

Hermann Wittenberg

University of the Western Cape

South Africa

Through the Lens: the photographic imagination of J.M. Coetzee

This paper will explore how the Nobel winning writer J.M. Coetzee has not only absorbed, combined, re-worked and transformed a vast range of textual sources in his fictions, but in key instances used visual media, in particular photographs and films to develop his stories. Coetzee's literary interest in images is traced back to his early photographic experimentation during his school years, and an argument is developed that traces the insistent visuality of the fictions back to this seminal youthful encounter with the camera. Coetzee's proficiency with the camera and his expertise in the darkroom, impacted on the novels in which photographs not only frequently feature, but where the writing is also shaped in other ways: a conspicuous use of framing, point of view and light effects. These photographic aspects are present in all of Coetzee's fictions but this paper will pursue this analysis with regard to his most well-known novel, *Disgrace* (1999).