

Macquarie University

Marcelle Freiman

***J.M. Coetzee's allegory of writing in Life and Times of Michael K: Politics and the writer's responsibility***

The writer's relationship to the physical environment, politics and history of his country is crucial in shaping the formations of his writing and his identity as a writer. J.M. Coetzee's novel *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983), like his other novels set in South Africa, presents events of history in the form of allegory in order to focus on some of these issues. In this story of a homeless man in search of a place to live in a society that overtly excludes him, the protagonist's search for a place to cultivate the land is linked with the question of individual creativity and storytelling in the context of apartheid South Africa in the 1970s and 80s. According to Edward Said, 'texts have ways of existing that even in their most rarefied form are always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place, and society - in short, they are in the world, and hence worldly' (Said 1983: 35). Coetzee's novel embodies an awareness of issues of the power and representation in writing and of the moral dilemmas faced by a writer in his participation in discourse creation.

It is this question of the ethical role and impact of the creative work in society that I want to address in this essay. In the post-war debate about art committed to social change Theodore Adorno, in his essay 'On Commitment' (1977), challenges Sartre (note 1) for the way in which Sartre's writing and drama - his arts of commitment - serve his philosophy of dialectical choice and Party politics, especially in its social realist aesthetic. Sartre, he says, does not address discursive structures that mitigate against the reader's (consumer's) freedom to choose. For Adorno, 'Committed art in the proper sense is not intended to generate ameliorative measures, legislative acts or practical institutions...but to work at the level of fundamental attitudes' (Adorno 1997: 180). The author's motivations and philosophy that enter the work as objective statements are irrelevant to the finished product; rather 'The actual obligation a writer undertakes is much more precise: it is not one of choice but of substance' (Adorno 1997: 181). It is the *form* of art that has the power to shift the cynicism of the consumer of art. While art is the 'awakener', its challenge is to find a way of representing suffering and violence without transfiguring it and giving it objective meaning, hence diminishing its horror (note 2). It is the *way* suffering is represented that determines the effectiveness of committed art. The challenge is to reveal evil without settling for resignation to the empirical 'fact' of evil in the world. He looks to Kafka and Beckett, non-realist writers, the forms of whose work, he says, 'arouses the fear which existentialism merely talks about' (note 3) -

By dismantling appearance they explode from *within* the art which committed proclamation subjugates from *without*, and hence only in appearance. The inescapability of their

work compels the change of attitude which committed works merely demand. He over whom Kafka's wheels have passed, has lost forever both any peace with the world and any chance of consoling himself with the judgement that the way of the world is bad; the element of ratification which lurks in resigned admission of the dominance of evil is burnt away. (Adorno 1997: 191. My italics)

Adorno advocates neither 'art for art's sake', nor the appropriation of revolutionary ideas into art. The risk of complacency, a case of 'preaching to the converted', can only be overcome if the work of art includes alterity, the '*should be otherwise*': the 'moment of true volition...is mediated through nothing other than the form of the work itself, whose crystallization becomes an analogy of that other condition which should be' (Adorno 1997: 194).

Adorno's emphasis is on form that emerges from the artist's engagement with materiality, rather than on the imposition of intellectual or political ideas upon the art, to facilitate an 'autonomous' rather than a 'political' art. To support his contention, Adorno refers to Kafka's allegories and abstractions and to Paul Klee's cartoon painting, the *Angelus Novus*, the 'Angel of the Machine', which was owned by Walter Benjamin. Benjamin's commentary on this work in his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' regards the angel (an allegorical figure) flying backwards towards eternity - 'His face turned to the past' (Benjamin 1970: 249) - looking back on history as a series of unfolding catastrophes, a view of history as 'ruin' rather than '*telos*' or development, but nevertheless, a history that offers, despite its predication on violence, 'the prospect of allegorical redemption via ruin and decay' (Kelley 1997: 256) (note 4).

Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K* depicts the 'ruin' of history as the destruction of country and land through 'war' (the conflicts of apartheid); it also develops a narrative thread of allegory that posits, through a metafictional discourse, a redemptive function for writing within material history. The novel appears to align itself with the issue Adorno raises through both its relationship to Kafka's writing and its ethical stance that refuses to subscribe to any form of party politics. It is 'autonomous', in Adorno's sense, in that 'politics has migrated' into it - as one writer's engagement with the predicament of creative writing in conditions of history and political change. Coetzee's eight novels and four books in other genres, published between 1974 and 2003, all emerge from the context of white South Africa. During the apartheid era his work was criticized within South Africa for what was perceived as limited engagement with material history and politics, and more lately in the post-apartheid era (since 1994) it has been criticized for what is perceived as a representation of the New South Africa in racist terms - a debate to some extent generated by a reading of his novel *Disgrace* (1999) as a factual rather than a fictional representation (note 5).

The conflict in the South African reception of Coetzee's novels mirrors the conflict of Adorno's argument, distinguishing between a 'politically' committed art and an 'autonomously committed' art. Throughout his writing Coetzee has argued for the place of writing, and the writer, as witness and ethical observer (note 6). His fictional texts are self-conscious about the capacity for writing to become subsumed in ideology; they challenge the assumptions of literary and other genres by using a range of discursive modes. These discursive modes include the contesting allegories that constitute much of the ambivalence of his writing, and

which have received much critical attention (note 7). Part of the ambivalence of *Life and Times of Michael K* is that it does present a realistic story of a homeless man who is denied a place in South Africa's discursive and material structures, hence it is also 'not' allegory.

Yet this ambivalence is also in the very nature of allegory, which is a complex mode characterized by dialogic discursive formations: for a start, allegory permits the writer to conceal his critique of a regime that imposed extreme levels of censorship on dissenting voices - Coetzee was the only 'dissenting' writer whose work was not banned - but allegory also tends towards essentialism: Frederic Jameson points to its a-historicity and its construction of 'collective fantasies about history and reality' (Jameson 1989: 34). He suggests that allegory is a reductive mode 'in which the data of one narrative line are radically impoverished by their rewriting according to the paradigm of another narrative, which is taken as the former's mastercode or Ur narrative' (Jameson 1989: 22) (note 8). Yet the irony of Coetzee's allegories tend to emphasise the distortions and omissions of allegories based on mastercodes of history, represented by colonial narratives of exploration, possession and settlement. His writing subverts such allegorical reductions, re-inserting what the imperial tropes omit, a process in effect supported by Jameson's theory which proposes restoring the 'buried realities of history' (Jameson 1989: 20) (note 9).

