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PERSONAL WRITING IN THE WORKS OF JOHN MAXWELL COETZEE: *BOYHOOD*, *YOUTH*, *SUMMERTIME*, *ELIZABETH COSTELLO* AND *SLOW MAN*

Doctoral Dissertation

Belgrade, 2022

УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ У БЕОГРАДУ
ФИЛОЛОШКИ ФАКУЛТЕТ

Марија С. Мишић

ЛИЧНА ПРОЗА У ДЕЛИМА ЏОНА МАКСВЕЛА КУЦИЈА: *ДЕЧАШТВО*, *МЛАДОСТ*, *ЛЕТЊЕ ДОБА*, *ЕЛИЗАБЕТ КОСТЕЛО* И *СПОР ЧОВЕК*

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ЛИЧНАЯ ПРОЗА В ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИЯХ ДЖОНА МАКСВЕЛЛА КУТЗЕЕ: *ДЕТСТВО*, *МОЛОДОСТЬ*, *ЛЕТНЕЕ ВРЕМЯ*, *ЭЛИЗАБЕТ КОСТЕЛЛО* И *МЕДЛЕННЫЙ ЧЕЛОВЕК*

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Personal Writing in the Works of John Maxwell Coetzee: *Boyhood*, *Youth*, *Summertime*, *Elizabeth Costell*o and *Slow Man*

Extended Abstract:

The poetics of postmodernism exudes elasticity of genre, and the Nobel-winning author John Maxwell Coetzee embodies the concept of the author at play with the boundaries of genre so much so that in his pen, they seem non-existent at times. Famous for transcending genre when its constraints become too tight, he mashes autobiographical discourse and autofiction into an original genre for his trilogy of life-based works summed up under the umbrella of the originally-named genre – *autre*-biography, or biography about the "Other." This dissertation chimes in the vibrant conversation in the social sciences about *autre*-biography, but also accounts for what theory has neglected to highlight in an author dedicated to hiding his private life, which is that modern autobiographical discourse mainly discovers the public persona of the author as a carefully controlled and publicized construct. By using Coetzee's *autre*-biography (*Scenes from Provincial Life*) and the intensely metafictional selected novels *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man,* I argue that the author's authentic voice and, by extension, true self appears rather in fiction than in carefully constructed fictionalizations of the truth aimed at public consummation. By first providing a theoretical revision of personal writing in the author's own words and in comparison to relevant theory, I move on to a close reading of the *autre*-biography and selected novels with a particular turn towards their respective converging and diverging subjects and narratological methods, only to conclude with a discussion on how texts both supposedly fictional and non-fictional share a narrative of the self in motion. Through a series of methods such as close reading and deconstruction of the author's interviews and essays, as well as *autre*-biography and novels, the conclusions inform that Coetzee simultaneously engages in writing all these genres for years on end. This procedure implies that the subjects intriguing the author become reworked in one piece of writing or another, as his topics of interest have a tendency of repeating themselves, even if characters do not. The theory of dialogism, if applied to one's self, proves the identities in Coetzee converse with one another, and fiction only represents the truth of that moment. My dissertation expands the range of understanding Coetzee's work by applying the logic of dialogism to the reading of both fiction and non-fiction as truths provided at the moment of their creation, narratives, and storytelling engagement within the self that all collectively provide insight into the author's voice – Coetzee represents the embodiment of all his protagonist and characters not only of the select few, and especially not only of the one in his quasi-autobiographies.

Key words: personal writing, J. M. Coetzee, *autre*-biography, otherness, dialogism, metafiction, the self, truth, *Slow Man*, *Elizabeth Costello*

Scientific discipline(s): Literary Studies, Social Sciences and Humanities

Scientific subdisciplines: Literary Theory

UDC:

Лична проза у делима Џона Максвела Куција:
Дечаштво, *Младост*, *Летње доба*, *Елизабет Костело* и *Спор човек*

Резиме:

Поетика постмодернизма одише еластичношћу жанра, а нобеловац Џон Максвел Куци јесте отелотворење аутора који се поиграва границама жанра толико да у његовом перу оне понекад изгледају непостојеће. Познат по превазилажењу чврстих ограничења жанра, он спаја аутобиографски дискурс и аутофикцију у оригинални жанр за своју трилогију животно заснованих дела сажетих под кишобран жанра који он назива „аутобиографија о другоме". Ова дисертација допринос је живописном разговору који се у друштвеним наукама води о „аутобиографији о другоме", али такође покушава да укаже на оно што је теорија занемарила да истакне код аутора посвећеног скривању свог приватног живота, а то је да савремени аутобиографски дискурс углавном открива јавну личност аутора као пажљиво контролисан конструкт у јавности. Користећи Куцијева дела из „аутобиографије о другоме" (*Сцене из провинцијског живота*) и посебно метафикционалне одабране *романе Елизабет Костело* и *Спор човек*, доносим претпоставку да се прави ауторов глас и самим тим истинско сопство појављује пре у фикцији него у пажљиво конструисаној фикционализацији истине усмереној на потребе јавности. У раду сам прво покушала да укажем на оквире релевантних теорија о личној прози и представим ауторове личне ставове на ту тему. Потом сам се упустила у помно читање одабраних „аутобиографија о другоме", посебно упућујући пажњу ка њиховим тачкама слагања и неслагања и наратолошким методама, како бих дошла до закључка да текстови, и наводно измишљени и истинити, деле наратив о сопству које се стално мења. Коришћењем метода попут пажљивог читања и деконструкције ауторових интервјуа и есеја, као и личне прозе и романа, долазимо до закључка да се Куци истовремено бави писањем свих ових жанрова. Овим поступаком се уочава да теме које интригирају аутора јесу прерађене у једном или другом делу, јер његове теме од интереса имају тенденцију да се понављају, чак и ако се ликови не понављају. Теорија дијалогизма, ако се примени на сопство, доказује да идентитети код Куција разговарају један са другим, а фикција само представља истину тог тренутка. Дисертацијом смо покушали да проширимо опсег разумевања Куцијевих дела применом логике дијалогизма на читање фикције и нефикције као истине која се пружа у тренутку стварања, наратива и приповедачког ангажовања унутар сопства, а која заједнички пружа увид у ауторски глас – Куци представља оличење свих његових протагониста и ликова не само неколицине одабраних, а посебно не само једног у његовим квази-аутобиографијама.

Кључне речи: лична проза, Џ. М. Куци, "аутобиографија о другоме", другост, дијалогизам, метафикција, сопство, истина, *Спор човек*, *Елизабет Костело*

Научне области: студије књижевности, друштвено-хуманистичке науке

Уже научне области: књижевна теорија

УДК:

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AUTHOR'S NOTES ON TRANSLATIONS, SPELLING, AND REFERENCING

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.
2. Standard American English spelling is followed throughout the manuscript, except in quotations. Other English standards are retained inside quotations and bibliographic entries.
3. The style of this manuscript is closely formatted in adherence to the guidelines issued by the Faculty of Philology of the University of Belgrade.
4. The referencing and bibliography of this manuscript followed MLA (8th ed.).
5. If not otherwise indicated, only quotes made by J. M. C. are taken from his interviews and collaborations of essays, and for that reason they will we mentioned in the bibliography as primary work, and not in the corresponding alphabetical places of his collaborates.

I

Prelude

I INTRODUCTION

1.1 Personal Writing in J. M. Coetzee – I Observe the *I* Who Writes of All that is Mine

> What are the qualities of a good (a plausible, even a compelling) story?
>
> (Coetzee, *The Good Story* 1)

John Maxwell Coetzee fictionalizes his autobiographical writing, he invents dates, authorial personae, and even characters he never met in real life[1] to suit his narrative agenda. He also excludes facts he is not ready or willing to share in his personal writing, such as the period of life he had children and a wife that coincide with the period *Summertime* is supposedly framed in. In doing so, he has also managed to rewrite the manual for how the "observing I" may represent the "narrative I," and vice a versa, how by writing one's story the author changes his/her perspective of the past events, thus the "narrative I" retroactively adds to the "observing I." The way Coetzee has gone about this process seems replete with a learning curve, since *Boyhood*, *Youth* and *Summertime* have varying levels of authorial skill of "self"-representation, getting better and more elaborate with each book.

Sheer enumeration of narrative techniques Coetzee employs in his *autre*-biography trilogy pieces would reveal anything from 3rd person autobiographical narrative to pseudo-static present point of narration destabilized by narrative present and, finally, in *Summertime*, the position of "quasi death" of the author or writing about yourself as if postmortem, to name but a few.[2] These literary techniques will be separately analyzed in Chapter 3. Fictionalization in his personal writing remains a fact. The question only remains as to what extent fiction pervades the texts and whether manipulations with the truth demonstrate enough literary justification?

I aim to look into and ultimately shed some light on whether these "inventions" in the form of autobiographical liberties and complete deletions of sections of his life are manipulated in order to rewrite history and hide the truth. To what extent does Coetzee write the story of himself, and to what extent does he utilize fictionalization with literary forethought to hide and distort the truth from himself and/or the public? Coetzee himself emphasizes that personal writing is full of decisions:

> When I tell other people the story of my life – and more importantly when I tell myself the story of my life – should I try to make it into a well-formed artefact, passing swiftly over the times when nothing happened, heightening the drama of the times when lots was happening, giving the narrative shape, creating the anticipation and suspense; or on the contrary should I be neutral, objective, striving to tell a kind of truth that would meet the criteria of the courtroom: the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth? (*The Good Story* 1)

It is my position in this thesis that with Coetzee, the truth of representation is more often hidden in "empty spaces" or, more precisely, topics undone, than in the "autobiographical" texts carefully constructed for public consumption. My interest lies in these spaces unmentioned by

[1] Coetzee changed the date of his mother's death, introduced the imaginary character of an autobiographer – Vincent who came to interview people in his life after his quasi death, and numerous authorial personae to deliver his opinions instead of him – such as Costello and Senor C. For more on the topic, see Attwell (2015), especially chapter 10.

[2] Autobiographies used to be exclusively 1st person narratives, even if written by court appointed ghost writers, for example. A 3rd person narration is considered to break with traditions, although Coetzee is not the first one to use the technique, by employing it consistently he has grown to symbolize the inability of the "narrative 'I'" to write cohesively about the "observing I." Furthermore, the second technique refers to pseudo static point of narration, meaning writing in the present tense, only to break the illusion with daily intrusions of the "real" present as you are writing about something. And finally, quasi death points to how *Summertime* begins, i.e. with "the death of the author," presumably real-life Coetzee. However, the reader at all times knows this not to be true, so it breaks the reality into fictionalization.

Coetzee, such as his family, not because of perverted interest in the author's private life, but his own opinions that autobiographical writing of famous people ranges in scope only to their public lives. The reasoning behind this search is that empty spaces such as privacy of the people in question provide the true autobiographical spaces and not the carefully constructed public personae he creates. My working hypothesis is that the other two books, fictional in nature and chosen for analyses in this thesis – *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man*, enable an interpretation that Coetzee uses literary techniques of metalepsis, distortion of reality, and the illusion of real worlds to sneak in a glimpse of his "real" opinions into fictional worlds, and in this way, he hides personal writing in plain sight.

Elizabeth Costello stands as a representative of Coetzee's authorial persona, allowed to have controversial opinions he himself meticulously avoids to make public, alongside other authorial characters I will compare in order to demonstrate that the innovation to Coetzee's autobiographical discourse lies in truth in fiction, and fiction in autobiography. The choice of *Slow Man* as a representative of this phenomenon is reflected in the additional layering and another world that opens up in front of the reader – supposedly Elizabeth Costello is the author of the character Paul Rayment – the *Slow Man* in question, authoring him as Coetzee authors her and as they both deny being penned as the author likes. An almost dystopian image of writing, the end of which "writes" a reader by providing an interpretation and finishing an open text.

Furthermore, I would also argue that due to metalepsis, self-reflexivity, and metafiction, Coetzee-the-author is less likely to be found in the carefully constructed author-surrogates of his *autre*-biography, and more often lurking in a choice of topics he addresses. Nonetheless, it is necessary to mention that, in my analyses, I will avoid unilaterally plastering views authorial alter egos assume to Coetzee's writing persona. I do agree that elements of personal writing pervade Coetzee's texts at least in the repetitiveness of certain topics, but simply contributing numerous views of his alter egos to his own, must be avoided at all costs, as that proves too simplistic for someone immersed in the literary world as an author, professor, and literary critic.

For this reason, works outside of the defined *autre*-biography trilogy, namely *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man* will also be analyzed in order to illustrate that a choice of topics in his other works echoes in his oeuvre, and perhaps says more about his true opinions than his constructed alter egos. Other novels may be mentioned as well, if they pertain to personal writing in topic or repetitive introduction of the same characters – a Balzacian-style maneuver.

When it comes to the title and terminology, I have opted for the term personal writing because it encompasses autobiographical discourse generally, and because there is disagreement in terms of how to refer to his work – whether as autobiography, autofiction, memoir, or confession, to name but a few. Self-narratives often defy and break the logic of any single genre, because of which they cannot be clearly specified as memoirs, journals, fictionalized autobiographies, autobiographical writings, or life narrative, unless the author steps in and demonstrates intent as to what term s/he prefers for the work.

The closest to a definition I could get is that Coetzee is prone to using certain elements of life-writing, memoir, and fictionalized autobiography interchangeably within many of his narratives, but especially in those referred to as *autre*-biography and novels that represent characters with his name-play or alter egos (such as authorial or character surrogates of J. C., Señor C. or Elizabeth Costello). In order to circumvent the aforementioned limitations of interchangeable terminology, I have decided to place his chosen works under the umbrella of personal writing.[3] In Coetzee's trilogy, on the other hand, his *autre*-biography[4] I aim to analyze in the framework he has created since he himself has named *Boyhood*, *Youth* and *Summertime* exactly that.

In the following chapters, major questions in personal or life narrative will be addressed, such as the scope of autobiographical writing, truthful self-representation, and writing of the self, however with the view of representing Coetzee's literary, critical opinions at all times. Thus, first and foremost,

[3] As a concept, personal writing was adopted from: see Kerstin W. Shands et al., editors, (2015). It is sufficiently encompassing as a concept, and since Coetzee's oeuvre of autobiographical discourse may be described as a search for the truth in self-representation, it seemed more appropriate than any other terms.

[4] A term Coetzee coined himself that will be described separately in a chapter under the same title (Ch. 4 *Autre*-biography).

I will aim to demonstrate what J. M. C. has said on a variety of life-narrative issues when he was discussing other authors he was studying at the time, collected in essays such as *White Writing* (1988), *Doubling the Point* (1992), *Giving Offense* (1996), *Stranger Shores* (2001), *Inner Workings* (2007), and *Here and Now* (2013), explored in Ch. 1.

