing . . .
Muffled by hot rocks

Literature's memory, as Renate Lachmann puts it, is its intertextuality [Lachmann, 2008, p. 301]. Margot's lone cricket evokes John Keats's sonnet *On the Grasshopper and Cricket* in which cricket singing "(o)n a lone winter evening" epitomizes the beauty and immortality of nature. It also brings to mind the cricket of Emily Dickinson's poem whose song transforms day into night: "The cricket sang, / And set the sun",

A vastness, as a neighbor, came,–
A wisdom without face or name,
A peace, as hemispheres at home,–
And so the night became.

Coetzee's representation of the Karoo subverts the traditional colonialist topos of the South African plateau as a wilderness, which is common in earlier "white" South African literature. He reclaims this wilderness, which is not anomalous, not exotic, and not empty. His representation of landscape is not founded on the imperial gaze but "grounded on love of and intimacy with the land-as-soil" [Coetzee, 1988, p. 167], to use the words by which Coetzee praised Charles Eglington's poetry and which can be applied to his own work as well.

5. Conclusion

South African scholar J.U. Jacobs describes Coetzee's identity as transnational [Jacobs, 2014, p. 260]; the writer is a person who, like many other people in South Africa, has become, in his own words, "detached from (his) ethnic roots" and has joined "a pool of no recognizable *ethnos* whose language of exchange is English" [Coetzee, 1992, p. 342]. Coetzee's life is a complex history of self-exile, exile, immigration and return, estrangement and identification. In his first "Australian" novel *Slow Man* (2005), Coetzee, the displaced cosmopolitan, problematized the notion of ethno-cultural identity in an age of globalization and mass migration by presenting multicultural individuals whose hybrid and destabilized identities defy categorizations of belonging and not belonging. What he emphasizes in *Summertime*, however, is the crucial role of native landscape in the construction of self-identity, he reveals his strong bond with his native country and portrays the Karoo as an anchoring space in a world of heterogeneity. Although South Africa remains "a wound within him", as Coetzee earlier confessed [Coetzee, 2002, p. 116], in *Summertime*, reflective nostalgia allows the writer to come to terms with his native country and his past.

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