It has been observed that allegory appears more frequently at times of cultural and political anxiety (note 10). The need to create 'autonomous' form for writing in such conditions is implied in Coetzee's 'Jerusalem Prize Acceptance Speech' (1987), where he comments on the troubled, morally traumatized South African context and the writing it produced, including his own:

The deformed and stunted relations between human beings that were created under colonialism and exacerbated under what is loosely called apartheid have their psychic representation in a deformed and stunted inner life. All expressions of that inner life, no matter how intense, no matter how pierced with exultation or despair, suffer from the same stuntedness and deformity. I make this observation with due deliberation, and in the fullest awareness that it applies to myself and my own writing as much as to anyone else. South African literature is a literature in bondage, as it reveals in even its highest moments, shot through as they are with feelings of homelessness and yearnings for a nameless liberation. It is a less than fully human literature, unnaturally preoccupied with power and the torsions of power, unable to move from elementary relations of contestation, domination, and subjugation to the vast and complex human world that lies beyond them. (Coetzee 1992: 98)

It might also be argued that in such conditions the mode of allegory serves a need for 'apocalyptic escape' (Fletcher 1964: 22), thus accounting for its emergence in writing at times of social and political change. Yet Coetzee's use of allegory is more complex than the need for escape suggests: as his allegories deconstruct the universalism of key colonial and imperial allegories and tropes, their textual formations simultaneously create constitutive allegories that demonstrate an impulse to transform the 'bondage' and 'stuntedness' described in his speech. This constitutive allegory, which is the focus of my argument here, suggests the tenacity of

the creative work in imagining an alternative consciousness to one of apocalyptic anxiety.

While the title of *Life and Times of Michael K* draws attention to its 'literal' textuality through its relationship to Kafka's novels (*The Trial*, *The Castle*) (note 11) and to the tradition of the European novel (echoing, amongst others, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* 1719), its dystopic vision in a 'time of war' (Coetzee 1983: 9) is ironically real: it is a 'futuristic' version of an intensified present in 1970s South Africa, a time 'after' apartheid, which was imagined by anxious white South Africans as a descent into social and political anarchy. The text was published in the early 1980s during the later stages of the struggle against apartheid, a period leading up to a state of emergency and mounting pressure for change in a totalitarian system of oppression. The story of the journey of Michael K represents the pathetic quest of an individual who falls between the cracks of a brutal system. He seeks a place to live and grow his own food, a desire signifying the expression of his own (limited and damaged) identity which is heralded in the text's first 'threshold image' of his physical appearance - 'The first thing the midwife noticed about Michael K when she helped him out of his mother into the world was that he had a hare lip' (Coetzee 1983: 3) - and in the fact that his mind is 'not quick' (4). When interred in a prison hospital later in the text, the Medical Officer who treats him becomes an obsessive 'reader' of Michael K's 'meaning' and sees him as an allegory 'of how scandalously, how outrageously a meaning can take up residence in a system without becoming a term in it' (228). The Medical Officer mis-reads K's meaning because he lacks knowledge of Michael's story, a story which the actual reader has read, focalized for the most part through Michael's consciousness in the first part of the text. The Medical Officer fails to represent Michael K in the 'writerly' constructions of his reading because, besides Michael K's silence about his story, the doctor's perceptual parameters limit his own knowledge of stories like those of Michael K. The Medical Officer is a reader limited by his own white liberal position.

The ambivalence of this liberal position is closely engaged with in all Coetzee's work. The Medical Officer, obsessive in his search for moral ground, together with his more pragmatic, co-director of the hospital camp, Noël (an Afrikaans name that provides the possibility of an Afrikaans-speaking white liberal in the text), pride themselves on their distinction from the totalitarian system of the Pretoria regime. They have not the hardness required to exercise such power; 'not being iron' (Coetzee 1983: 211) they are entrapped in the system, are compassionate (if paternalistic), they play cricket and do not consider themselves part of the war. The Medical Officer's positioning is as white, English-speaking liberal who is distinguished by language and ideology from the Afrikaans-speaking nationalists dominating the white regime. Effectively the English-speaking liberal had no role to play unless he could align with one side in the fiercely bipartite struggle against the race-based system of apartheid. The Medical Officer's difficulty in reading K is a symptom of this struggle and its reflexivity in the text implicates the actual reader. It is precisely Michael K's *allegorical* function that directs readers towards his significance in ways that the Medical Officer cannot read. The reader fills in the omissions of Michael K's story to read a local story through recognizable cultural and linguistic codes to recognize how much of this bleak story is not an allegory.

One such omission in the representation of Michael K, given the story's material history, is the obscurity of reference to his race. Coetzee's silence

in defining a racial type can be understood as a refusal to reproduce the South African typological discourse dominated by racial difference. But enigmatic clues are provided to prevent Michael K from becoming an abstraction that would release his representation from the historical conditions that create him. The letteral reference to Kafka's 'K' also signifies 'Kleurling', the term of 'classification' for people of mixed race. In the hospital where his mother dies, he is named and classified as 'Michael Visagie - CM - 40 - NFA - Unemployed' (Coetzee 1983: 96), 'CM' referring to 'Coloured Male'. Other forms of social definition ground the allegory in time and place: a socially accurate picture is presented of Michael's childhood with his mother, and later in an institution: 'Year after year Michael K sat on a blanket watching his mother polish other people's floors, learning to be quiet... At the age of fifteen he passed out of Huis Norenius and joined the Parks and Gardens division of the municipal services of the City of Cape Town as Gardener, grade 3(b)' (4). Michael K belongs to a class of servants and manual workers in Cape Town. By virtually excluding one type of definition (racial) and underscoring another (bureaucratic/institutional) the text deflects the reading away from a racial dialectic, making Michael K into a more generalized figure who is everyman/worker/victim, but at the same time locating a plausible South African story. The writing foregrounds its context, yet as allegory it also preserves 'buried realities of history' (Jameson 1989: 20) - in this case the materiality of the stories of people like Michael K, which at the time were literally unwritten because the system prevented it, restricting every opportunity and means for the stories of black South Africans to be told.