Additionally, questions of authorship and resurrection of the author in autobiographical writing will be discussed separately in light of modern theories (Ch. 2), with the aim of clarifying how J. M. C. has successfully worked with what had already been theoretically available but has also uplifted and changed the genres of life-writing, memoir, confessional writing, and autobiography. Some of these genres will be interchangeably used as they appeared historically, but in order to compare and contrast them in Coetzee's writing, at one point when I discuss *autre*-biography they should diverge.

The scope of my investigation, aside from the aforementioned "what makes for a *compelling story of the self*" and how Coetzee uses innumerable literary techniques to elevate the genre of autobiographical discourse into something else, further topics require elaboration, such as: what personal writing represents and what falls outside of the scope in personal writing as defined by Coetzee? Hence, let us define personal writing so that separate elements may come to light, illuminating later on the methodology of how Coetzee has mashed these elements in order to create *autre*-biography.

1.2 The Scope of Personal Writing – *How Personal* is Personal Narration?

> Let me treat this as a question about telling the truth, rather than as a question about autobiography. Because in a larger sense all writing is autobiography: everything that you write, including criticism and fiction, writes you as you write it. The real question is: This massive autobiographical writing-enterprise that fills a life, this enterprise of self-construction (shades of Tristam Shandy!) – does it yield only fictions? Or rather, among the fictions of the self, the versions of the self, that it yields, are there any that are truer than others? How do I know when I have the truth about myself?
>
> (Coetzee, *Doubling the Point* 17)

What constitutes personal writing these days – or better yet, what does not? Historically speaking, autobiographical narratives and journals by famous people used to be the only acknowledged form of writing about the self, whereas nowadays sub-genres have become fractioned and varied beyond recognition. In a random search of books,[5] we are faced with titles including, but not limited to – "spiritual autobiography," "a fictional autobiography," "autobiography of a city," "a tale of the buffalo" or "an autobiography of emotion."[6] The buffalo in question, the one referred to previously is actually a person, and the city of Havana is personalized throughout as a human being, made to feel, smell and breathe just like any other person writing the tale of their lives or being written into existence. So, the extent of autobiographical discourse in its new form of personal/life-writing has become much broader in the sense that it encompasses metaphorically even inanimate objects or animals, which would have been unthinkable a few centuries ago.

[5] Whether typing into google, or just searching "autobiography" in the library search engine like I did, should provide similar results that illustrate varieties of autobiographical sub-genres and personalization of autobiographical discourse that now extend to cities, animals and inanimate objects as metaphors. My search mentioned here was done at the library of the Faculty of Philology in Salamanca, Spain.

[6] The following examples are taken randomly to demonstrate variability of choice presented to the reader under a common denominator of "autobiography" or "life-writing," which could be completely misleading and representative of actually – fiction, in sections only, or in their entirety:

Acosta, Oscar Zeta. *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo, 1989-07*. Random House, 1989.

Summers, Joanna. Late-*Medieval Prison Writing and the Politics of Autobiography*. Oxford UP, 2004.

Jose Estrada, Alfredo. *Havana: Autobiography of a City*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

We have graduated from initially writing about exceptional lives and historical figures, to being interested in the mundane and ponderings of everyday common characters. From biographies and autobiographies of Benjamin Franklin, Malcolm X, and Shakespeare, to anything from "how-to" books and genres loosely named addiction narrative, scriptotherapy, testimonio, confession, diary, personal essay, trauma narrative, blog, ethnic life narrative, autoethnography, autographic, autotopography, ecobiography, gastrography, jockography, "oughta" biography can be widely read as life or personal writing. Hence, speeches of "everymen"[7] pop up from shelves across continents – their discourse exceptional first and foremost for being about completely unexceptional individuals and their innermost thoughts.

So the next step seemed only logical – everyone with enough funds was able to publish their own autobiography in the forms of various "life journals," "mindful beings" and "trauma" writings. But in powerful self-narratives such as Coetzee's, Morrison says that "it's the difference between agency and victimhood" that determines value, between taking the responsibility of shaping a powerful narrative instead of writing grievances ad hoc or using literature as therapy only (Morrison 216).

Coetzee proves that personal writing does not necessarily represent only narcissist tendencies of a certain society, but it provides intrinsic value in literary terms if done with a higher goal of mirroring societal issues, not only superficially addressing individual problems. Cultures "engage in either an oblique or an overt dialog(ue) with one another" (Simal 7) as it is impossible to exist in a vacuum. Personal writing mirrors a time in history without fail (7).

Arguably, the common person taking center stage has had other effects on literature aside from placing the commoners front and center. It has led to a proliferation of genres and subgenres of autobiographical discourse inevitably changing the landscape of self-narratives. Readers' unquenchable thirst for "true confession" and subjectivity in the 20th and 21st centuries proved counter-reformative to movements such as New Criticism and post-structuralism that had "discredited" subjectivity (Gray 20). Self-representation may culturally stem from "confession and disclosure in 1960s" (20), but predominant factors that made the genre popular have to do with "feminism and minority studies" (20) from marginalized groups, giving subjectivity its rightful meaning back. "Speaking as" a member of a marginalized group, or setting up an identity to provide agency became the norm in many confessional narratives (21). Belonging is equaled to first-hand knowledge, and first-hand knowledge is given primacy over all others (such as wisdom or education).

How does Coetzee fit in this system, then? He is neither marginalized nor outgoing enough and narcissistic to share his every thought on various subjects. Quite oppositely, he is very private. However, he was able to provide the much-needed linguistic twist of high literature to self-narratives. At a time when personal writing was emphasized solely on agency and authorship politics, it was viewed as something that merited no fame for literary reasons. However, as an acclaimed author and critic, he was able to elevate the genre of personal writing to acclaimed literature at the moment when autobiography lost its momentum, and life-writing gained infamous etiquette as something artless, jotted down for emotional impact and by anyone who belonged to marginalized group views.

Coetzee's relevance in genre theory remains substantial. Since sub-genres of personal narratives include numerous encompassing methods of expression, such as atrocity narratives, letters, blogs, prison writing, etc. as well as autobiography in a broad sense, Coetzee extrapolated elements he liked and ignored others from all blurred genres in order to create his own language and sub-genre – he in the end termed *autre*-biography. He was able to capitalize on the opinion that these forms of self-narration provide a unique "personal" access to the minds of authors and the appearance of "directly" speaking to the reader, which in itself is very attractive. Personal writing reflected the importance of intimacy and "privileged access to truths the author feels impelled to disclose" (Morrison 204).

Despite the fact that some authors view these genres of self-narratives unclear in scope, and thus impossible to criticize, there is merit to them, especially if well done. They negate everything: "Blurred and porous, the notion of genre raises many practical and theoretical controversies all the

[7] Everyman is used in the meaning of person, regardless of gender. In literature it reflects the common person and universal experience.

way to its perceived uselessness" as their changeability nullifies everything by not being neither here nor there (Shands 7). And yet, Coetzee disagrees. He posits, somewhat radically that the scope of personal writing is – all writing. Everything that is written is a form of autobiography (*Doubling the Point* 17),[8] as it says something about the author and his/her choices. And the scope of personal writing is then all writing because storytelling is fiction, an invention, a version of one person about their lives – "Are all autobiographies, all life-narratives, not fictions, at least in the sense that they are constructions?" (*The Good Story* 3).

1.3 The Scope of Genre in Coetzee's Personal Narratives

> I take an autobiography to be a personal narrative distinguished from narrative fiction by the assumption on the readers' part that it adheres to certain standards of truthfulness, and perhaps distinguished as well by an inspiration on the part of its writer to tell the truth. For that reason, I take auto-biography to be at least an intention, a kind of history rather than a kind of fiction.
>
> (Coetzee, "A Fiction of the Truth" 1)

J. M. Coetzee uses his extensive experience and knowledge of literature to take advantage of blurred genres. He effectively writes his novels in the "style of" methodology, be it in the style of autobiographical discourse, novels, or anything in-between. This plays right into the critics' inability to deem negatively a procedure in the literature that is innovative since it remains incomparable to tradition. His genre-play goes to the extent that critics disagree even what to call his body of works in self-narration. Coetzee's *Boyhood, Youth,* and *Summertime* trilogy gets referred to as memoir, confessional writing, or autofiction, aside from *autre*-biography, which is how he classified these autobiographical narratives with varying levels of fictionalization.

Going to the beginnings of the scope of genre discussion in Coetzee, I propose that *personal writing* incorporates numerous sub-genres, owing to the fact that in a single piece of writing there could be parts resembling sections of different genres. This pluralism of autobiographical writing as a specific type should not be considered lack or criticism, but merely a facet of expression. Since it is impossible to come to a consensus, for the purposes of this research I will use personal writing as a larger umbrella for different methods of expression in blurred genres Coetzee uses. The autobiographical discourse will be used as a modern equivalent of autobiography, as research today points to the impossibility of clear-cut autobiography from a practical point of view. Autobiography, confession, or memoir will be used as terminology only for historically classified autobiographies and quoting Coetzee who uses these terms as such in his critical essays. [9]

Developments have led to the enrichment of autobiographical discourse, and even to the creation of sub-genres as a positive by-product to all this modern interest in self-expression. Originally in the words of Clifford Geertz (1980) – *blurred genres* enable conversations between forms. So, the scope of Coetzee's writing in genre theory incorporates autobiographical instances interspersed with memoir, life-writing, autobiographical novel, confessional style, and autofiction. In spite of that fact, there are authors (Rak and Kusek) who insist memoir precedes autobiography. According to Kusek, a memoir demonstrates a much looser structure, whereas autobiography is more fact-based (*Through the Looking Glass* 52), thus he personally prefers to name Coetzee's trilogy – a memoir. Personal writing was chosen as a neutral term here in the meaning of any self-narration that demands referentiality in the real world.

[8] Autobiography as a term here is used more broadly, in the meaning of self-narrative, writing about yourself, not as a genre.

[9] Research into the representation of self, identity and overlapping between character, real author and the self – point to the impossibility of realistic representation of self due to distortions of memory, personal interests and a lack of better judgement (see De Man).

Historically, self-narration was equaled to autobiography in peoples' minds. For this reason, and because of Coetzee's lengthy discussions on this topic, I will address his opinions on autobiographical discourse at length. Additionally, confessional narratives will also be mentioned extensively due to their interconnectedness to self-narratives and motivation behind them (being forgiven, narcissism, etc.). *Autre*-biography will be discussed in a subtitle of its own, as it incorporates Coetzee's views on genre-bending narratives into one, and as a creation of his own, it merits discussion separately (Ch. 4). Most important to Coetzee's later work is innovation – he himself says that he gets "impatient with fiction that doesn't try something that hasn't been tried before, preferably with the medium itself" (*Here and Now* 165). This speaks to Coetzee's experimental authorial methods and authorship politics.

These blurred genres, in part, remain unidentifiable because there is radical disagreement even in whether autobiography is possible. We require other's input in describing our lives and providing "evidence" for events. As Couser sums it up, "constraints on all self-lifewriting" mean that "one can no more write one's life autonomously than one can live it completely independently – that autobiography is impossible" (268). De Man, additionally, zooms in on autobiography's inability to be perceived as a genre per se as it is often compared to novel writing since it is difficult to discern fictional from factual narration (919). There seems to be angst when it comes to proving and enumerating the differences between novel writing and autobiography, as they often transcend into one another. As Spicer elaborates "this is the anxiety of small differences, that most intractable of anxieties" (399). What is relevant for J. M. C.'s narrative refers to his agreement on the fluidity of truth in autobiographies and lack of a discernable one-fit-all type of story. Coetzee settles the debate by claiming that all storytelling is fiction anyway. The quote from the beginning explains that to Coetzee, the "enterprise of self-construction" (*Doubling the Point* 17) possibly yields only fictions of the self, or in other words how the authors see themselves. If the truth is located in the mind of the storyteller or story-listener and interpreter, then surely the genre of the story can also be discussed in light of the interpretation?

Coetzee proves modern in his concept of fiction as subjective truth in self-representation being inevitable. Starting from Booth's "Rhetoric of Fiction" (1961), Hart's "Anatomy of Modern Autobiography" (1970), and all the way to Eakin, Olney, and other relevant critical authors in the area of personal writing, known as an autobiography at the time, the main argument against personal/life-writing has often been that it was difficult to determine rules in literary criticism according to which something could be classified as an autobiography, and this is closely linked to the truth conundrum in autobiographical discourse. The concept of truth-telling about yourself through a character of your own name used to be implicitly expected in autobiography. As the genre changed, from the Greek definition (αὐτός-*autos* self + βίος-*bios* life + γράφειν-*graphein* to write), to modern concepts of ghostwriters and theories of relative truth and limits of self-representation, it is no longer expected that the author says the truth about the self, but oppositely, that s/he is unable to do so. Coetzee radically posits that it is the position of expectancy which is relevant – only if the reader expects truth and believes it is the intention of the author to provide it – the truth is important.

The contract of truthfulness (Lejeune) as best we know it or are able to conjure, seems to be embedded in the reader-writer implicit understanding of what is on offer – if we name literature autobiography – the absolute truth is required. Whereas this does not apply to personal/life writing, and expectations shift towards a fictionalization of truth with the intention of telling it (Coetzee, "The Fiction of Truth" 1). Since there is no consensus on how much fiction is allowed, readers feel cheated if an autobiography represents narration not truly about a person, or not truthfully written, but with hindsight as well as distorted and doctored recollections. This could be prescribed to problems with clarity between factual and fictional writing. For example, genres such as autobiography, autobiographical novels, autodocumentary novels, journals, autofiction, etc. – all belong in elements only, or the whole body of text – to life-writing. However, autobiography differs from all of the above in terms of the truth it is expected to portray, e.g. the narrator and the main character are supposed to be alike in the world outside the text as well as in the textual form.

Quite uniquely, Coetzee believes everything we write is autobiographical to some extent – it is a fiction of our worldview. He himself say that "all writing is autobiography" because "everything that you write, including criticism and fiction, writes you as you write it" (*Doubling the Point* 17). The conclusion arises that this refers to topics of choice, authorial judgment in sculpting specific characters, as well as emphasis put on certain issues that an author repetitively argues a point of through his or her oeuvre, and that in turn changes as the process of writing comes to the end. De Man proposes to treat autobiography similarly to Coetzee's view. In Coetzee's and de Man's view – autobiography is to be treated as a *manner of writing*, not "a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading" (de Man 921). "It is a process of reading" in which two subjects involved in the process "determine each other by mutual reflexive substitution" (921). In other words, the process of writing the autobiography and reflections on the past, change both the subject who is writing it and the subject in memory that is being written down (921). This happens because the "author declares himself the subject of his own understanding" in the text (921). However, despite the control the author exerts on his/her own story, the final interpretation lies in *the reader* after all, not the writer or the subject of his/her memory.

