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‘The Labyrinth of the memory’: spatial form and axes of time and place in the Work of J.M. Coetzee

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I consider the ways in which spatial form influences the representation of time and place in J.M. Coetzee's works. Spatial form is the focus of a method developed by Joseph Frank to analyse the unusual time orientation of modernist novels (Foust, 1975: iv). Since then, a number of critics have broadened and expanded the scope substantially to include texts from other periods. The reference point for Frank's analysis of spatial form is Gotthold Lessing's *Laocoön*, in which the concept of space was associated with the visual arts, while time was associated with literature. Frank's conception of spatial form questions this distinction, arguing that in many modernist works the expectation of sequence is frequently disrupted, and that the works can be better understood as being "juxtaposed in space rather than unrolling in time" (1963: 10). My study focuses on Coetzee's first two novels, *Dusklands* and *In the Heart of the Country*; his trilogy of fictionalised memoirs, *Boyhood*, *Youth* and *Summertime*; and *Diary of a Bad Year*. In chapter one my central argument is that chronological sequence is frequently disrupted in *Dusklands*, producing a discursive shift in temporality that is underscored by the novel's non-linear narrative. In chapter two I analyse the ways in which Magda's narrative subverts historical time in *In the Heart of the Country* in order to disrupt and displace the discourses of colonialism and patriarchy that characterise the farm on which she lives. In chapter three I focus on the multiple ways in which time and place intersect in *Boyhood* and *Youth*, particularly in relation to Coetzee's representation of South Africa, his homeland. In chapter four I do a close reading of Coetzee's intricate textual strategies in *Summertime*, arguing that there is a parallel in the disjunctive narrative method and thematic concerns relating to time and place. Finally, in chapter five, my analysis centres on spatiality in *Diary of a Bad Year*'s form, focusing particularly on the technique of montage construction.

Keywords

spatial form; J.M. Coetzee; Joseph Frank; reflexive referencing; montage; juxtaposition; chronological sequence; linear; non-linear; temporal; image; time; place; *Dusklands*; *In the Heart of the Country*; *Boyhood*; *Youth*; *Summertime*; *Diary of a Bad Year*.