Yet, while the text alerts us to a setting, Cape Town, and a time, somewhere after the 1970s, other omissions signal towards the constitutive allegory that endeavors to alleviate hopelessness and ruin, to counter Michael K's language-less state and to act as a metonym for a creative life of 'story making'. The writing works in complex ways to highlight the empirical reality of events while deconstructing western colonial significations of power and oppression. The narrative quest of Michael K, who seeks a place to dig his mother's ashes into the earth, 'turning the earth over spadeful by spadeful' (Coetzee 1983: 81) and to cultivate the land in a place outside a system that constructs him as a servant, rewrites the colonial settler narrative from the point of view of the dispossessed. The farm where Michael K's mother was born signifies home and land ownership in direct opposition to the dispossession he and his mother suffer. In Coetzee's allegory the land on which the farm is built becomes symbolic of identity and potential creativity. The focus of this creativity is on the connection between the power of imagination and cultivation. Anna K's quest to return to the farm of her childhood at Prince Albert, in the Western Cape, is based on her memory rather than factual knowledge of the farm, which has effectively been erased and which in his turn Michael imagines 'in his mind's eye a whitewashed cottage in a broad veld with smoke curling from its chimney, and standing at the door his mother, smiling and well, ready to welcome him home at the end of a long day' (11).

This *imagined* vision becomes the object of his quest, which he actively 'inscribes' on the abandoned farm site, said by locals to be the 'Visagie farm' originally owned by white farmers. For Michael K the farm signifies a site of gardening or cultivation. His imagining long before reaching the place on the land he 'locates' as his mother's farm is his entry into a vision that refers to the novel's intertextual relationship with the pastoral mode. In *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (1988) Coetzee observes that South African pastoral takes on a different form to the myth

of the idyll in New World mythology. This is due to historical fact - the origin of the Cape of Good Hope settlement in 1652 was as 'a trading post, a garden' (Coetzee 1988: 1) - as well as to constructions of Africa as 'south' and therefore tending to depravity rather than enlightenment. Nevertheless, he says the South African genre of pastoral, the Plaasroman, presents a 'farm myth' that erases the black labour on which the farms depended:

Pastoral in South Africa...has a double tribute to pay. To satisfy the critics of rural retreat, it must portray labour; to satisfy the critics of colonialism, it must portray white labour. What inevitably follows is the occlusion of black labour from the scene: the black man becomes a shadowy presence flitting across the stage now and then to hold a horse or serve a meal. (Coetzee 1988: 5) (note 12)

In *Life and Times of Michael K* Coetzee re-instates the labourer into the text, writing against the ideologically constructed Plaasroman in a number of ways. K's claim to the farm is confirmed by the 'planting' of his mother's ashes there; his gesture rewrites the myth from the point of view of the land's workers who were also its original owners, inscribing his family upon the earth - 'This was the beginning of his life as a cultivator' (Coetzee 1983: 80-1). Indeed, K is more interested in cultivation than in property ownership: when he returns to the farm after escaping from internment in the Jakkalsdrif camp, one of several internments, he refuses to re-enter the Afrikaner farm myth which is symbolised by the farmhouse: 'It is not for the house that I have come' (Coetzee 1983: 134). His refusal to re-enter the farm affirms that for K, a place to live and cultivate is outside existing forms of land-boundaries, metonymic of boundaries of the discourse of colonial power and representation.

In Coetzee's writing, the representation of land is inextricable from language. In *White Writing* he says, 'the task of the human imagination is to conceive not a social order capable of domesticating the landscape, but any kind of relation at all that consciousness can have with it'; it amounts to 'the question of finding a language to fit Africa' (Coetzee 1988: 7). Michael K's search for a place to cultivate is analogous with this idea of the role of the writer and his search for a language 'to fit' this specifically located South African story. This allegory of K as a sign of creative potential emerges as the narrative structures are gradually transformed from realism to allegory. After his escape over the fence of the Jakkalsdrif labor camp, where he has gained awareness of the plight and treatment of homeless camp-dwellers through the politicized figure of 'Robert', K begins to live on the land eating roots and insects, a 'wild man' (Coetzee 1983: 45), while he begins to cultivate pumpkins and melons from seeds saved from the farm shed. During this time away from society and institutions, he appears to thrive. But paradoxically he becomes more body-less as he retreats from the structures that had previously defined him, and becomes increasingly a figure of allegory, a sign on which meaning is written: 'His clothes, tattered already, hung on him without shape. Yet as he moved about his field he felt a deep joy in his physical being. His step was so light that he barely touched the earth. It seemed possible to fly; it seemed possible to be both body and spirit' (139). K is textually constructed and is at the same time 'dismantled in appearance' (to recall Adorno's description of Kafka's art - a representation 'exploded from within'). Yet this representation is never allowed objective finality, in effect it becomes more ambivalent - despite becoming 'body-less' K is living as an indigenous hunter-gatherer and land-dweller outside the

boundaries of colonial institutions, but still within the bounds of anthropological discourse: 'He also ate roots. He had no fear of being poisoned, for he seemed to know the difference between a benign bitterness and a malign one...' (140). If the representation suggests the archetypal 'noble savage' figure, the simplicity of the stereotype is complicated by its material resemblance to the Bushmen tribes of the Cape, such as the !Kung and /Xam peoples (note 13). The representation of K reverses the 'telos' of history, occupying a space outside or before the material history and its discourses of power and the tropes that had constructed his representation. He is made anew. Even before this moment in the narrative, we are alerted to the creation of a different allegorical trope than some readers might expect, the pastoral that rewrites imperial tropes emblemized by a key colonial text of the castaway, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*: 'He did not explore his new world. He did not turn his cave into a home or keep a record of the passage of days' (Coetzee 1983: 93). But the reversal of history to a pre-colonial idyll is never allowed to settle into a myth of 'noble savagery', because the fact remains that K lives 'in' history.