It follows "all texts are autobiographical" (922), or "all writing is autobiography" (Coetzee, *Doubling the Point* 17). "But just as we seem to assert that all texts are autobiographical, we should say that, by the same token, none of them is or can be" (de Man 922). Instability is seen as an "inherent" problem in any definition of autobiography, since "the interest of autobiography, then, is not that it reveals reliable self-knowledge – it does not – but that it demonstrates in a striking way the impossibility of closure and of totalization" (922). Everything we write about ourselves says something about us; on the other hand, a clear-cut definition of the genre proves futile as self-knowledge tends to be accessible only to a limited extent, due to common psychological mechanisms at work.

But, then, what reflects the correlation of trauma writing, or confessional narrative to autobiographical writing? Are all autobiographies or choices of topics narrated inadvertently traumatic experiences explained in a variety of modes (genres)? With regard to how autobiographical writing comes to be, Coetzee said in an interview with Begam that "art is born out of burning issues, issues felt deeply" or "internal to the medium" ("An Interview" 431). Even autobiography or *autre*-biography he has written must have stemmed from unresolved issues of his own, whether "specific (political issues, for instance) or general (such as questions of life and death)" (431). Any types of self-narratives inadvertently reveal information about the authors' interests.

Atwell sees Coetzee's autofiction and autobiographical elements in his other work as representational mirrors, mirroring images instead of precise reflections ("Coetzee's Estrangements" 232). Lejeune goes on to say that "identity is a fact" (21), however, in autobiographies it is often the next best thing, a mere resemblance of the author, a character the author is willing or able to demonstrate. "Despite the self-reflexivity, all the representational mirrors, to pretend that we can measure Coetzee's achievements without considering the effects of biography and place is to ignore the elephant in the room," says Attwell ("Coetzee's Estrangements" 232). Thus, it is Coetzee's place and time that determine his writing and write him into relevance, as well, because he depicts the human condition in a certain moment in time. Perhaps this so-called "elephant in the room" may be interconnected to the very notion of limitation placed upon autobiography. Aside from technical limitations, one must also acknowledge the psychological ones in narratives of the self by the agent himself/herself. In the words of Broncano, "the threats to a reasonably examined life" (603) may appear to be numerous. Failure to represent one's self faithfully could sum up elements such as "confabulations, self-deception, bad faith, and akrasia," (603) the last one known in English more often as acrasy or lack of self-control.

Even if to some identity is "not resemblance" (Lejeune 21), to Coetzee it seems to be just that – an approximation. To Lejeune's mind, when autobiography begins to resemble an autobiographical novel, the case of resemblance has taken over the fact, and we no longer can discuss autobiography in the initial sense, in the definition that had been offered ("the biography of a person written by himself/herself") (22). Both Coetzee and Lejeune refer to an understanding between writers and

readers that they each represent opposing ends on the message spectrum. In a biography or an autobiography, there is an understanding that an element of truth as the writer remembers it will be presented. On the other hand, there is doubt, be it postmodern in nature, that a writer actually can remember his or her own history with truthful reflection. Meaning that the writer only promises to provide the representation or memory of the truth, a reflection instead of identity itself. And yet, the conundrum remains who could do it better, if not the person who has lived it?

The simile of autobiography as a biographical activity depends heavily on temporal connection to the past in Coetzee's work. "Biography is a kind of storytelling in which you select material from a lived past and fashion it into a narrative that leads into a living present in a more or less seamless way. The premise of biography is a continuity between past and present," says Coetzee (*Doubling the Point* 391). Two important premises prove valuable: one that authors personally select the information they provide in the text; second that it is a storytelling affair that depends on the author, not facts. However, does Coetzee propose that blatant lying about one's past is possible in a well-done self-narrative? Not really, only if lying to oneself is involved.

Coetzee concurs with other critics (Kurtz) that invention or plain lying about the past may not be an option in self-narratives – "the claim here is not that autobiography is free, in the sense that we can make-up our life-story as we wish" (*The Good Story* 3). Nevertheless, he disagrees we have too much control over reality – "we exercise the same freedom that we have in dreams, where we impose a narrative form that is our own, even if influenced by forces that are obscure to us, on elements of a remembered reality" (3). So he proposes that everything we write about the self represents a molding of our own subjective view – "Are all autobiographies, all life-narratives, not fictions, at least in the sense that they are constructions (fiction from Latin fingere, to shape or mould or form)?" (3).

Due to self-interest, or a "self-interest enterprise" as Coetzee phrases it, self-narration may be prone to "blindness" biography is immune to (*Doubling the Point* 391). He says that on the one hand, "the writer has privileged access to information" (391) to such extent that s/he is unparalleled in his/her advantageous position to write a piece. On the other hand, "selective vision, even a degree of blindness, becomes inevitable – blindness to what may be obvious to any passing observer" (391), disabling the writer from being objective due to the innate need to be his/her own devil's advocate on every turn.

> Autobiography is dominated by self-interest (continues this second person); in an abstract way one may be aware of that self-interest, but ultimately one cannot bring it into full focus. The only sure truth in autobiography is that one's self interest will be located at one's blind spot. (392)

Essentially, J. M. C. ultimately is wary about absolute statements on autobiography and whether it is possible or impossible. Through techniques of self-reflexivity, he merely points headlights to its gory holes and asks questions about the practicality of how it works in reality, both for the writer and the reader. What we can claim without a doubt is that he believes it to be a story, one form of phrasing one's worldview but in no way the only one. He finds it riddled with possible pitfalls, but inevitable nonetheless.

Self-representation also represents a never-ending work that can be redone after any number of years – "In these dialogues you have asked what I, in my blind way, have seen as I look back over the past twenty years of writing; and now you ask what I see when I look back over the dialogues themselves" (391). As the person changes over time, the rear-view mirror reflects the change. The story changes with the telling.

This is closely reflective of Coetzee's views on confessions. Confessional literature in the Western world is connected to faith and absolution, but secular, in Coetzee's mind, does not ask for forgiveness but an accomplice. Coetzee assimilates the Catholic confessional situation to that of therapy in the sense that there is "the silence," "the confessor," "the code of confession" and "the liberating formula with which the session ends" (*The Good Story* 58). Although Kurtz disagrees – to

her the therapeutic situation is more connected to Protestantism and individual responsibility, hard work on "the self" and taking responsibility for your actions (*The Good Story* 60-61), still Coetzee finds confession to be more related to the act of professing to an unknown presence that brings closure to a religious man, whereas in the post-religious society he professes not to know what brings closure.

> Remorseful confession has a long and complicated history in its literary embodiments. The part of this history that interests me – and has been of use to me as a writer – commences in England of the late seventeenth century, when journalists appropriated the confessions of criminals due to be executed for sensational material, and reaches a high point in the novels of Dostoevsky, who was no stranger to sensationalism but who was – I agree with you – unexcelled in the power of his diagnosis of the complex motives that may underlie a decision – or an impulse – to bare one's heart. (38)

At one point in his academic career, Coetzee extensively wrote essays and one of them on wrote on Pozdnyshev's confession (in Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata*), emphasizing that various truths in a confession come out depending on what information we choose to stress or eliminate. "No doubt we can read third and fourth truths out of the text" (*Doubling the Point* 257). However, the point of the matter to Coetzee is not whether the unending cycle of truths exists, as it may, but that sacramental confession turned secular focuses on admitting what one knows about oneself, as well as "the truth about [himself] that he does not yet know" (252), but arrives to in the process of making a confession (or writing). This intrinsic element of confession he refers to as "twofold confession" – trying to tell the story of the self, all the while knowing your mind might be hiding some insights from you, thus being as truthful as possible without guaranteeing the truth of yourself (252).

The distinction in types of confession we perceive in Coetzee refers to confessional intention, or the reason why a confession is being made (*The Good Story* 41). To him that is key. The concept of a public confession may only have the aim of gaining something, such as in the *Scarlet Letter* and that is acceptance in the community as a pennant. But privately, to Coetzee, the person may be "rejecting judgement of her" (43). He is mostly interested in the one we use as confessee (the reader), as the confessor will have his/her motivation. To Coetzee, discrimination does not exist among any wrongdoers' stories as they tell themselves whatever it is that they need in order to justify their actions in their own eyes (I did it for the country, my kids, for passion, etc.). He considers that exactly the same psychological mechanisms are at work that defend murders, adulterers, or deniers from themselves (44):

> The figure who interests me in the duel is Tikhon, as the one who is placed in the position of being confessed to by the one who wants to – or claims to want to - make confession. In *Notes from Underground*, and in the many novels and stories in European literature that follow after *Notes from Underground*, it is the reader who is maneuvered into the Tikhon position, and has to decide whether what they are reading is a 'true' confession or (for instance) a pseudo-confession whose unstated purpose is to make one think more highly of the narrator. (40)

The reader holds all the power in a confession, as Coetzee believes the confessor to be tainted by his/her needs. He goes further to say, paradoxically since he is the author of three self-narratives, truthful self writing is morally somewhat impossible because "the nostrum that each of us has a life-story, and we should exert ourselves to become the author of that life-story, rather than allowing others to tell it to or for us" he finds "to be morally dubious" (44) as it exudes interest on the part of the author – self-interests, self-defense, settling score with enemies.

So, words like *morally dubious* – yet who *more qualified* to do it *than the author himself*; compelled to *tell the truth*, but *unable to so* and aware to be lying; having the option of *telling many truths* but *choosing one* that suits his narrative; about *the self*, but *simultaneously about the country*

and everyman; both aware you are telling the *truth as best you recall* it and knowing you are *lying to yourself*; calling it an *autobiography, memoir or personal writing* based on arbitrary reasons; s*imultaneously* narcissistic and collective in the description; and finally, both *a truth* and *a fiction of his life story* – refer to our current understanding of personal writing according to Coetzee. Since formulating a clear-cut definition might be impossible, let us enjoy the fluid borderlines of Coetzee's identity, self, quest, and life-story narratives as just that – self-interested stories from a master of self-disguise and revelation who invented a completely new genre to suit his moral agenda.

1.4 Appeal(s) to Personal Writing – How *I* Take Ownership of *My* Story

> In our liberal, post-religious culture we tend to think of the narrative imagination as a benign force within us. But there is another way of seeing it, based on our experience of how self-narratives work in many people's lives: as a faculty we use to elaborate for ourselves and our circle the story that suits us best, a story that justifies the way we have behaved in the past and behave in the present, a story in which we are generally right and other people are generally wrong.
>
> (Coetzee, *The Good Story* 4)

While I should point out that in this quote Coetzee sidelines a pivotal question, namely that of the level of consciousness and presence of intent in creating self-serving narratives,[10] he does mention an appeal to personal narratives that often remains implicit – people generally tell a story of events skewing them to appear right and others in the wrong, or "a story that justifies the way we have behaved" (4). In his essay "Confession and Double Thoughts," Coetzee says that "one must remember that as a writer of his own story he is in a privileged position to dictate readings" (*Doubling the Point* 279), and I agree with him that this ownership of one's story and power exerted over one's life stories remains part of the appeal of personal narratives.

This thought is somewhat similar to Ohmann's view of "victimization," namely, he sees the origin of life stories as "outbreaks of self-indulgence" (353) and puts their emergence down to globalization, the crisis at universities, as well as coming out stories of numerous freedom-starved groups he mentions to be imbedded with identity politics and "saliently female, or disabled, or Asian-American, or gay…" (352). Life stories have gained momentum and would last because they appear among the privileged as "competitive displays of victimization, or unsporting claims on sympathy" (353). They will remain "politically relevant" (353) in the future, despite being used and abused at times as not sufficiently "good" literature – coming from marginalized groups it still bears weight. Lastly, Ohmann does concede, though, that while "the personal turn" has been "more beneficial than not," in either case, it is a moot point as it is "irreversible" now (354). The technology has imposed the genre of self-talk more than eve, and postmodernism has elevated this practice in literature.

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[10] We can spot remnants of Sigmund Freud's views on motivation in the position Coetzee takes. Still, it should be noted that we could question the level of awareness and intent behind such actions, especially if we take Freud's theory into consideration. For instance, as Freud sees it, the ego is torn between the super ego and id, the former putting emphasis on what we've been taught by our parents and is deemed acceptable by society in general, the latter demanding mental resources for more basic, somewhat animalistic urges, usually ostracized by society. What remains unanswered and not entirely clear in Coetzee's line is - how aware is the ego, are we, of any distortions of reality? If we are making up a storyline and fitting memories into a narrative where we are the hero, the one who is right, are we consciously making decisions to show ourselves in a better light or does this happen automatically, maybe even on a hidden plane, shrouded from us? If we are distorting facts, are we lying to ourselves as well?
Looking into psychoanalytic discourse we are likely to find an answer somewhere in between the two mentioned extremes, but it should be noted that I am only mentioning Freud's theory in light of Coetzee's interest in the field. As I am aware that these questions merit further investigation and as such research exceeds the scope and main goals of this thesis, I suggest, for further reading and an in-depth view on guilt, personality and society, see Sigmund Freud's "The Ego and The Id."

Blake Morrison also provides several points as to why personal narratives have taken up so much public space. Confession as a desire to shock, to apologize or justify, to redefine shocking and include new topics into the public sphere; also as a testimony, as catharsis, as an ego trip, as therapy of self-reinvention or control over one's memory in death (208-212). According to Morrison, after naming all the possible reasons for writing in this genre, sides with the view that authors most likely want to reclaim a personal history that has become, or is going to become after death – public property (213). So, it appeals to authors to assert control over their legacy and memory in advance.

Additionally, personal narratives persevere because readers get included in a confession of bad behavior, and who would pass up the guilty pleasure of reading someone's transgressions? But aside from a morbid fascination with someone else's negative behaviors, Coetzee emphasizes a learning curve that happens not just in the reader, but also in the writer of the transgression:

> In Augustine's story, the theft of the pears is the transgression, but what calls to be confessed is something that lies behind the theft, a truth about himself that he does not yet know. His story of the pears is therefore a twofold confession of something he knows (*Doubling the Point* 252)

The reader also gets something out of this inward-looking confession – the transgression provides an opening for a chorus of opinions. Morrison believes "it is as much about other people as about the writer […] at best it's *for* other people" (219). By noticing and emphasizing different details of a transgression, we, as readers, learn more about ourselves than about authors. It allows for imagination and empathetic play of and escapism in the form of "what if" – what if that were me, how would I react, what might happen? So, the appeal of personal narratives, on the one hand, refers to the writer learning the truth about him/herself unknown before the process of writing, and on the other, allowing the reader to play imaginary roles, assume positions from a perspective of first-person, and try out identities.

Furthermore, Coetzee's personal writing may be viewed as a modern, advanced *version of omniscient narration*, especially if the protagonist is written from a third-person perspective with occasional input from the authorial persona. If the temporal position of the authorial persona refers to *now* (moment of writing) and the position of *hindsight* knowledge, then it is even more reminiscent of omniscient narrative. And the appeal of omniscient narration relies on being able to *relax the reader* with already pre-arranged answers and ready-made interpretations for the world that the reader could just adopt. This relaxation of the reader is predominantly in the fact that the author is still alive. If an author of a personal narrative is still writing that means all is well with the world, the appeal of knowing he/she cannot have died and will have persevered no matter what.

