

Beyond Conventions: The Nomadic Smooth Space in J.M. Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K*

KATARZYNA KARWOWSKA

Wrocław University, Poland

Uniwersytet Wrocławski, Instytut Filologii Angielskiej
ul. Kuźnicza 22, 50-138 Wrocław, Polska
ekalaka@op.pl

Abstract. This article traces the processes governing the creation of literary places in J.M. Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K*. The recognition of elements characteristic of pastoral, anti-pastoral and post-pastoral modes of spatial organisation in renderings of the City of Cape Town and the South African countryside constitutes the point of departure for the analysis. Conventional patterns are questioned and subverted, and ultimately proven unfit for the representation of the moments of social and political distress in late twentieth century South Africa. The novel's protagonist suggestively navigates the interpretation process into the field of postmodern theories of space. The distinction between 'smooth' and 'striated' space proposed by French philosophers Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze establishes a revealing set of correspondences and evinces previously uncovered exegetic layers of the narrative.

Key words: J.M. Coetzee; South Africa; literary convention; pastoral; ecocriticism; space; place; city; country; Michel Foucault; Félix Guattari; Gilles Deleuze; smooth space; striated space; heterogeneous; hybridity

Reflections on space/place in the field of Coetzee studies are to a great extent marginal and most often arise in relation to discussions of other literary issues. Generally, there are two distinct critical approaches. First of all, many studies stress the allegorical dimension of the writer's oeuvre and his distrust of realistic codes of representation (Head 1997, Dovey 1988). Other scholarly contributions focus on the novels' rootedness in spatiotemporal, social and cultural circumstances (Gallagher 1991). The intertextual dialogue between Coetzee's narratives and Afrikaner literary culture and mythology has also been widely discussed, es-