While cultivating K lives hidden in a burrow between two hills, emerging only at night. His crop of pumpkins on the land become *marks* of his presence on the land, causing anxiety about being discovered, which eventually ends the idyll. The burrow on the land between two hills is reminiscent of Kafka's story 'The Burrow' (1931), where the narrator can only escape into unchanging, fearful isolation (Kafka 1986: 166). Yet the conflict for K is more complex, its aim is not to fall into a Kafkaesque despair - rather it is conflict between the fear of being discerned ('read') and the need to 'inscribe' the earth with his presence, with the visible white markers of his crop, even if this leads to his discovery by soldiers. It is from *within* this conflict that he asserts the source of his creative identity - 'I am a gardener' (Coetzee 1983: 81) - which is inextricable from his connection with the land as place and home - 'I want to live here forever... It is as simple as that' (135).

Reading his cultivation as analogous to the inscriptive nature of writing, and his creativity as analogous to the role of the creative life of the writer, the text establishes a metafictional allegory that signifies Michael K caught in conflict between his desire to live his own story (his own language) and the demands made upon him to subscribe to a required role within a time of political upheaval where being heard depends on 'who made his voice heard loudest' (Coetzee 1983: 160). The allegory of writing and the connection Coetzee establishes between 'writing on the earth' and the search by a writer for a language, is pre-figured in Coetzee's previous novel, *In the Heart of the Country* (1977). Here the isolated narrator Magda searches for both her own voice and a listener. She writes in stones upon the dry earth, but in language that cannot be understood and for which there are no readers: 'I turned to writing. For a week, toiling from dawn to sunset, I trundled the wheelbarrows full of stones across the veld until I had a pile of two hundred smooth, round, the size of small pumpkins, in the space behind the house' (Coetzee 1977: 132). This pre-figuring of the theme of inscribing 'on the earth' in one's own language acts as a 'rehearsal' for the allegory of writing/the writer in *Life and Times of Michael K*. The concept of 'infinite rehearsal', the writer's repeated returning to his own allegories, processing them through different texts, recalls the work of West Indian writer Wilson Harris, whose fiction 'seeks through complex rehearsal to consume its own biases' (Harris 1985: 127) (note 14).

The trope of the earth as the surface or 'pages' on which the truth of history and material experience is written figures throughout Coetzee's fiction, constituting such a process of 'infinite rehearsal'. In *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1982) the Magistrate's archaeological searches for the runes/ruins of local history mirrors his failure read and write (create) a different history of the Fort (note 15). In *Life and Times* the earth, inscribed with the effects of war, is in Michael K's creative imagination a repository of historical 'forgetting' which his imagination resists and against which his cultivation of the earth is counter-discursive:

If these people really wanted to be rid of us, he thought (curiously he watched the thought begin to unfold itself in his head, like a plant growing), if they really wanted to forget us forever, they would have to give us picks and spades and command us to dig; then, when we had exhausted ourselves digging, and had dug a great hole in the middle of the camp, they would have to order us to climb in and lay ourselves down; and when we were lying there, all of us, they would have to break down the huts and tents and tear down the fence and throw the huts and the fence and the tents as well as every last thing we had owned upon us, and cover us with earth and flatten the earth. *Then*, perhaps, they might begin to forget about us. But who could dig a hole as big as that? (Coetzee 1983: 129-30)

As the earth is the 'text' of the sufferings of war that occur upon it, the ripening white pumpkins in *Life and Times of Michael K* - read intertextually with Magda's self-professed endeavor to mark the earth with stones in *In the Heart of the Country* in order to communicate with the 'sky gods' - develops the metaphoric linking of the act of gardening or cultivation with writing. Its effect is to counter forgetting.

While the allegory presents K as thriving in cultivation, the outcome of his quest is only to grow and consume the food of his 'own labour' (Coetzee 1983: 156) in freedom; it does not posit the isolation of the cultivator (nor writer) as a viable option. K is aware that there are others in the hills, insurgents or guerilla fighters; he wonders whether he might provide them with food and have a role in their activities. K is quiet and passive; he is no soldier. He is perceived by the Medical Officer as 'untouched by doctrine, untouched by history', able to evade 'the peace and the war' (Coetzee 1983: 207-8). This desire to read Michael K as untouched by history is reified in the Medical Officer's discursive struggle for meaning in the text, and through his desire to project the possibility of active resistance onto this starving vagrant. The text itself becomes a site for the struggle for meaning, symptomatic of the difficulty of the writer. As Coetzee has said:

If one takes Michael K seriously as a hero, a paragon, a model, it can only be as a hero of resistance against - or rather, withdrawal from or evasion of - accepted ideas of the heroic. But insofar as this resistance claims a social meaning and value, I see no great distance between it and the resistance of the book *Michael K* itself, with its own evasions of authority, including its...evasion of attempts by its author to put a stranglehold on it. (Coetzee 1992: 206)

In considering the writer's role Carlos Fuentes, in an article on the novels of the Czech writer Milan Kundera published in 1981, two years before



the publication of Coetzee's novel, considers Kundera's question, in his writing, of 'how to fight injustice without creating injustice?' (Fuentes 1981: 269). Kundera suggests that the responsibility of the writer is to write from a position outside these structures. The writer's problem, Fuentes says, is 'to discover the invisible avenues that depart from history and then lead to realities we had hardly suspected, hardly imagined, whose modern doors were opened by Franz Kafka' (Fuentes 1981: 269). Fuentes advocates finding 'the internal utopia, the real space of the untouchable life' (275), an ideal that resembles aestheticism. If read exclusively of the other discursive threads in the text, Coetzee's motif of gardening does appear to support an escapist idyll or utopia, however, the implication in the text is that the *desire* for escape constitutes a resistance to discourses of politics and history rather than constituting a refusal of engagement (note 16).