Although subjective memory makes it difficult to be privy to thoughts that escape even the authorial persona at the time of the events, the lure of appearing to know what had happened remains strong in personal narratives. Recent research shows that even in hindsight we have a tendency towards remembering events in a better light as we grow older (see Harris et al. 2-47),[11] which argues the impossibility of accuracy in hindsight knowledge. Depending on the position we adopt towards past events – meaning if we have what we had yearned for or not, our memory may be positively or negatively tainted. Coetzee seems to pray on the fact that memory can be extremely mutable and suggestible for reorganization in hindsight – his personal narratives may be reminiscent of omniscient knowledge, but that by no means suggests that he truly knows his memories and has not reorganized them to suit his narrative agenda. It is an element of his oeuvre worth investigating – to what extent

[11] See Harris et al. (pp. 559-581) for more information on how memory plays tricks on us. In this study, the experiment brought about several conclusions relevant for life narrative and personal writing, all in connection with memory. Namely, autobiographical memory serves three major functions: self or identity, directive or problem solving, social or communicative (4). In the analysis of life narrative, there is a table attached clearly defining each function, which could be used for analyzing life narrative. More about this experiment will be done in the chapter about memory, but I advise reading the paper in full as it outlines areas for further study as well.

he is aware of memory's fallibility and how much he abuses this in his personal writing to achieve a truth-like narrative instead of a true-to-his-memory narrative.

Personal narratives also demonstrate rhetorical strategies meant to adapt to the readers' ever-changing pathos – that is, postmodern times require postmodern writers catering to a *new readership*. It has become notable that literary fashion sees "omniscience" as an "outmoded narrative voice that cannot speak with the same authority" as it did for previous readerships (Dawson 93). So, personal writing exceeds authority as it is presumed in an innovative "pact with the readership," implying or guaranteeing that the author knows best what had happened as he or she was present. This "pact" refers to implicitly gaining authority from belonging to a marginalized group, or being present in a historical event, but also promising to treat the audience *as intelligent*.

1.5 Problem(s) with Personal Writing – *I* Reflect Reality from Memory

> From what I write it must be evident to you that I don't have much respect for reality. I think of myself as using rather than reflecting reality in my fiction. If the world of my fictions is a recognisable world, that is because (I say to myself) it is easier to use the world at hand than to make up a new one.
>
> (Coetzee, *The Good Story* 69)

Here I will recapitulate the problems encountered in creating autobiographical discourse. When I mention them afterward it will be part of an in-depth analysis of J. M. C.'s particular brand of personal narrative. By enumerating problems in personal narratives, I am also shedding light on general issues Coetzee had dealt with and the solutions he arrived at in the process of writing. How successful he had been will be the point of my investigation into his personal narratives, but let us start with a brief enumeration of elements to be addressed in his poetics of the self.

In the following sections I deal with Coetzee's approach to genre in personal writing, highly acclaimed personal writing versus everyday clichéd writing, self-narratives as only narcissistic, authorship politics, how much fiction is allowed before autobiographies become novels, truth representation in personal writing, memory, the self, and identity.

First of all, blurred genres have been mentioned as a bone of contention before, but it is worth clarifying why that inspires problems in personal writing. If no boundaries exist, then no criticism is clearly applicable. We are left with a "feeling" as to what makes for "good" personal writing, instead of systematic analysis showing how an author follows or breaks the rules of the genre. Depending on personal affinities, we as readers may opt for putting emphasis on a topic we enjoy reading about, or a tone and turn of phrase, or interesting characters and inventions – and consider that good literature. However, usually, it is the consensus amongst critics, and a passing of time, which separate acclaimed literature from that of clichéd, and therefore that which will not stand the test of time.

Coetzee seems more than anyone immune to genre classification because he has extensively written literary criticism in his academic career at universities, making him closely familiar with all possible genre modifications. He is the winner of awards, including the most prestigious Nobel, thus he is considered an acclaimed literature writer and should be investigated accordingly. In this paper, I will try to shed some light on his solutions for elevating self-narratives to iconic literature instead of, as sometimes defined by critics – merely self-indulging narratives.

Another issue at the core of personal writing reflects that it suffers from prejudice in the readership and criticism alike because it used to drastically vary from academic discourse or highly acclaimed literature. Self-narratives embody "[t]he idea that there's something rough-hewn or artless about confessional literature persists" (Morrison 215). "There's a low budget, improvised feel to it – the equivalent of a hand-held camera" (215). Namely, sometimes critically clichéd work is given

primacy merely because it is written from an innovative, or never-to-have-been-heard-before perspective of the "other," making that literature socially engaged, but perhaps not "the best."

If the only reason why a piece of self-narrative gets praised happens due to its innovation, shock, or social importance (grouped in topics such as sexuality, gender, ecology, religion, race literature, and such), and not necessarily because of literary value, it may be considered as a downside and a problem to be addressed. It should be noted, though, that proponents claim it takes time to get the literary expression of one group's voices, who had been neglected and silenced – up to par. Meaning that although some "other" writing might lack literary value, it still should be supported at its infancy.

According to Mutnick, one more bias against personal writing stems from the fact that it can "be read as deeply narcissistic – a form of cultural pathology, a retreat from social activism" (80). When Coetzee was asked to elaborate on "literature of exhaustion" and arguments that "First World" literature "has fallen into a debilitating narcissism" in an interview with Begam, he replied that "[it] may, from a certain point, be narcissistic," however, it is perfectly valid if the authors are aware of this phenomenon and think what they are doing is "more important" ("An Interview" 430). Meaning that even if written in order to promote oneself, personal writing still had to respond to the same norms of critically acclaimed literature, and demonstrate great execution.

Furthermore, as another problem worth evaluating, Coetzee refers to the fact that analyses in personal writing unilaterally focus on authorship politics. This refers to the focus of analyses – the frame and scope prove challenging to grade, so analysis often delineates into different directions, but the relevance of analyzed elements remains in doubt. The norm has been to overemphasize some elements to the detriment of others, for example, the comparison of the author's life and life-in-writing as a fishing expedition for mistakes, instead of a discussion of techniques used. Instead of the personal life of the author, emphasis might as well be placed on the audience studies, voice, point of view, proximate and distant narration, psychic mechanisms of confession, and the healing powers of giving evidence, to name a few important solutions authors had to come by in order to write about the self. In order to go through all of these distinct categories, it is essential to determine the "I" in self-narration, agreed. It is the "I" that mirrors all literary techniques at the disposal of modern authors to demonstrate the "self," and it is uniquely representative of any author. However, far be it from the fact that no other category merits equal investigation.

That said, even though Coetzee thinks of himself as "using rather than reflecting reality" (*The Good Story* 69) in his work, truth representation cannot be completely exempted from evaluation. It is interconnected with fact and fiction in autobiographical discourse. Despite the fact that recent theories have already postulated that the truth in autobiography is not a given, and might even not be entirely possible, Schmidt argues that it is illogical how still "autobiography tends to be read as fact rather than fiction" (402). The issue at hand has always been that what represents someone's fact in life narrative, is another person's fiction, as people might have a completely different impression of the same event.

Viewing personal writing as a medium of information, almost a news report from a specific point of view has no bearing in reality, although it is often done in practice (403). The fact of the matter is that if written as self-narrative, readers have a presumption of truth and Coetzee had to create solutions to this, and/or play on the implicitness of the matter. This thin line between fiction and fact in personal writing needs discussing, as well as how much fictionalization is allowed, either because of a lack of self-awareness, memory, or literary ability, before it could no longer be held autobiographical discourse, but be called a novel?

Finally, three interconnected problems arise, blurred like everything else in personal narratives: the problems of memory, the self in representation, and the author's identity (as an author and as a character). In other words, the self in the representation of language is a fiction of the author, who, instead of being impartial is actually closely affected by the story and by extension partisan to truths s/he prefers to remember. As Couser explains – "if the self is inherently a function – even a fiction – of language, then autobiography is doubly so; after all, it is a literary capitalization of the 'I'" (18). The writer's interpretation of events depends on his/her memory, which in turn is distorted

over time. The *I* who writes can also not be trusted because it is a different *I from the perspective of the character.* With this, I ask – who is there to help the reader along in the story of the self?

1.6 *Autre*-biography in J. M. C. – *I* Tell the Story of *Him*

> Yes, all autobiography is *autre*-biography, but what is more important is where one goes from there.
>
> (Coetzee, "All Autobiography Is *Autre*-Biography" 216)

Does Coetzee connect *autre*-biography to autobiographical discourse, autofiction, or both? Essentially, *autre*-biography is part autobiography, part metafictional narrative of the self, part autofiction in terms of authorial freedom to withhold the truth. As soon as authors name how they prefer the work to be read (as a novel, autobiography, autofiction, or anything else), a contract is "signed" between them and the readers (Lenta 160).[12] The expectancy of what is to follow seals the deal. So, what to expect in an *autre*-biography, considering the fact that it only applies to Coetzee and only to his three personal narratives?

All three of Coetzee's semi-autobiographical narratives in *Scenes from Provincial Life* are placed under the umbrella of *autre*-biography. Whereas Coetzee clearly only talks about *Boyhood* as such in his interviews with Attwell (1992), other authors (Lenta 2003, Marković 2016) recognize *Boyhood* and *Youth* as *autre*-biographies, while Sue Kossew (2011) classifies all three works in her analysis as *autre*-biography. Despite the fact that *Summertime* possesses clear differences in style and provides more authorial trickery and autofictional elements, I agree with Kossew because everything applicable to the first two narratives from the definition of *autre*-biography – applies to the third one as well. To this day, *autre*-biography as a term has not been used in reference to other authors' work, although some candidates would qualify (Lenta 159; 161). Still, as his own invention, it is only applied to Coetzee in criticism to date.

The terminology *autre*-biography first appears in Coetzee's interview with Attwell in 1992 titled "Retrospect" as he talks about what he would like to add to his views about himself from prior interviews. At one point he says "*he* now begins to feel closer to *I: autre* biography shades back into autobiography" (*Doubling the Point* 394).[13] *Autre,* coming from French, means another, other, the Other, that who is no longer me. So, we could conclude that the dominating factor of *autre*-biography is its metafictional characteristic of referring to itself with the realization that the *narrating I* is only the mirror image of *the experiencing him*, a reflection and an approximation instead of exact reflection. At that point, *Boyhood* had not been published, but the term was coined. A decade later, in another interview with Attwell in 2002, he confirms that "all autobiography is *autre*-biography" ("All Autobiography Is *Autre*-Biography" 216), referring to the fact any author of personal writing always writes about *autre* – another, his/her other past self.

Prior to defining *autre*-biography as a concept, Coetzee writes in the style of "he" in other essays, without clearly labelling the procedure. For example, talking about how his schooling years had proven very instructive and formative in a way he had not expected, he says he "had trained himself/myself to think brought illuminations that I can't imagine him or me reaching by any other route" (*Doubling the Point* 394). Just like "himself/myself" confuses the reader and provides distance, so does talking about himself as – "this is the person who, in a slightly maturer version, goes to Texas to resume his studies in literature," or "Let me ('me') trace this feeling" (393-394). The "this person,"

[12] See Lejeune (1989) for more on implicit and explicit contracts between authors and readers.

[13] We could conclude Coetzee had spent some time as a critic thinking about this term and its implications before writing his first book of *autre*-biography since he mentions the term in 1992, and publishes *Boyhood* in 1997. Prior to the interview in question, in his essays on *Foe*, as well as on his years in Austin he speaks "as he" about himself, but never calls this procedure *autre*-biography before the interview with Attwell.

"himself/myself" and "me" (last one originally in parenthesis) – all draw a distance between the Coetzee who writes and the Coetzee who is being written because of a consensus that autobiography is written in the first person. Carrol Clarkson sheds light on this (mis)conception by asking the question as to why it is deeply rooted that "each person has special access into his or her own 'inner world'" that is unavailable to the "third-person view others have of me" ("Inner Worlds" 423)?

If for no other reason than cultural belief in more limited access of the third-person narration, Coetzee provides a conundrum reflected in that the readers experience third person as remote and cold, even (un)autobiographical. With that in mind, he questions why a 1st person confession offers privilege and 3rd person does not. *Autre*-biography also serves the purpose of drawing the readers' attention to the procedure taking place, almost as if a magician were to show his trickery during the duration of the trick. It appears to be self-exploration, but it might as well just be distancing between Coetzee the narrator, and the reader. Even if unintentional, the effect produced leaves the reader confused, wondering about the metafiction of it all and who the *autre* narrated might be in that particular case.

Table 1
Subordinate and superordinate characteristics of *autre*-biography

	Subordinate (grammar and style)	Superordinate (what is achieved)
Characteristics of *Autre*-biography	● Writing in the 3rd person versus 1st person singular ("he" versus "I");	● A sense of unrealistic distance from the self; ● A sense of alienation and estrangement from the past self; ● A divide between the narrative self and the experiencing self; ● A sense of being objective;
	● Unclear and limited focalization;	
	● Change of facts;	● Exerting authority over the text;
	● Metafiction;	● Creating distrust in the self and others (the text by extension); ● Anxious authorship;
	● Language vs. experience.	● What is important is how we remember it, not facts (history as a story of oneself).

Aside from this main characteristic of *autre*-biography as a subgenre of autobiography and more closely of personal writing in Coetzee, numerous other elements have to be taken into consideration to determine why his self-narrative is so distinct as to deserve a category of its own. Essentially, his debilitating metafiction, self-reflexivity, treatment of memory, anxious authorship, ideas on truth, and fiction in writing of the self all paint a picture or *autre*-biography. However, not

all of these elements are equally important, thus I suggest a division referring to whether they represent a characteristic on the level of the text or supersede the text.

Characteristics of *autre*-biography could be divided into subordinate and superordinate. The subordinate characteristics include grammatical and stylistic choices on the part of the author, whereas superordinate characteristics demonstrate the very purpose of such choices and their use in making a point in *autre*-biography. In the subordinate characteristics of this sub-genre of autobiography we include writing in the third person singular ("he") about one's self, unclear and limited focalization (Marković 177), rhetorical trickery, and change of facts (fictionalization of facts) to suit the story and the evolving narrative purpose.

The superordinate characteristics of the genre include metafiction as a device for self-reflexivity and alienation from the self, power struggle with the reader and the self in creation versus in representation, exerting authority over the text, and language versus experience. So the argument goes that the subordinate techniques enable superordinate characteristics of the sub-genre to appear and be represented in their fullness. Essentially, the existence of the subordinate characteristics provides a reading of authorial intentions in the text, even superseding the text itself.