Resistance does not advocate denying the role of the writer as *witness* and ethical observer. When Michael K encounters the rebel band of guerillas he constructs them in terms of their potential stories which are different to his own: 'They will have stories to tell long after the war is over, stories for a lifetime, stories for their grandchildren to listen to open-mouthed' (Coetzee 1983: 150). The temptation to join these men is the possibility of handing down stories based on the experience of history that associates the figure of Michael K with the writer/storyteller. From his position of agency and creativity he chooses *not* to join them, a decision that creates what Coetzee has termed the most 'politically naked moment in the novel' (Coetzee 1992: 207):

K knew that he would not crawl out and stand up and cross from darkness into firelight to announce himself. He even knew the reason why: because enough men had gone off to war saying the time for gardening was when the war was over; whereas there must be men to stay behind and keep gardening alive, or at least the idea of gardening; because once that cord was broken, the earth would grow hard and forget her children. That was why. (Coetzee 1983: 150)

K's story of cultivation (not his life as constructed by history) has no place in the stories of these men; because he is damaged since birth, and *because* of history, he has insufficient language to relate his story and is precluded from their discourse:

Between this reason and the truth that he would never announce himself, however, lay a gap wider than the distance separating him from the firelight. Always, when he tried to explain himself to himself, there remained a gap, a hole, a darkness before which his understanding baulked, into which it was useless to pour words. The words were eaten up, the gap remained. His was always a story with a hole in it: a wrong story, always wrong. (Coetzee 1983: 150-51)

The emphasis here is on the need for different forms of language and narrative discourse. K's story has no place to be received because he, as a subject, cannot bring it into the binary oppositionality and violence of the discourse of war. In this context there is no space, nor language, to 'cultivate' his story. This directly faces a concern with cultural survival and with the capacity of the environment in which the writer writes to support the work and its content. The society does not wish to know the truth of

K's story other than to construe him as servant or bandit; nor does it know his language. He claims that people want his 'story of a life lived in cages...whereas the truth is that I have been a gardener' (Coetzee 1983: 247).

Coetzee has been criticized for this 'idea of gardening' as an example of a 'failure' of commitment, a refusal to take up an oppositional position towards the regime, as did writers such as Nadine Gordimer, André Brink and Breyten Breytenbach (note 17). Yet the connection between writing and material experience has always concerned Coetzee. His interest is in creativity that makes visible what historical and material discourse obscures. In his early essay 'Nabokov's *Pale Fire* and the Primacy of Art' (1974) he suggests that Nabokov's writing satisfies a criterion of 'true creativity'. A note to the essay quotes a line from Rilke's letters - 'We are the bees of the invisible' (Coetzee 1974: 7) (note 18) - illustrating the function of fiction in making visible what is hidden, and in the more recent *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons* (2003) the writer, Mrs Costello, defends her position as a writer as 'a secretary of the invisible' (Coetzee 2003: 199). In the essay on Nabokov Coetzee also quotes Wallace Stevens' 'Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction': 'Then Ozymandias said to the spouse, the bride/Is never naked. A fictive covering/Weaves always glistening from the heart and mind' (note 19). The image of K's necessity to 'keep gardening alive' because 'once that cord was broken, the earth would grow hard and forget her children' (Coetzee 1983: 150) draws on these images of a process where writing and material experience are intrinsically connected.

The quest for an alternative place to live in 'corridors between the fences' (Coetzee 1983: 64) signals the need for a place in which to retain the integrity of his work. When Michael K first leaves Cape Town and reaches the mountains, he looks back at his life in the city where he was employed by 'Parks and Gardens', working the soft earth of city parks: 'I have lost my love for that kind of earth, he thought... It is no longer the green and the brown that I want but the yellow and the red; not the wet but the dry; not the dark but the light; not the soft but the hard' (Coetzee 1983: 92-93). When Coetzee observes the need for the writer to find 'a language to fit Africa', he also points out '...Africa is a land of rock and sun, not of soil and water. What relation is it possible for man to have with rock and sun?' (Coetzee 1988: 7). Michael K rejects the picturesque, the colonial motivation for creating city parks symptomatic of a will to control nature. With the cultivation of a language of 'hardness' more fitting to the dry Karoo into which he travels, K becomes part of the land, taking up a stone-like existence and signifying the potential for a different language and discourse. This hardness inscribes K's un-budging resistance to compliance in the oppressive system, his refusal to eat anything but the 'bread of freedom' (Coetzee 1983: 200), nor to speak other than to say 'I am not in the war' (189). Agency and the ability to choose one's role is echoed in the novel's epigraph from Heraclitus's *The Cosmic Fragments*: 'War is the father of all and king of all./Some he shows as gods, others as men./Some he makes slaves, and others free.'

Yet who in this novel is free? No figure can escape the time of war, nor the discursive representations of the text. As the allegory of the role of the writer urges the reading towards the simplicity of parable, it separates itself from the political story of Michael K the homeless vagrant. Is this, then, yet another example of reductive allegory, in Jameson's terms? It is arguable that the allegory positions a reading where Michael K (as human being, vagrant) is appropriated into the allegory of writing, losing his force

as material signifier. It is significant that he cannot speak properly, due to a malformation of his palate, which, together with the Medical Officer's frustrated reading of K, signals the text's aporia - the difficulty of representing 'otherness' in a context acutely aware of the political and discursive implications of appropriating the powerless into a dominant English language text. As a self-consciously textual construct, Michael K never escapes the limitations the text imposes on him, other than becoming stone-like, a signifier without a signified. The text's aporia is further signaled by the evidence that K is starving to death - a tragic form of resistance signifying the hopelessness of his position. But this 'death force' is pitted against the constitutive allegory of hope and creativity, an ambivalence that aligns the text with Walter Benjamin's model of allegory as 'ruin' which is redemptive in its images of destruction.

Within the limitations, Michael K's potential is more resilient than that of his observers - readers within and outside the text - in his capacity to imagine a future. This imagining, like much of the representation of his reflective consciousness, is outside the realistic representation of 'character' hinted at in the categorization and social context of K as a simple-minded municipal gardener concerned with his mother's welfare. At the end of the narrative the reader is left, despite the evidence that he is dying of malnutrition, with an image of hope as he visualises returning to Prince Albert again, this time with an old man as companion. When they find there is no water, he imagines

...he, Michael K, would produce a teaspoon from his pocket, a teaspoon and a long roll of string. He would clear the rubble from the mouth of the shaft, he would bend the handle of the teaspoon in a loop and tie a string to it, he would lower it down the shaft deep into the earth, and when he brought it up there would be water in the bowl of the spoon; and in that way, he would say, one can live.  
(Coetzee 1983: 250)

Coetzee cannot, and does not, ignore the plight of the homeless and dispossessed victims of apartheid, and the representation of Michael K's plight dominates the text, which ends with his 'survival' as a consciousness. However, Coetzee uses the conditional tense, refusing what Adorno sees in Kafka's refusal of objective realism as the 'element of ratification which lurks in resigned admission of the dominance of evil' (Adorno 1997: 191).

\*

Issues of representation such as those in Coetzee's text are implicit throughout creative writing praxis, and in particular, in post-colonial contexts. In examining some of my own creative writing practice in the light of these issues, I want to explicate problems of representation in writing from the subjective position of a post-colonial white female writer (which is one potential writing position relevant to this discussion). I do this in a cautionary way, with no wish to compare my writing with Coetzee's work. My poetry is informed by many conditions, including my academic research and my background of having been born and raised in South Africa and maintaining connections to the country after immigrating, first to the UK in 1976 and then to Australia in 1981. No doubt there are other conditions relating to this background that are hidden from my limited perception.

As with many migrant writers, the function of memory often drives my writing which wants to bridge perceptions of the past and its sense of place with present experience. Yet in writing about the South Africa under apartheid in which I grew up and have returned to periodically over several decades, I am faced with the problem of representing the African people who were formative in my life within that system and its culture. As an adult writer, I have a responsibility to make something meaningful from my experiences; to be responsible to those whom I write about, and as far as possible, to be aware of the 'worldliness' of my writing, its impact on readers and discourse. Considering an example from my own writing, is, I think, relevant here because it draws on my experience in doing the writing.

As my reading of Coetzee's text indicates, no observer or participant is ever free of a compromised position in the context of their writing praxis, even as one struggles to untangle oneself from history and attempts to clarify its meaning. How much easier it is to be a reader of others' writing than one's own! Yet it is the tension of this struggle that drives the search for appropriate language and representation that I would like to consider here. An example of such a struggle is evident, I think, in a poem, 'Mercy' (Freiman 2002), written in stages between 1991 and 1997 and published in Australia, in which the figure of the African woman is based on an actual person. Mercy was the first name of a night-nurse who entered my family in the mid-1980s to care for my father who had Parkinson's Disease. Her already-allegorical name (which was the name by which she referred to herself) indicates the importance of the Christian denominational church in her own life, family and culture.

### **Mercy**

*Johannesburg, 1988*

I watch from the doorway of our house -  
Mercy, the nurse, holds my father's hand  
leads him gently to the car,  
white headed, stoop-shouldered,  
he accepts her strong dry hand.

Mercy tells me of strikes in Soweto -  
people told to withhold their rent,  
but with no office to approach  
when evicted, their boxes,  
pots, pans, blankets and clothes scattered  
around them on the road.  
Government leaflets in their turn say  
*Do not support the boycott* -  
yet compliance would risk scorched rubber and ash, a  
burned house  
roofless, her daughters and their children  
under a cold burning sky.

Mercy goes to church on Sundays,  
prays from a full heart. She walks  
through the township dawn,  
her wide body a warning  
to *tsotsis*. (note 20)  
Each night  
she comes from Soweto

to the white suburbs  
to care for my father.

\*

When he died she walked  
into our house with its candles,  
hips arthritic, bent with stroke, still massive.  
Round the family table  
she held our hands, opened her curled Bible  
closed her eyes, and sang.  
Her voice like a bell,  
you could feel God at her shoulder,  
waiting over the horizon.

In reading the poem, I notice how Mercy's presence is distanced by the narrator position. Yet my recent memory of her, her impact on our lives, the experience of her inherent strength and goodness, was the emotional impetus for writing the poem. Her name 'Mercy' is significant of her culture and value system that combines traditional religious practice with Christian values. During the struggle the church was a site of resistance and community and political cohesiveness for black South Africans. The values symbolized by Mercy's name reflect this aspect of black South African culture, and are articulated in the focus on the African concept of *ubuntu* by Reverend Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela and others. *Ubuntu*, the spirit of humanity, community, compassion and forgiveness was the basis of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Chaired by Reverend Tutu); the establishment of the country's institutions of governance and law; and the writing of the new Constitution. The concept is based on a unifying vision or world view enshrined in the Zulu maxim *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, i.e. 'a person is a person through other persons' (Louw 1998). The concept of human dignity, respect, interdependence, the hope of transcendence of suffering through forgiveness was formative in establishing the New South Africa in a spirit of reconciliation. It had also characterized Mercy's care and strength during the apartheid era; it provided a sustained sense of justice that existed (and exists) in contrast to the penetrating abuses of oppression that constituted the lived reality of her life. Her name foregrounds this concept; it stands out, an emblem that completely disrupts the reality of the political events of the forced evictions by state-supported vigilantes depicted in the poem. It emphasizes her strength, compassion and faith.

When I first wrote the poem, I had little experience of the concept of *ubuntu*, but Mercy embodied it and thus I had come to know it: I wanted to show her capacity to transcend the impact of the oppression that dominated her life, without discounting or diminishing her suffering caused by it. However, the distancing in the poem also threatens to appropriate the figure into my (the narrator's) subjective perception that frames the poem, and to subsume her experience. I attempted to counter this structural effect of writing from my own memory by presenting details of her experience and her strength to resist violence in the two central sections of the poem: the first being based almost verbatim on a conversation I had with Mercy in 1988 when she told me about the township rent boycotts in Soweto, instigated by the South African police to divide the community and disrupt unity in the struggle against apartheid. I have tried to include and preserve Mercy's voice and point of view, her experience and outrage, through the details which she gave to me in conversation.

The second part of the poem's central section is based on a conversation in which she related her fearlessness in the township streets on her return to her Soweto home after the night-shifts. It was this image that was the trigger for the poem. But the image echoed (I was unaware of this intertextuality at the time of composing the poem) my reading of the allegorized image of Florence, the domestic worker whose child is killed in a township uprising in Coetzee's *Age of Iron* (1990). The narrator, Mrs Curren, visualizes Florence's possible indifference to her own suffering as she is dying of cancer (an allegory for the dying regime of white supremacy), imagining Florence as a mythologised figure '...passing by, with Hope at her side and Beauty on her back, would she be impressed by the spectacle?' (Coetzee 1990: 129). The impact of this Eurocentric vision of the black woman, Florence, had remained with me - both for its strength and for Coetzee's capacity to meld Western mythology with realism. Coetzee himself addresses this mixing of discourses (and its problems) ironically and reflexively when he presents Florence earlier on: 'With the baby on her arm and the little girl, only half awake, stumbling behind, she splashed up the path to No. 219, knocked, was admitted. Hope and Beauty. It was like living in an allegory' (Coetzee 1990: 84). The combined references to allegorical personifications with the realism point to the ambivalent position of the white (European) writer whose experience is also African.