As previously said, *autre*-biography is narrated from a third person, historical self, but avoids retrospective "feeling" by putting the narrative in the present tense. In the name of "autre," the first clue is given as to what kind of autobiography it constitutes – the biography of the "other," of another part of one's self, a past self, or the self in retrospect. The *perspective* in modern personal writing shifts from the self who narrates to the other "I" who has experienced something. To Coetzee, the narrative "I" is never the same as "the experiencing he." The tense in which narration of the "he" takes place is present (imperfect). This present narrative of the past simulates immediacy for the reader. The evocation of memories is presented as re-living events, rather than remembering distant points in one's life. Seemingly more objective about his past, Coetzee provides us with personal writing unrealistically distanced from the self, which in turn, leaves the readers with a sense of estrangement and otherness from the self.

The concept of *otherness* provides a double effect of "simultaneity of intimacy and distancing" (Klopper 24), otherwise mentioned as the "alienating effect" in Sue Kossew ("Scenes from Provincial Life (1997-2009)" 11). The author uses the present imperfect as a device to re-live the moment as well as to castigate the young self who "did not know any better." The emotional detachment of discussing another seems pivotal for the comprehension of the self. Rather than asking for forgiveness, the castigating self-loathing comments evoke sympathy in the reader for the author's younger self. Hermione Lee calls this "the ultimate alienated and alienating autobiography" used as a "self-parody," not a "self-exploration" ("Uneasy Guest" 15), because in the end it can alienate the sense of self in the text.

In the words of Angela Müller, *autre*-biography enunciates this "estrangement" we encounter "between the writing and the narrated self that is implied in the process of autobiographical writing" (256). What this technique achieves, in her view, can be classified as bridging the gap between the narrative self and experiencing self, especially when told in the present simple instead of the narrative past simple tense (256). Müller further stipules how the estrangement manifests – "it challenges the idea of an unequivocal relation between author and autobiographical self" (256). This relationship in Coetzee is "blurred" because of the "employment" of "self-parodying" taking place and a "profound dissociation from the former self" (256). Still, she believes that "the historical self and the self of writing" demonstrate a strong "distance and intimacy" on purpose, be it ambiguously shown. All the selves in question work together on creating this ambiguous feeling for the reader, or in her words they show "concomitance of distance and intimacy" (256-257). The technique prevents the reader from feeling compassion or merge with the author's self.

Asked about defining *autre*-biography and why he wrote in such blurred ways, Coetzee explained that it is a "legitimate demand of readers they be told what genre territory they are being asked to enter" ("All Autobiography Is *Autre*-Biography" 214). However, oftentimes the definition of a genre was "crude," and in his view not "refined" enough (214). With this in mind, Coetzee's concept of *autre*-biography should also be viewed as a method for invoking truthfulness. So what "if

the writer wants to trouble the boundaries of the genre," he asks defiantly ("All Autobiography Is *Autre*-Biography" 214). As long as "the reader will be told no outright, deliberate lies" he argues the pact between readers and writers is not broken (214). If the reader may feel "disquiet" (214), but that is of no consequence in *autre*-biography, it is an even desirable outcome so as to loosen crude definitions (of truth).

The way to achieve this search for personal truth begins with the previously mentioned alienation, as it enables the self-as-other to be more truthfully represented. The historical distance helps the narrator remember him/herself with objectivity in retrospect. Because to Coetzee "all autobiography is storytelling, all writing is autobiography" (*Doubling the Point* 391) the narrator requires distance and closure to determine what is important for the story of the self, which events helped create his/her self. In order to avoid self-praise and too much storytelling about oneself, both of which belong to canonical autobiography – *autre*-biography demonstrates almost debilitating self-reflexivity and metafiction about one's actions and thinking processes. Metafiction, in turn, creates distrust in everything and questioning of the canon, the author, and the truth, which is a recipe for *anxious authorshi*p.

Besides negotiating autobiography and fiction, Coetzee further bends the genre by mingling facts and fictional elements from his personal life to different extents in *Boyhood* (1997), *Youth* (2002), and *Summertime* (2009). Even when he does not employ gimmicks or blatant lies, he does fictionalize or adapt facts to better suit the storyline. And finally, *empty spaces* of unsaid, unwritten events constitute his prose, although autobiographical writing in a narrow definition "should" include "all" relevant life-changing facts. However, he is well aware that the author can always argue irrelevance or feign innocence regarding why he had not included something. Critics, on the other hand, could argue assumed control over the text in order to hide what the authorial persona deems too personal for historical knowledge. And they could all be right.

A*utre*-biography also deals with power in postmodern fashion – by questioning the authority of narrators versus readers in unfinished texts and by questioning language. Enquiring into the limitations of text and any final readings, Coetzee releases power to the readers – the power to interpret the story. This has two possible effects – *detective-like reading* and *anxious authorship*.

If the author constantly engages in asking him/herself what s/he is doing while in the process of doing it, the reader takes over the power to interpret because the text becomes too loose and someone needs to step in and provide a reading. As opposed to asserting authority over the text and guiding the reader, Coetzee self-reflectively asks the right questions and leaves the reader without answers, forcing them center stage and part of the reading process in a detective-like quest. Thus, self-reflexivity and metafiction provide power to the masses of readers instead of one author as in previous self-narratives (autobiography or journal writing, for instance). However, like everything else in postmodernism, this is also inverted, as the author ultimately assigns power to the reader, which proves where authority lies, because the one who gives away something has the luxury of giving, meaning the author has the ultimate say.

Another way to question the canonical power of autobiography is by discussing language as a means of transferring a message. Coetzee's otherness transpires in his language, which he connects to the fact that language always belongs to the Other – yourself as other and your ancestors who coined the phrases you are using:

> As Derrida remarks, how can one ever conceive of a language as one's own? English may not after all be the property of the English of England, but it is certainly not my property. Language is always the language of the other. Wandering into language is always a trespass. And how much worse if you are good enough at English to hear in every phrase that falls from your pen echoes of earlier usages, reminders of who owned the phrase before you! (*Here and Now* 67)

Owning a language, despite the power to turn a phrase, proves impossible. There is always someone who had done it better, or with more fervor, or simply who represents an ancestor. But, what

authors can do in *autre*-biography is exert power over the language of one's story, in line with facts that took place, but with distorted memories and in lieu of *an interpretation* of the event rather than the experience or reality of the event. Coetzee relies on his inner world, distorted in time though it might be, in order to represent subjective reality "he" recalls, rather than objective reality that really happened, that the "I" experienced. The power of *autre*-biography lies in the interpretation using language, the language of Other, of the "experiencing self," to create an inner world. Not because Coetzee "deliberately" sets "about altering the reality," but because he "has no interest in it the kind of realism that takes pride in copying the 'real' world," as he explains to Tony Morphet ("An Interview with J. M. Coetzee" 62).

Anxious authorship comes about due to these varied devices. The author appears unsure of his power over the language, he is constantly self-conscious to no apparent avail. He asks rhetorical questions of himself and his power to tell his story, which, as previously explained needs to represent his own interpretation of the events, not the events themselves. Unsure about events, unsure about his reactions at the time, the narrator is ironical and unforgiving to his former self, all the while being metafictional for meta-narrative's sake as no forgiveness is asked of the reader. Thus, *autre*-biography represents a "subversive literary form" undermining "canonical conceptions of autobiography and of the (autobiographical) self," says Müller (256). I would argue that it proves subversive on every possible level and that that provides a shift in power over the text. Whereas it raises questions of authority, self-narration, truth, and fiction, it also plays with the cannon on all levels so as to assert itself. And what is being asserted in the end? An anxious author, unwilling to take possession of his finite story and any responsibility for his truth. The anxious author abandons his voice and ultimately leaves the interpretation to the reader every single time.

Coetzee describes the process of writing in general as inhabiting a voice – writing "involves finding one's way into the voice that speaks from the page, the voice of the Other, and inhabiting that voice, so that you speak to yourself (your self) from outside yourself. The process is thus a dialogue of sorts, though an interior one" (*The Good Story* 179). Sue Kossew explains this as an "inner dialogue" in which "countervoices are *within* the self" ("Inner Worlds" 427, emphasis hers). While "abandoning the support that comes with a certain institutional voice, the voice of the historian or sociologist or whatever" proves illustrative for fictional discourse (Coetzee, "Voice and Trajectory" 101), the anxious author appears lost and out of words, but that is also incredibly courageous. Abandoning finite worlds with fixed and ultimate truths and allowing readers to judge you and judge your life's story seems to be the way of *autre*-biography. Also, it "entails no longer being an expert, no longer being master of your discourse" (101), not the master of your story but the servant of your history and at the mercy of the powerful Reader, the Other – *Autre*.

II

Coetzee and His Authorship

II PERSONAL WRITING AND AUTHORSHIP

2.1 The *Wake*[14] of the Author – Who *Now* Authors the Story of *I*, Myself, and All That Is Mine?

> Announcements of the death of the author and of authorship made by Roland Barthes and Michael Foucault a quarter of a century ago came down to the claim that the authority of the author has never amounted to anything more than a bagful of rhetorical tricks. Barthes and Foucault took their cue from Diderot and Sterne, who long ago made a game of exposing the impostures of authorship. […] Authority cannot be taught, cannot be learned. The paradox is a true one.
>
> (Señor C., authorial alter-ego for Coetzee, *Diary of a Bad Year* 151)

Authorship in Coetzee could best be summed up as subversive and experimental work; it is an attempt to apply all theoretical constructs of post-structuralism and postmodernism. Coetzee often creates a palimpsest of voices and points of view in an attempt, and the style of Bakhtin's dialogism, to avoid unilateral narration. In an essay on Dostoyevsky, Coetzee defines this idea in reference to the dialogical novel – "there is no dominating, central authorial consciousness, and therefore no claim to truth or authority, only competing voices and discourses" (*Stranger Shores* 123). Thus, avoidance of truth and authority, as well as purposeful guidance of the reader in the direction of negated authority is something familiar to Coetzee, and arguably that which makes almost all of his writing in this area highly valuable.

A double narrative is used in order to avoid authority and escape authorial responsibilities. His characters often write or play with the idea of writing, thus creating a double narrative situation (*Dusklands* (1974), *Foe (1986), Age of Iron* (1990), *The Master of Petersburg (1994), Elizabeth Costello* (2003), *Slow Man (2005), Diary of a Bad Year* (2007)). On the one hand, author-characters embody some of Coetzee's authorial ideas and voice them, thus keeping Coetzee's authority; on the other, Coetzee removes responsibility for his opinions from himself and, in turn, inscribes the character with those opinions. This neutralizes the possibility of interpreting his views on authorship beyond a shadow of a doubt from that of his characters' supposed views.

Coetzee represents an unwilling author who, in a post-structuralist twist, does not negate powers vested in him as an author, but he tries to diminish them by allowing characters who had never had a voice a postcolonial and feminist revival (*Foe*) by lending them his authority. He experiments with metafictional techniques of representing an author, layering worlds, and playing with texts inside and outside fiction by rewriting old masters (*Foe*, *The Master*). If the period of his novel-writing could be called anything but apprenticeship of authorial roles, then his trilogy and select work on authorial alter egos may best be summed up as mastering authority and (un)masking the authorial self in *Scenes from Provincial Life*. Overall, authorship in Coetzee is the culmination of the theory of authorship politics – applied.

The *Author* is defined as a creator, and in a much narrower definition that seems to have gained traction, it is "someone who writes books" (Donovan et al. 1).[15] However, historical concepts such as rhetor turned author, all the way to scriptor and shadow authors are not included in this differentiation between flesh-and-blood authors outside the realm of texts and the public persona of authors and authorial characters in their personal writing, who may or may not bear a resemblance to their real-life counterparts. The modern literary theory tries to recuperate the debate and extend it to personal writing, especially with the view of separating author, author/character (pretending to be the

[14] See Sayers, Philip C. G. for more on authorship after the death of the author. The very title "Wake of the Author" appears similarly in his unpublished thesis *Authorship's Wake: Writing After the Death of the Author*. Although the title here was written in 2017, prior to any knowledge of this thesis, due to similarities of the topic at hand and because we did read the thesis after discovering the title, it should be mentioned and credited.

[15] See Donovan at el. (2008) for detailed description of terminology problems related to definitions of author, authorship, authority and agency and their epistemological counterparts in Greek and Roman languages.

author in the realm of the text), and the narrator of events (who could be someone else, another character or the actual writer).

Authority, on the other hand, can be seen as a quality of being an author and sketching the world. Authority in personal writing is used to trace back to first-hand knowledge about events and provision of a unique viewpoint, providing more authority to authors writing about themselves than anyone else. Nowadays, it is questioned because of psychological mechanisms that impede knowledge of the self. The concept of authority as divine and coming from God (gods) abounds in Coetzee's characters, so in *Foe* we encounter Susan the-want-to-be-author exalt: "Here the writer can of himself effect nothing: he must wait on the grace of illumination" and "it is not without justice that this art is called divining" (*Foe* 89). However, most of Coetzee's era and work is dedicated to the "death of the author"[16] and death of authority by extension, be it as negation or agreement.

Coetzee plays a vital role in canonizing the resurrection of the author in personal writing. This process of resurrecting the author can be traced back to his/her sudden and violent "death" or attempt at the complete disregard for the author in structuralism. In "The death of the author," Barthes is attempting to deconstruct the myth of symbiosis between the protagonist, author, and author-the-private-person's various voices. They used to be equaled and they sang in unison to the reader, at least in literary theory, until Barthes raised the question of who was speaking. "Is it Balzac the individual, furnished by his personal experience with a philosophy of Woman? Is it Balzac the author professing 'literary' ideas on femininity? Is it universal wisdom? Romantic psychology?" (142). Despite subtle differences in Barthes and Foucault's positions on the author, they agree on placing their focus on the text at an almost complete obliteration of the author. It is their common position that modern times and the rise of individualism (18th and 19th centuries) have brought about a historical study of the author in more depth than the study of their work. That impedes interpretation – the author (or authorial intention) places limitations on interpretation, thus, this author is "repressive" (Irwin xiii)[17] because s/he inadvertently pushes his/her opinion on the reader and possesses enough authority to enforce their opinions over those of the reader.

Foucault's main legacy for personal narrative lies within the construct of an author clearly distinguished from that of the actual historical writer. Foucault also introduces an "author-function"[18] to explain that the name of the author does not exactly correspond to the historical author. It is a function performed for a specific purpose of the text, the same as when someone else adopts the persona of a policeman or a doctor once wearing a uniform. In Coetzee, we may equate this role to his authorial egos, performing as authors within the text in order to explain some of Coetzee's authorial agendas. Additionally, it is the difference between a public and a private persona of the author in authorship, in life versus in printed texts.

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[16] See Barthes (1977), Burke (1998) and Foucault (1977). Namely, reactions to Russian Formalism and Check and French structuralism finally reached a theoretical peak in postsructuralism of Barthes, Foucault and Derrida in 1960s. Literary theory from the Formalists' onwards has slowly been reducing the role of the author, only to culminate with the death of the author, or his/her complete denial in postsructuralism. Within Russian Formalism, we could claim that the annihilation of the author did not represent a strategy or a side effect, it was actually a response to biographical positivism and an attempt to focus on the words written (New Criticism). It was a scientific agenda to root out subjectivism.

[17] See Irwin, ed. (2002) for various articles on the death and resurrection of the Author. Foucault exclaims – "Where a work had the duty of creating immortality, it now attains the right to kill, to become the murderer of its author" (116–117). The methodology how the author manifests in the text, Foucault finds in the obliteration of all true personality of the author, which he phrases as "total effacement of the individual characteristics of the writer" (117). As Westphal explains it in "Kierkegaard and the Anxiety of Authorship," this authorial anxiety, or unwillingness to play God, comes to the fore due to fear of being between "the reader and the text," or "failing to withdraw" (Irwin 38).

[18] See Spicer, p 388. Apparently, the figure of the author may pervade any text in question, it may be so imposing as in the case of Balzac, for example, whose side commentary to characters often made up a more entertaining reading than that of the characters themselves. On the other hand, this would open up the debate whether that was Balzac in the flesh, or whether that was a role he was playing, the role of the author for the purposes of a certain text, and he was merely Balzac the ventriloquist doing the task at hand. The author figure's relevance in autobiographical writing is a "a ghostly presence animating and providing the life for the text" (Spicer 388), nevertheless escaping the parameters predetermined by the text and entering the realm of real life of the real author in order to assert the truth in autobiography.

Interestingly enough, the two critics attempting to obliterate the author as a person outside the text only stronghold his/her position. Barthes quotes Balzac in his article and speech, but if it is irrelevant who the authors are, then why does he name the quote as belonging to Balzac? Similarly, Foucault creates the construct author-function, thus proving that a relationship with an author is necessary, regardless of the fact that it could be a flesh-and-blood person or a construct. Foucault paradoxically reinforces the position of the author and its necessity and bridges the gap towards a more modern understanding of authors and authority in Coetzee. So, what is the author and authority like in Coetzee's writing?

To answer that question, I propose organizing Coetzee's authorial experiments into two categories: non-personal (novels and "fake" confessions) and personal authorship plots (critical essays and "real" confessions in *autre*-biography). The first category is relevant because it demonstrates how J. M. Coetzee had cumulatively arrived at personal writing and author as a character, and the second one draws similarities between fake and real confessions in modern personal writing genres.

Within non-personal writing solutions for authorship, I will mention characters – Coetzee's alter egos (who can also be confessants – *Diary of a Bad Year)*, Coetzee's novels overall because they host these characters in a grand scheme of authorship, and especially *Foe* as a study of authorship. Aside from *Foe* and the *Master of Petersburg* as rewritten evaluations of classical novels, the novels *Dusklands*, *Age of Iron*, *Elizabeth Costello*, *Slow Man,* and *Diary of a Bad Year* will be discussed along the lines of name play, alias, and authorial egos of the author Coetzee. Additionally, Coetzee's personal writing as non-fictional will give us insight into his work as a critic and his positions on authorship and authority provided in critical studies. Especially his three collections of essays (*Stranger Shores*, *Inner Workings* and *Late Essays* (1986-2017)), the Nobel lecture "He and His Man" (2003), and *Doubling the Point* (1992). Finally, the trilogy *Scenes from Provincial Life* will be discussed, as part of my broader study into his solutions to the historical author as character (and narrator?) conundrum, forming a significant part of this thesis.

2.2 Coetzee's Authorship Politics – An Overview

Coetzee believes in the author and authority's existence, and above all, he claims through Señor C. that it cannot have all been just "a bag of rhetorical tricks" (*Diary of a Bad Year* 151) that there is a true innate necessity for an author (or author-function). The wake of the author provides the grand return of the author, especially in personal narratives – subjective literature winning over the focus-on-the-text-only debate. That resurrection comes as a birth of a new, self-conscious but authoritative author – "thanks to the twentieth-century debate […] the author was born" (Campagno 37). I will go even further in claiming that thanks to personal writing, the author was not only resurrected but given a position equal to both readers and characters in postmodernism.

This was achieved through the so-called anxious or self-conscious authorship (Kossew 1996). The author calls for trust as s/he wonders about the process of writing. The wondering highlights self-doubt present in the reader as well. This procedure glues the two together and provides rapport, a comradery of sorts. In Bakhtin, a "polemically colored autobiography and confession" is an "active type of discourse," in which one author engages practically in "conversation" with another one, dead or alive, or more precisely with their texts (*Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* 199). To Carol Clarkson, it is this style that makes all the difference in authorship, not necessarily the words themselves ("Inner Worlds" 422). This technique enables the historical author to avoid "moral agency" – "accountability for, and commitment to, the ideas expressed" (425) because everything said is attributed to the character of the narrator, and the author may renounce authority completely in this way.

Another way he achieves this lack of responsibility is by attributing someone else's authority to himself. Rewriting the masters (Daniel Defoe and Dostoyevsky) allows for Coetzee to judge and

place himself above the masters and their respective texts and backward opinions. Whereas Defoe and Dostoyevsky write from a position of their times, Coetzee retrospectively uses their famous names and texts for authority but chastises them for their masculinity, for example. In this way, he places himself, as an author – in a position of power. In rewriting the masters, Coetzee engages in conversations with their times and values only to rewrite them. Ultimately the author supersedes the original text and creates something new. In his essay on Beckett, Coetzee adds that writers make "attempts to get closer to a secret," (*Doubling the Point* 25). Even he has done the same, he reared the original author for "a secret of Beckett's that I wanted to make my own. And discard, eventually, as it is with influences" (25). After learning where the masters' authority comes from and how they did the deed so well, Coetzee believes creation begins, and influences should be minimized for something new to be created.

Just like Coetzee is involved in conversations with masters and their texts, Coetzee's readers engage with those same authors in the reevaluation of values and choices of both eras through the narrator's self-conscious commentary. Since only the classics get rewritten, the reader is familiar with both texts. A conversation is struck in the minds of readers because, while they maintain knowledge of the original text, Coetzee's rewriting facilitates another point of view. In this way, "the most pressing political points hinge on the differences between the original author and Coetzee's revision" (Janes 112). However, the readers are confused by the conflagration of opinions, not knowing whether they belong to the old masters, Coetzee, or the authorial characters. Attwell explains that these embedded narratives prevent the readers from taking anything "at face value" as they raise "questions of authority" ("Mastering Authority" 214). The authority in question refers to "not only the authority of the reflections themselves but the authority of the voice and the voice in the text" (214), which inevitably creates the right postmodern reader who questions everything.

The voice of Coetzee (the author) in the text is ironic and to the point – "Mired in the medium, Coetzee is always serious" (Janes 105) that it performs a function. What this technique provides is the authorship that "allows no escape through a mask (persona) that the reader can write off or dismiss" (105). The mode of his fiction – "distrustful, even hostile to self-deceiving, self-assured language and to rational calculation, the narrators speak most powerfully from strange sources – from dreams, wounded bodies and defenseless longings" (Attwell, "Mastering Authority" 219). "Authority comes, then, not from crafting a position, still less from persuading an audience or a readership of the rightness of one's views," but from a *non-position* (219, emphasis his).[19] Coetzee defines this as not only neutral but also "off the stage of rivalry" ("Erasmus' *Praise of Folly:* Rivalry and Madness" 1). Essentially, an author provides multiple stanzas, not taking any, which enhances his/her neutral authority of "realism" (Coetzee, *Doubling the Point* 27).

"Doubling the point" shows similarities to this stance of middle voice and non-position. Going again and again over previous views and opinions in criticism and his own authorship provides a type of circular, never-ending questioning of the self's authority as an author and as a person. Attwell explains that the concept "doubling the point" more broadly comes to signify "the reflexive self-consciousness which characterizes all Coetzee's work" (3). The self-consciousness that questions everything symbolizes J. M. C.'s authorship studies. "I do see the capacity to push self-analysis through to its limits – analysis not of one's self but of the self, the soul as more important in secular thinkers" (244). Self-conscious authors yield writing that doubles on itself and its techniques constantly. To Coetzee, that symbolizes merely realism of multiple self-positions:

> Illusionism is, of course, a word I use for what is usually called realism. The most accomplished illusionism yields the most convincing realist effects. Anti-illusionism—displaying the tricks you are using instead of hiding them—is a common ploy of postmodernism. But in the end there is only so much mileage to be got out of the ploy. Anti-

[19] See Coetzee's essay on Desiderius Erasmus's figure of *Folly* (1992) for more information on non-position.

> illusionism is, I suspect, only a marking of time, a phase of recuperation, in the history of the novel. The question is, what next? (*Doubling the Point* 27)

Thus, authorship *is* a bag of rhetorical tricks, but to Coetzee, it is *not only* a bag of tricks. In Attwell's words, the "reflexivity here is a mode of self-consciousness" that is "directed at understanding the conditions—linguistic, formal, historical, and political—governing the writing of fiction (4). "Stories tell themselves, they don't get told," says Coetzee (as Señor C., *Diary of a Bad Year* 55). Authority cannot be forced; it gets born out of an accumulation of non-positioning. So, "Never try to impose yourself. Wait for the story to speak for itself. Wait and hope it isn't born deaf and dumb and blind" (55). The setting, the voice, and accumulation of authority provide the author collected authority to non-invasively push his/her opinions on the reader and that establishes the resurrection of the author.

2.3 Coetzee's Authorship in Novels – Rewriting the Masters

> What the great authors are masters of is authority. What is the source of authority, or of what the formalists called the authority-effect? If authority could be achieved simply by tricks of rhetoric, then Plato was surely justified in expelling poets from his ideal republic. But what if authority can be attained only by opening the poet-self to some higher force, by ceasing to be oneself and beginning to speak vatically?
>
> (Señor C. as Coetzee's alter-ego, *Diary of a Bad Year* 151)

Discussing authorship and authority of Coetzee's alter-egos in his novels (usually writers) or his fictional work on authority, we encounter "conversations" between authors, between authors and narrators, and between texts. In the examples of *Dusklands*, *Foe, Age of Iron*, *The Master of Petersburg, Elizabeth Costello*, *Slow Man,* and *Diary of a Bad Year* – Coetzee's authorship procedures and intertextual conversations are best visible. *Foe* begins our conversation as the most relevant text in this area, and browsing through others will provide a comparative overview. The last two texts will be evaluated in a chapter of their own, in which I will provide more details into Coetzee's technique of juxtaposing two metafictional characters – that of Elizabeth Costello – an authorial alter ego and Raymond from *Slow Man* – her supposed character.

With regards to the practice of writing authorial alter egos, it is essential to note that characters in the 21st century not only represent extensions of imagination but also authors' way of *inhabiting others* in the dichotomy of *us* versus *not us*. Authors or creators extend their selves and stretch them out into alter egos and worlds of alterity or "otherness"[20] that could signify topics of interest, voices or several characters. There is a notion of sympathetic imagination in Coetzee's authorial experiments, which he challenges. The sympathetic imagination is understood as "inhabiting another in order to understand or interpret" (Caldwell 1), or inhabiting another's body and point of view in order to purposefully and consistently subvert them.

In fact, Coetzee achieve this in metaphysical spaces. Coetzee creates author/characters who "interact with other characters to reveal that some characters resist being written" (2). Most painfully for the reader, Coetzee provides no alternatives when sympathetic imagination proves limited, for example when he embodies the elderly Costello as a white man in a white female feminist whose experiences he could not possibly comprehend fully. The very act of inhabiting the other, in this instance the character, places authorship in a palpable act versus a perceptive one (Abramson 22). This transcends authorship from imagination into the "real" spaces of body, environment, and time depictions, rather than just the imaginary world of the author's inner self (22). It is illustrative of the

[20] See Abramson (2014) for more on this idea, especially in *Elizabeth Costello*.

author's immense power to create worlds, not just depict them, despite the varying levels of success, such authorship politics inevitably create a buzz in literary criticism.

The very idea of authorship as *inhabiting*, possessing, and taking over the world of the character versus *imagining* and creating provides multiple avenues of interpretation. Such worlds prove "writing is no longer a matter of finding the words to represent a given, pre-existing world. On the contrary, writing brings a world into being" (Coetzee, *Late Essays* 110). It is subversive and violent in the act of taking and exhibiting power by demonstrating a willful extension of one's self over the "other" who gets created. It also resurrects the author in utterly violent ways. Coetzee's s "wake of the author" yields authors more power than ever – the power to reinvent themselves in *autre*-biography without the control group providing a "reality check." Namely, the author knows what happened, the text is written following the memory that s/he wants to leave behind, and then referentiality outside the text only covers facts. Ultimately feelings and memories regain absolute power in self-narratives. As long as authors respect facts of the life lived, their inner lives remain potentially truth-free. It is a triumph of subjectivity.

It is worth mentioning that this subjectivity in Coetzee's texts seems too self-conscious for some readers. The texts can be irritable, impossible to "lose ourselves" in; we are "penetrated, irritated, turned against both our inner and outer selves (Janes 105). His language and authorial trickery are not for everyone – "Coetzee's texts turn on themselves, subtract their affirmations, deny their hopes, betray their aspirations, contradict their assertions, even as they affirm, hope aspire and assert" (105). Janes also believes that Coetzee's choice of characters – outcasts, such as Mrs. Curren, Michael K., and Susan Barton, actually epitomizes *a moral authority* of someone who believes in denying himself any authority in the first place (111). Namely, those who "lack political authority," aspire at times and arguably display more dignity to Coetzee – to merely persevere in whatever it is that they were doing, rather than "overthrow an opponent" (111-112). Their age and lack of relevance to his stand for authority of outcasts and "otherness" in itself.

How does he achieve this idea in practice? First of all, through self-reflection and metafiction. Let us begin with *Foe* as a novel that proves invaluable for rewriting the masters, authorial egos, and anxious authorship representation. Coetzee, as the author of *Foe,* plays with the name of the novel – Daniel Defoe as the author of *Robinson Crusoe* appears as Foe. Spivak asks "Whose foe is Mr Foe?" ("Theory in the Margin" 7). Foe as an author represents patriarchy and, by extension is the enemy of Susan Barton, the female protagonist who wants to become an author but is not allowed because of lack of authority. Or he is reflected as the direct Foe of Mr. Coetzee who would like the ultimate authority for himself - the way to achieve that is by taking it away from Defoe first through questioning Defoe's truth of representation, and secondly by giving him a puppet-like feel in placing him in the narrative as a character.