To what extent, then, have I also appropriated and allegorized Mercy in my poem? As I have described, my endeavor to convey the realistic context was a primary concern, and if Mercy's power (and her name) produce an allegorical reading (and writing) the fact remains that the grounded bodily experience of this woman affirms more than 'merely' a figure of allegory; it is the strength of the African women of South Africa. Rather, I *wanted* to mythologize her, to preserve and inscribe her meaning in the poem, and to acknowledge her power. I wanted the poem to pay tribute to Mercy and to women like her, while at the same time framing her representation from within the structures of my own experience and recording her impact upon it. The resulting ambivalence is inescapable and inherent to the writing of the experience.

Poetry is created within the tension between the facts of our experience, and our need to create form and meaning out of this experience. We have control over our representations, but we are also limited and humble in our creative shaping of experience in words. The North American poet C.K. Williams writes in his essay 'Contexts: An essay on intentions' (1983):

I think that the primary business of poetry in our time...is to offer evidence. [Yet] despite our best intentions, and despite the fact that we all think we nobly and incessantly attempt all we can, we still manage to omit so unconscionably much of what implores us or hints almost invisibly to us of the necessity of our intervention.  
(Williams 1983: 184-5)

Writers make interventions; in the case of 'Mercy' the origin of the experience and its constructs of perception are within the context and limitations of a system of apartheid whose structures, inequities, injustices, cruelties and separations, while interrogated and deplored, have conditioned the constantly shifting frames of my perception.

In reading *Life and Times of Michael K* it is hard to ignore what the text reveals about the desire for refuge and place for the vulnerable, disaffected

refugee. Yet Coetzee's writing is also a powerful teacher: it wears its ambivalence on its sleeve and rarely refuses to question its own parameters. It offers a profound example of writing that never allows itself to rest upon its own assumptions. The intensity of questioning exemplifies the capacity for writing to shift the consciousness of the reader, and to disallow a settling into a state of moral complacency. The sense of responsibility permeates Coetzee's fiction in the self-interrogations of his narrators and in the complex, shifting, confronting representations of figures who emerge in contexts we are forced to recognize as being part of our experience, yet who push beyond the boundaries of realism to construct what Adorno refers to as 'autonomous' art - not dissociated from the immediacy of ethical and political life, but showing the possibilities for often painful change in the way we see the world.

## Notes

1. Sartre, J. (1947) 'Why Write?' In *What is Literature? Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Vincent B. Leach (ed) New York: Norton (2001): 1333-1349. [return to text](#)
2. In the statement, 'to write lyric poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric' (Adorno 1977: 188), Adorno is referring to this ascription of objective meaning, the concept of 'the banality of evil'. [return to text](#)
3. Beckett and Kafka are significant in Coetzee's work, with intertextual references to their writing throughout. [return to text](#)
4. Kelley's discussion of Benjamin's allegorical models draws on analysis of the dual influences of Marxism and Jewish Messianism in his writing. [return to text](#)
5. The novel was denounced in a submission by the ANC to the South African Human Rights Commission, resulting in a media scandal that tends to treat the novel, which is fiction, as 'truth' within the context of an inquiry on actual racism, and to confuse the writer, Coetzee, with the novel's protagonist David Lurie (Kai Easton, University of KwaZulu, Natal, 'Scandalous Fictions', unpublished abstract). The scandal involves the question of whether representations within the novel are appropriate ways to represent South Africa internationally. This debate raises important issues of responsibility, which are outside the focus of this paper. [return to text](#)
6. Referring to the self-reflexivity in all Coetzee's fiction; to the ficto-critical work, *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), *The Lives of Animals* (1999); and to the non-fiction essays in *Doubling the Point* (1992), *Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship* (1996) and *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (1988). [return to text](#)
7. Dovey, T. (1988) 'Allegory vs Allegory: The Divorce of Different Modes of Allegorical Perception in Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*', *Journal of Literary Studies* 4, 2: 133-43; Slemon, S. (1987) 'Monuments of Empire: Allegory/Counter-Discourse/Post-Colonial Writing', *Kunapipi* 9, 3: 1-16 and (1988) 'Post-Colonial Allegory and the Transformation of History', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 23, 1: 157-168. [return to text](#)
8. Others, such as Northrop Fry (1957), *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971) and Paul de Man (1979), *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust* (New Haven: Yale UP) explore other discursive possibilities of the mode. [return to text](#)
9. Jameson (1989: 20) cites Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'The Communist Manifesto', in Karl Marx *On Revolution*, S.K. Padover (ed and trans) (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971): 81. [return to text](#)
10. Roditi, E. (1969). Also Brink, A. (1984) 'Writing Against Big Brother: Notes on Apocalyptic Fiction in South Africa', *World Literature Today*, 58, 2: 189-194. [return to text](#)

11. In an interview Coetzee provided his view on the conditionality of his engagement with Kafka: 'There is no monopoly on the letter K; or, to put it in another way, it is as much possible to centre the universe on the town of Prince Albert in the Cape Province as on Prague. Equally - and the moment in history has perhaps come in which this must be said - it is as much possible to centre the universe on Prague as on Prince Albert. Being an out-of-work gardener in Africa in the late twentieth century is no less, but also no more, central a fate than being a clerk in Hapsburg Central Europe' (Coetzee 1992: 199).  
return to text

12. Also, 'In its isolation from the great world, walled in by oceans and an unexplored northern wilderness, the colony of the Cape of Good Hope was indeed a kind of garden' (Coetzee 1988: 3).  
return to text

13. See *The First Bushman's path: stories songs and testimonies of the northern Cape, Versions with commentary*, by Alan James (2001) and Marjorie Shostak, *The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman* (1981).  
return to text

14. Also Wilson Harris, Introduction to *The Secret Ladder and The Whole Armour* (London: Faber 1973) and S. Slemon (1986) 'Revisioning Allegory: Wilson Harris's Carnival', *Kunapipi* 8, 2: 45-55.  
return to text