Coetzee includes the world outside of the text by stripping Defoe of his name even, as his parents' names were James and Ann Foe (7), perhaps Coetzee, by extension, questions all Defoe's writing and integrity for truth. If he is lying about his name, is he not lying about everything in Robinson Crusoe? Thus, we should trust Coetzee over Defoe, that is the trickery and implication. Despite being the author of her story, Susan Barton says: "I hesitated awhile, wondering what it augured for the writing of my story that I should grow so intimate with its author" (*Foe* 137), this is an ironic play on words and providing authority to Defoe.

If Coetzee represents the ultimate authority of the real author in *Foe*, having upended and emasculated the original author by changing the facts of his world (Defoe), with whom does he share power with? He attempts to pass it on to Susan Barton, despite knowing that authors should "*Learn to speak without authority*, says Kierkegaard" (*Doubling the Point* 151, emphasis his). Speaking without authority, speaking as you can under the conditions you have, but not rendering one's power to anyone else seems to be his prescription. Coetzee provides his protagonist with authority despite his belief that "Authority cannot be taught, cannot be learned" (151). It is the attempt, the intention that counts even if it proves futile.

Susan Barton represents the narrator of the story (except the last section), the storyteller who depicts Cruso (Coetzee's spelling), Foe, Friday, and herself as characters. Despite being given this

role by Coetzee, it is the very act of giving away power to a woman and her giving it to Friday, that determines levels of marginalization of both – power spreads from the white man, then the white woman to finally the black *other*. Just like Coetzee, Susan Barton is self-conscious, burdened with authority, and anxious to be an author (Susan says: "I would rather be the author of my own story than have lies told about me" (*Foe* 40)). Knowledgeable about her power, she attempts to spread it because the power to share one's story is a privilege – she tries to get Friday to write his own story, a female other asks a colonial subject for a point of view. Since Friday is negated speech – illiterate, powerless, and tongueless, she attempts to have him learn how to write or choose photos ("Consider these pictures, Friday," I said, "then tell me: which is the truth?" (68)). Essentially, Coetzee uses Susan to reveal how an author "could" share power with the character. By asking self-reflective questions, Susan weathers well in this *ethics of inhabiting*[21] and provides *the other* a chance for some authority of their own.

But Coetzee-the-historical-author is no idealist. In the end, Foe-the-author is said to have published his story as he pleased, becoming famous and leaving Susan's manuscript unpublished – "At one corner of the house, above head-height, a plaque is bolted to the wall. *Daniel Defoe, Author,* are the words, white on blue, and then more writing too small to read" (155). "A colleague unnerved me by suggesting that this book, like all transactions among men, left the woman anonymous" (Spivak, "Theory in the Margin" 19). Coetzee is aware of this authorial truth. He attempts to rewrite history and show "comradeship and complicity" (18) with a marginalized other but does not attempt to feign innocence as to how the marginalized other ends up in authorship – mostly *silenced.* Neither Friday nor Susan gets the story they had lived, but a man's fictionalization of their lives. Unable to tell her story alone because of a lack of authority as a woman, Susan is used as a representation of the failed authorship and power struggle lost in patriarchy. Coetzee emphasizes the idea that we as a society still have not been able to overcome – women and indigenous people need power and voice to be given to them by white men. No matter how much we have progressed, this still renders true in marginalized groups' lack of authority and general dislike and unpopularity as authors.

Spivak's reading of *Foe* presupposes the importance of displacement in space rather than time ("Theory in Margin" 7), and that may be so. The reading I propose suggests that the displacement of space (a white man on an island, a woman on a boat, Friday in England) does emphasize unusual situations as catalysts that offset the reader. Characters let go of their narration, in a move described as a lack of "know-how" and anxiety of authorship:

> She is facing anxiety as to why she has told "less" of her story and "more" of Cruso's. She is also worried that she cannot "truly" tell Cruso's story. Her anxiety is of authorship and faithful representation. She lacks the knowledge, expertise and tradition of "how, to begin with" writing and documenting one's personal experiences. She is full of indecision and lacks "agency" to commit her experience of island to writing. The repetition of "how" explains that she does not know the way to record her voice. (Zubair Baig 51)

On the level of the whole text, these are the relationships relevant for authorship politics and authority (or lack thereof). Coetzee rewrites Defoe, and he exercises power over an old classical text, subverting it and also making it more relevant in modern times, which represents a paradox. The only certainty is the exertion of creative power and judgment over someone else's authority and property postmortem. There Coetzee exercises power while he undermines his own authority. In his choice to subvert and rewrite famous authors, borrowing their authority only to ridicule it in recent light, Regina Janes notes that Coetzee's "exertion of power over others' helpless texts undermines the authority of the writer who exerts that power. He seems a parasite, rather than a poet, a maker" (112). By being

[21] See Emmanuel Levinas (1987) and Martha Martha Nussbaum (1982) for explanations into the concepts of alterity and inhabiting respectively.

the authorial parasite in the master' texts, Coetzee borrows authority but also loses it in the mind of the reader because he lacks originality.

There is a relationship between *our* idea of Coetzee-the-author of *Foe* and Susan Barton the potential author of her life story in *Foe*. She epitomizes some of his ideas on authorship and metafiction, but we do not know which ones. Susan also interacts with Daniel Defoe, whom she asks for help as she is unable to get published alone in a patriarchal society; and with Cruso, whom she considers a partner until she is displaced from the island. Cruso metafictionally represents Defoe's character Crusoe, Susan-the-character's lover and fellow character, Susan-the-author's subject whom she writes about, and in the end – Coetzee's rewritten character whom he gave a second life. As an anxious author as well, Susan interacts with Friday – they, as two "others," marginalized, try to tell their stories, Susan female but literate, and Friday the illiterate "body," thus unable still to tell his story.

Ultimately, despite her efforts to make him literate and provide Friday with tools to author his story, she fails, but Coetzee succeeds in demonstrating that – on the one hand, authorship cannot be willed into action, sometimes characters do not "speak" to authors no matter how hard they try, and – on the other, more needs to be done on redistributing power. Not only feminists can share power with other groups, but most of the time, it needs to be coerced from those who benefit from patriarchal systems the most – as "the only one" who could have written Friday more clearly, or given him space to tell his story in his own language and words – was Defoe, and he refused.

Similar to *Foe* and all this authorial confusion and intertextuality,[22] I encounter *The Master of Petersburg* as the only other rewritten text of the old masters – complex in authorship politics. Coetzee as an author rewrites Dostoyevsky as a character and narrator. He also recreates a few of Dostoyevsky's characters from his life and books (his son Pavel, landlady's daughter Matryona – Matryosha seduced by Stavrogin in *The Possessed*) (Kossew, "The Anxiety of Authorship" 85). Historical considerations render reading the mixed worlds of Dostoyevsky-the-historical person with Dostoyevsky-Coetzee's character difficult but also provide credibility. For example, the intertextuality of life and the character's imaginary life when Dostoyevsky-the-character says something that is common knowledge for the reader but from a personal perspective: "Anya, Anna Snitkina, was his secretary before she was his wife. He hired her to bring his manuscripts into order, then married her. A fairy-girl of a kind called in to spin the tangle of his writing into a single golden thread" (*The Master* 245). Despite having said that he enjoyed "making up characters from scratch," and that "It feels more like the real thing that way" (*Here and Now* 187), Coetzee uses intertextuality to confuse the reader about textual versus reality outside the text.

Coetzee's novels that deal with writing and authorship through an array of characters (other than Barton and Dostoyevsky) may have another division, depending on whether characters bear a resemblance to his name or not. The name of alter egos is relevant. Aliases may be used as an extension of the self or as trickery to confuse the reader and provide more similarities to the historical author or just allude to false similarities.

For example, *Dusklands* depict a character named J. M. Coetzee, a translator of Dr. S. J. Coetzee, an editor to the protagonist, and a Jacobus Coetzee – the name of the actual J. M. C.' s ancestor, both of Dutch descent.[23] *Dusklands* begins with the title – "THE NARRATIVE OF JACOBUS COETZEE, Edited with an Afterword, by S. J. Coetzee, Translated by J. M. Coetzee" (51). The trickery of cobwebbing the worlds works, as readers try to determine truth from fiction, we conclude Coetzee to be a character different from the real J. M. C. ("He is a hearty man, the kind that eats steak daily," and J. M. C. is a vegetarian and anything but hardy). Similarly, we are launched on an expedition researching facts about Jacobus Coetzee, but since he is deceased, this proves futile, and the trickery works. Another trick using aliases reflects the readers' natural tendency to gather clues and ascribe the characters' views to the real author at minimal evidence. Coetzee prays on this by providing protagonists names that phonetically sound similar or have the same consonants – in

[22] See Zubair Baig (2014) for a more detailed analysis of *Foe* and intertextuality.

[23] See Attwell (1991) for more on *Dusklands* and Coetzee's narrative web, including a potential source of the character S. J. in one N. A. Coetzee.

Age of Iron – Mrs. Curren; in *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man* – Costello, in *Diary of a Bad Year* – Señor C. Against the soundboard of Coetzee, they sound similar, which represents a purposeful fishing expedition for readers "forcing" them to take an active part in the text.

Coetzee is aware that politics of authorship in modern theory include a variety of postmodern issues, not necessarily connected only to the text but more so to innovative media and ownership rights. Aside from analyses into the intricacies of the textual authors, it seems necessary to delve into the theories of "copyright, intellectual ownership, changing historical conceptions of authorship" and other signature-related issues (Burke ix). These days, conglomerate publishing houses own rights to numerous texts, authored and signed, but at times in aliases, making any discovery of the personality behind them almost impossible.

In the technological cultural shift, people became less burdened by form and started participating in disjointed realities of interconnected hypertexts. In the interactivity of the texts, metafiction, and hypertexts, Burke believes that "the concept of the author" stems from the realm of books, meaning that after the book's collapse or metamorphosis, "will dissolve categories such as authorship, selfhood and subjectivity" (194). Online communication and obsolesces of printed books have gradually led us down a path of oral-like communication in writing and interest to take part in texts as clue gatherers.

With this technological interplay in mind, and in an era of public availability of information, authorship has gradually transformed with regards to aliases. Reconfiguration of these elements comes about due to "leveling out" (197) of complex interconnected processes and comments of one author towards another, of one text towards another – "primary authorship, secondary authorship, multiple authorship, compilation, editorship, and scholarly annotation" (197). For example, initially, an alias was supposed to hide the true identity of the writer – the physical embodiment of the public persona of the writer. However, these days, and in Coetzee's case, in particular, an author chooses a public persona he or she is willing to put forward, constructs it carefully, and protects it via the publishing houses, limited interviews, or complete control over interviews (like Pynchon). The writer then has the luxury of hiding or showing any aspect of their public or private persona. A game-changer in narratives, as a referential body outside the text is missing, the writer maintains dominance over his public image and agency, as well as the truth in the narrative of a life lived.

Because of aliases and public/ private personae dichotomy, Janes suggests that authority remains in the readers' hands, thrust upon them instead of being given as "Coetzee forces alternatives to open" (113). Coetzee creates choices that "multiply choices" and with that, "the authority of the author seems undermined, given over to the reader" (113). This process renders the effect of made-up freedom of choice, but actually, it is manipulation as "the author's authority extends even further into the reader than it otherwise would" (113). The manipulation of supposedly rendering the authority to someone else, but expecting them to return it to you with the most plausible version you have written and with credibility provided with self-deprecating comments, served as "realistic," and referred to "crafty realism" (113), because it provides the appearance of reality rather than reality itself.

Sue Kossew adds that this "anti-imperialistic concept of the novel, in which no single authoritative voice speaks" actually allows the author to orchestrates "a polyphony" of voices "often competing ones, which requires the reader to 'read out'" the meaning ("The Anxiety of Authorship" 77). Following that, "at stake in this complex inter/textuality is not just the writing process but also the reading process, not just the writer but also the reader, who stands in as confessor, thus sharing some of the responsibility" (86). Spivak emphasizes the ability the reader has of interpreting the text, as it is much more relevant than they have acquired this skill than what is being presented ("Ethics and Politics" 22). Jason Holt agrees it is essential to practice being an active reader in modern texts, because "we can interpret texts not only in ignorance but even in direct violation of the author's intentions" (71). This may be due to even subconscious reasons, thus Hold believes we must be "charitable" (71) towards the text, postulating opinions prior to knowing authorial intentions, and imagining how we would have interpreted it if we only had access to the text and no author, such as in cases of anonymous texts.

What's more, Barthes goes further to claim that at times it is incomprehensible who is speaking, as "writing is the destruction of every voice […], oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing" (142). Barthes seems to advance the point that just by being aware of the flesh-and-blood person behind a tale, or an entity, it still might be impossible to separate the voices and identities of narrators. This may especially hold true in autofiction, as the author may be unaware which identity is speaking – the past, present, hindsight benefited one or someone else, as they bear the same name. However, in most cases, we may argue identity separation of the author(s), narrator(s), and point(s) of view can be located within the text unless the authors are deliberately confusing the readers, which is the case is Coetzee's autre-biography when he gives his name or initials to various characters, but still avoids identity overlapping (*Diary of a Bad Year*, for example).

Nevertheless, Barthes makes a great point towards explaining why authorship and voice have a powerful "sway" (143) over the readers, and why critique seems obsessed with finding them. He argues that "the explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end […], the voice of a single person, 'the author' confiding in us" (143). Moreover, he further argues that the text is the most relevant instance of voice, and bearing that in mind, the definition of who is the I behind the written "I," should be defined as "the instance writing, just as the *I* is nothing other than an instance saying I" (145). Most importantly, if the text is unfinished or "open only to posteriori inspection" (Bruss 158), there is frustration at play, and all sides need this tension in order to perform outside the scope of the text. In the mind of the reader the event of literature takes place, thus the author initiates the game, but "the reader" is also "a construct, the ideal Other for whom the test is posed, against whose expectations and likely calculations all the ruses and hints have apparently been laid" (154). The reader as the ultimate "Other" inhabits the text and participates in the literature of the event in Coetzee.

2.4 Non-fictional Writing and Coetzee – Essays and Authorship

Throughout his career, J. M. Coetzee was forced to write extensively on his reading interests, simply because of requirements he had at universities. Despite this type of writing being mandatory, his criticism depicts extensive knowledge, subtle style of writing, and above all obvious, short sentences and sympathetic attitude towards fellow writers. In the "Introduction" to *Inner Workings,* Derek Attridge says as much, adding that we should read these essays "not as retrospective appreciation but as an engagement with contemporaries" (xii-xiii). Above all, it is emphasized that just like Coetzee's focus is on particular novels, rather than the authors' lives," that he too "expects his own fiction to be judged by the same exacting standards he applies here to others" (xii-xiii). A warning to steer clear from excessive, unfounded attribution.

The initial idea to fact-check his essays for opinions on authority, author, and writing personal narratives lies within a broader understanding of all facets of his personality as a writer, critic, and individual. Only after having taken a variety of his roles in writing into perspective may we draw conclusions based on intersection and repetition in views – Coetzee-the-author, Coetzee-the-critic, Coetzee's authorial alter egos, and Coetzee-the-character in personal narratives.