15. In *Foe* (1986), which followed *Life and Times of Michael K*, Cruso builds rows of terraces that he fails to cultivate; in *Age of Iron* (1990), the bones of murdered African children refuse to be covered by earth, rise up and show on the surface.  
return to text

16. The desire to escape history represents a disruption of the Eurocentric construction of history as the narrative discourse 'History' in the post-colonial context. See Ashcroft 1998: 198-213.  
return to text

17. See Gordimer 1984: 3-4. Some of Gordimer's and Brink's novels were banned under South African censorship. Breytenbach's poetry was banned and he was imprisoned.  
return to text

18. In Note 5 Coetzee cites Rilke's letter to Witold von Hulewig, from Richard Ellman and C. Feidelson (1965) *The Modern Tradition* (New York: Oxford): 191-192.  
return to text

19. In Note 8. Coetzee cites Wallace Stevens, 'Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction', II, 8.  
return to text

20. *Tsotsis* - township gangsters.  
return to text

## References

Adorno, T. (1977) 'On Commitment'. In E. Bloch, G. Lukacs, B. Brecht, W. Benjamin and T. Adorno *Aesthetics and Politics*. R. Taylor (trans and ed). London, New Left Books, 177-195.  
return to text

Ashcroft, B. (1998) 'Irony, Allegory and Empire: *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *In the Heart of the Country*'. In Sue Kossew (ed) *Critical Essays J.M. Coetzee*. New York, G.K. Hall: 198-213.  
return to text

Benjamin, W. (1970, 1992) *Illuminations* H. Arendt (ed and intro). H. Zohn (trans). London, Fontana Press.  
return to text

Brink, A. (1984) 'Writing Against Big Brother: Notes on Apocalyptic Fiction in South Africa'. *World Literature Today* 58, 2: 189-194.

Coetzee, J.M. (1974) 'Nabokov's *Pale Fire* and the Primacy of Art'. *University of Cape Town Studies in English* 5: 1-7.  
return to text

Coetzee, J.M. (1977) *In the Heart of the Country*. Harmondsworth, Penguin.  
return to text



- Coetzee, J.M. (1983) *Life and Times of Michael K*. Harmondsworth, Penguin. return to text
- Coetzee, J.M. (1988) *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*. New Haven, Yale UP. return to text
- Coetzee, J.M. (1990) *Age of Iron*. London, Secker & Warburg. return to text
- Coetzee, J.M. (1992) *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*. D. Attwell (ed). Cambridge, Mass., Harvard UP. return to text
- Coetzee, J.M. (2003) *Elizabeth Costello*. London, Secker and Warburg. return to text
- Dovey, T. (1988) 'Allegory vs Allegory: The Divorce of Different Modes of Allegorical Perception in Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*', *Journal of Literary Studies* 4, 2: 133-43.
- Fletcher, A. (1964) *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*. Ithaca, Cornell UP. return to text
- Freiman, M. (2002) 'Mercy', *Westerly* 47: 126-127. return to text
- Freiman, M. (2003) 'Dangerous Dreaming: Myths of Creativity'. *TEXT: The Journal of the Australian Association of Writing Programs* 7, 2 (October): <http://www.griffith.edu.au/school/art/text/oct03/freiman.htm>
- Fuentes, C. (1981) 'The Other K'. *Tri-Quarterly* 51: 256-275. return to text
- Gordimer, N. (1984) 'The Idea of Gardening. Review of *Life and Times of Michael K* by J. M. Coetzee'. *New York Review of Books* 2 Feb: 3-4. return to text
- Harris, W. (1985) 'Adversarial Contexts and Creativity'. *New Left Review* 154 (Nov/Dec): 124-128. return to text
- James, A. (2001) *The First Bushman's Path: Stories songs and testimonies of the northern Cape, versions with commentary*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press. return to text
- Jameson, F. (1989) *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. London: Routledge (1981). return to text
- Kafka, F. (1986) *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*. Harmondsworth: Penguin ('The Burrow' first published 1931, English trans. 1949). return to text
- Kafka, F. (1978) *Wedding Preparations in the Country and Other Stories*. Willa and Edwin Muir (trans) 1949. Harmondsworth: Penguin. ('Two Dialogues', 'Meditation', 'The Judgement', 'A Country Doctor' and 'A Hunger Artist').
- Kelley, T.M. (1997) *Reinventing Allegory*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. return to text
- Louw, D. (1998) 'Ubuntu: An African Assessment of the Religious Other'. <http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Afri/AfriLouw.htm> (Accessed 30 March 2006). return to text
- Roditi, E. (1969) 'Allegory and Alienation'. *Arts in Society* 6: 237-242. return to text
- Said, E. (1983) *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP. return to text
- Shostak, M. (1981) *The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman*. Harmondsworth: Penguin. return to text
- Slemon, S. (1986) 'Revisioning Allegory: Wilson Harris's Carnival', *Kunapipi* 8, 2: 45-55.

Slemon, S. (1987) 'Monuments of Empire: Allegory/Counter-Discourse/Post-Colonial Writing'. *Kunapipi* 9, 3: 1-16.

Slemon, S. (1988) 'Post-Colonial Allegory and the Transformation of History'. *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 23, 1: 157-168.

Williams, C.K. (1983) 'Contexts: An Essay on Intentions'. In W.N. Herbert and M. Hollis (eds) *Strong Words: Modern poets on modern poetry*. London: Bloodaxe (2000): 184-187. Re-printed from C.K. Williams *Poetry and Consciousness*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 1998. return to text

*Dr Marcelle Freiman is Senior Lecturer in the Department of English, Macquarie University. She teaches creative writing and post-colonial literature. Her research interests are in the theory and practice of creative writing, in which she has published several articles in TEXT; in post-colonial and diaspora literature and theory; and in the writing of J.M. Coetzee. Her creative writing publications include selected poetry in a range of literary journals, a volume of poetry, Monkey's Wedding, which was Highly Commended for the Marjorie Barnard prize in 1996, and articles on contemporary Australian women and migrant writers and Australian-Jewish writing.*

*mfreiman@hmn.mq.edu.au*

---

## **TEXT**

**Vol 10 No 1 April 2006**

**<http://www.griffith.edu.au/school/art/text/>**

**Editors: Nigel Krauth & Jen Webb**

**[Text@griffith.edu.au](mailto:Text@griffith.edu.au)**