We take note of Coetzee's essay collection No 1: *Stranger Shores: Literary Essays 1986-1999*, in which he mentions *authority* in his analyses. These three books of essays represent Coetzee as he – "engages with his peers" in conversations (Attridge, "Introduction" *Inner Workings* ix). A search of the book provides Coetzee's notions on "public authority" (1),[24] "authority invisible to the

[24] On T. S. Elliot and his discussion of classics.

sufferer" (*Inner Workings* 183),[25] "supreme authority" (220),[26] "in the face of authority" (253),[27] and "unrivalled authority" (270)[28] in different essays. It is possible to deduce Coetzee perceives authority as available to someone from the public, important versus marginalized; also the concept comes with opposition by some who try to negate it ("in the face of"), and God may be said to have it (by extension the God of the writing world, or the novel's author) and the adjectives "unrivalled" and "supreme" even increase it to begin with, hence he is aware some people have more of it and some less (or none). All concepts are deductible from his work, but in finding them present in criticism, we could claim he is aware of their existence beyond doubt.

In the second collection of essays – *Inner Workings: Literary essays 2000-2005*, a swift search of authority renders no results. However, I point out the essay on Philip Roth as relevant to authorial ideas. On the process of authorial intent, Coetzee says that "the stories we set about writing sometimes begin to write themselves," they take on meaning sometimes not intended "after which their truth or falsehood is out of our hands and declarations of authorial intent carry no weight" (229). The authority or proprietorship of the author ends "once a book is launched into the world" (229) because the readers' interpretation is more important than the author's authority. "It becomes the property of its readers, who, given half a chance, will twist its meaning in accord with their own preconceptions and desires" (229). Elizabeth Bruss provides a similar idea that in modern literature, the reader's relevance may be imbued in the role allotted to the "player-reader" (153). The role of the contemporary reader has shifted from "the good traditional reader" being nothing more than passively "responsive" – to a "player-reader" of whom it is expected not to get lost in the text, but to analyze, browse and conclude outside of the scope of texts as well (153-154). The "readerly 'you' works quite as hard as the authorial 'I'" (157), as both create imaginary constructs, not necessarily equal.

In the third book of essay collections: *Late essays: 2006-2017*, J. M. C. provides intriguing views on authorial guidance, namely that it is still necessary. In an article on Goethe, he says that the original intent "to maintain an ironic distance between himself as author and Werther as character" had failed because most readers found it difficult to follow only "writings the dead man had left behind" (*Late Essays 52*). The argument being that "*Werther* lacks a guiding authorial voice" (52). It appears Coetzee never allowed himself this mistake, as in *Summertime*, aside from "the writings of a dead man," he also introduces interviewees and the character of a biographer, providing centrality and authorial concentric circles.

Finally, there is no text more poignantly pointing to authorial troubles than "He and His Man," Coetzee's Nobel Lecture presented on 7 December 2003. It must have been mesmerizing to hear Coetzee read out this lecture live since the puzzlement and complexity of the ideas must have been even more challenging to follow without the text in front of us. Be that as it may, it now represents a famous allegorical tale of the author and his creation, most likely that of Crusoe and Defoe (Cornwell 99). Although initially presumed to be about Crusoe and Friday, it now appears more likely that "He and His Man" refer to the symbolic dance of author and character, in any order – be that the character calls the author "his man" or that the author refers to his character as "his man." Coetzee) or the character) asks – "How are they to be figured, this man and he? As master and slave? As brother, twin brothers? As comrades in arms? Or as enemies, foes?" ("He and His Man"). It is highlights that the relationship between character and author is very intimate.

On a different occasion, Coetzee said: "The experience of writing a novel is, above all, lengthy. The novel becomes less a *thing* than a *place* where one goes every day for several hours a day for years on end" (*Doubling the Point* 205). So, in this "place" he as the author visits, authorship is more of a friendship, a tug of wars even, to write a character into existence. Thus, an author worries about the creation of this independent world he has construed – "what name shall he give this

[25] On Jewish interpretation of God and understanding of fate.

[26] Essay on Gordimer and Turgenev, the word "authority" here appears as a direct quote from Gordimer on black and white writing and a necessity to provide distinct language for each.

[27] See Coetzee's the entire essay "The Memories of Breyten Breytenbach" – "'Coloured' community, it was a community created by the common fate of being forced to behave, in the face of authority, as 'Coloured'" (253).

[28] On Helen Suzman and her career as a liberal MP in Africa.

nameless fellow with whom he shares his evenings, and sometimes his nights too" (Coetzee, "He and His Man"). Attwell sees his Nobel lecture "like the Costello stories in drawing public discourse into the procedures of fiction" ("Mastering Authority" 218). The lecture is seen as a recapitulation of Coetzee's work on narration, author vs./and character, and the act of surrender on the part of both:

> It reflects on the spaces of intimacy and distance between the self-of-writing and the writer's historical–biographical being. The former (the Crusoe figure of the story) is the persona that comes together in the act of giving oneself over to writing's unpredictable processes; the latter is the historical being (the Defoe figure), the author who, after a lifetime of writing, seems to owe his very existence to the success of his creature and counterpart. (218)

The author may never outlive the character, the struggle and comradery continue not merely in life but in the fame of the afterlife in which both live on. Coetzee fights authority despite believing in its existence. Unlike *Dusklands* and a strong authorial fatherly grip of Jacobus Coetzee, all other novels escape canonization and can be summed up as a struggle for power between characters and authors, between intertextual worlds and their creators and the inner worlds of the authors who try to rid of their moral responsibilities of creating worlds.

2.5 Personal Writing and Authorship in Coetzee

Having dealt with numerous author-characters in his own name and/or alias, Coetzee developed anxious authorship in his *autre*-biography to perfection. In *Scenes from Provincial Life,* we encounter a postmodern twist – the characters of John-the-boy, John-before-the-artist, and John-post-mortem all resemble one another and their historical counterpart – the famous J. M. C. And yet, as readers, we encounter the paradox of not being able to decipher the author's true self versus that of the narrator. Coetzee is well versed in theory enough to realize that as long as he tiptoes the line of well-known facts about himself (the historical facts), he may lie on any other topic, and the reader would be none the wiser. "*Authority* is the key term from the essay on confession," Attwell claims ("Mastering Authority" 219).

As long as the author seems credible enough, as long as facts match, the confessor reserves the right to remember wrongly or to be forgiven for transgressions based on psychological mechanisms at play in autobiographical memory. If the writer has "amassed sufficient authority to provide a persuasive mimesis" (219) of the truth, we as readers experience a "truthful" confession. Autobiographical research in the classical sense has paid much attention to the process of writing a "poetic piece" of oneself because space is non-existent between the narrator and the narratee, or "between subject and language" (Lang 10). These roles used to merge with numerous studies of identity and post facto reflections into the old "selves" in personal writing, some of which I will present in the sections discussing the identity of the author/narrator. However, in order to get to the modern definition, we must trace and differentiate between orator, author, narrator, scriptor, writer, author-figure, author-function, and others, so as to set a tone of research to be performed on J. M. C.'s personal narrative.

For our further purposes, it could be said that J. M. Coetzee is the writer of the body of work *Scenes from Provincial Life.* The author-figure is John in hindsight for *Boyhood* and *Summertime*, and an imaginary biographer for *Summertime*. By providing narrators to speak in the third person, Coetzee simultaneously provides analytical space for the writer (writing not of the I, but he) and sheds moral responsibility of the "I." The main characters being narrated into existence are as follows: John the boy (10 years old), John before he became an artist (post-university graduation), and John post mortem (age irrelevant).

In this way, Coetzee organizes for the identity of the author to be distinct from that of the author-figure and the writer if we apply Foucault's logic. The writer or the author is J. M. C the famous author who won the Nobel, and the author-figure reflects the Coetzee he carefully constructs in his interviews and books, which might be to a certain percentage, an imaginary personality. And the writer's character could be just one aspect of Coetzee as a wholesome personality. This brings us to the notion that an empirical author, otherwise called a historical author as "the flesh-and-blood person" who had written a text (Nelles 23), could remain beyond the reach of the reader because it is carefully constructed in personal narratives by himself (Coetzee).

Just like "the narrator" in Balzac, for example, intimately knows "the Vauquer boardinghouse" in which he had lived, whereas Balzac the author only imagines it (Walsh 499), knowing versus imagining in determining the author's function as opposed to the characters' can be useful. The experience lived differs from the one narrated in the temporal space, as well as the memory of the event itself. Discussing that the writer and the character potentially have the same self, unless much of the story has changed, explains that temporality is key in fiction versus personal narration. A work of fiction may begin wherever and end wherever, and autobiographies start from the end where the "character merges back into self as past merges into present" (Gordon 112). Autobiographies end in a significant moment before the present in order to reach culmination "to keep self and character, from merging altogether" (112). Despite attempting to decentralize, Coetzee-the-narrator and Coetzee-the-author symbiotically work on the desired representation, it is inevitable despite the removed "he":

> But he or she will also be pulled back, and in, by the sense that character and self cannot be separated from one another. And in seeking formal means of dealing with this tension, writers may contribute creatively to the art of autobiography, even though they cannot achieve the harmony of a work of fiction. Finally, it should be said that this tension is perceived not only by the writer but also by the alert reader, who faces the complex task of reading the same piece of work from two competitive sides. (117)

These two competitive sides participate in the rewriting of the self. The author's rewriting of himself by "fashioning his characters out of certain aspects of himself" takes place (Wisniewski 307). We could argue that identity representation in Coetzee's various author-characters was fashioned from Coetzee's beliefs but may never converge with his opinions one on one, but more on a collective basis. The repetitive notions and topics divulge the identity of the historical author, or at least collectively merge into categories of interest we could inscribe to him. Regardless of the fact whether the writer wishes for his or her presence to be known or not, it is unavoidable, be it in style or through "deliberate rather than naïve self-reflexivity" (Gordon 117), and for the purpose of making a point to the reader, usually about authorship.

This "intertextual phenomenon to be abstracted from a writer's whole corpus" helps decipher "between authorial and narratorial personality" in the text (Walsh 506). Since a personality, even that of authorial public persona – "is not monolithic, not timeless, not unitary, not even necessarily coherent" provides the perspective that authors adopt a variety of authorial personalities in each work, often equated to characters (506). Authorial personality in personal narratives represents, then, a sum of all of their appearances, not a single character. "The narrator is always either a character who narrates or the author," however, the author may be the authorial personality – a sum of the author's appearances and opinions throughout his/her oeuvre (505). Characters in any novel represent to some degree "successful projection, or transformation" of the author's "selfhood" (Gordon 105). Another feature at the disposal of any author is the ability to distribute "writerly identity" among several characters (105), which I will argue is precisely a case in point with Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man.*

What then conspires if the writerly identity is openly stated to be present, as well as expected in a genre such as an autobiography? Is that more liberating for the author's self or more constricting?

Gordon goes on to say that, apparently, distancing is the key, since "writer and subject, self and character, are perilously close," then depending on the final product or how successful was the distancing at not serving merely the author's ego or other self-serving mechanisms, we measure an autobiographical self well or poorly portrayed (105). The appeal of personal narratives includes for "a trained reader" the feeling of an analyst and detective – the reader "positively welcomes a broken report because it permits him or her to expose a hidden motive" (106). Not unlike other detective novels, autofiction enables the reader to assemble the jigsaw puzzle and treat it like a broken narrative for him/her self to inhabit the cracks and finish the story at will.

Coetzee provides an array of techniques for his anxious author. The potential methods to earn the reader's trust in *autre*-biography represent, but are not limited to – presenting himself as an impersonal historian, discussing himself through other historians and biographers, overtly dramatizing personal history or its meaning, engaging the problem of how to write a self-narrative in self-reflexivity, reducing a whole character to meaningful events versus factual narrative (106). Coetzee uses all of them, but most prominently he exposes anxieties of authorship and self-authorship in modern times – "A historicizing consciousness or, as you put it, the distancing effect of reflexivity, or even textualization – in the present context these are all ways of tracing the same phenomenon: an awareness, as you put pen to paper, that you are setting in train a certain play of signifies with their own ghostly history of past interplay" (*Doubling the Point* 62-63). His authorship in personal narratives becomes a blend of truth and fiction and extrapolation of ideas and topics rather than facts.

Self-reflexivity and exposure of techniques used and abused, all the while not blatantly lying, seems to be Coetzee's recipe for the author-narrator-character conundrum. It comes as no surprise, given how he speaks about autobiography as "a kind of self-writing in which you are constrained to respect the facts of your history" (18), and that is the only constraint. As long as facts match the biographical reading, the author is free to roam the text and spread his varied opinions through different subjects and characters, not only the one's created in his/her image. As Coetzee himself explains – a truth has to be offered, some facts mentioned – "But which facts? All the facts? No" (18).

III

Coetzee and His Truth

III THE TRUTH IN PERSONAL WRITING

3.1 The Concept of *Fluid Truth* in Personal Writing

> But what is truth to fact? You tell the story of your life by selecting from a reservoir of memories, and in the process of selecting you leave things out. To omit to say that you tortured flies as a child is, logically speaking, as much an infraction of truth to fact as to say that you tortured flies and you didn't. So to call autobiography – or indeed history – true as long as it does not lie invokes a fairly vacuous idea of truth.
>
> (Coetzee, *Doubling the Point* 17)

Truth is understood to exist in all autobiographical discourse, personal writing included, but it is referential truth, not absolute. Autobiographical discourse,[29] implicitly or explicitly, demands the notion of truth as the basic component in order to maintain the scaffold of autobiography credible and the pact between reader-narrator-author-main character alive. Lejeune claims that "biography and autobiography are *referential* texts: exactly like scientific or historical discourse, they claim to provide information about a 'reality' exterior to the text" ("The Autobiographical Pact" 22). However, if this autobiographical pact of truth does not hold, and we have fictional characterizations, Lejeune believes that analysis is still in order, it will only change from "no longer biography-autobiography, but the novel-autobiography relationship" (26). As long as blatant lying is not present, Coetzee concedes this point and autobiographies get told by invoking some memories and not others (*Doubling the Point* 17).

Autobiography and novel as genres coexist in the same space and time, and that they both have their advantages. However, "autobiography will lack complexity, ambiguity […] the novel, accuracy" (Lejeune, "The Autobiographical Pact" 27). Thus, he claims, both should exist "*in relation*" to each other (27). Distinguishing truth from fiction in personal narratives could be harder than simply doing fact-checking expeditions. "It is impossible to distinguish between truth and emotionally-charged fiction," says Freud[30] (*The Origins of Psycho-Analysis* 216), as long as events or facts match, subjective truth cannot be proven. This concept enables *fluid truth* to occur in personal writing – the truth that is the figment of one's imagination or fiction of the self. Its fluidity comes from, on the one hand – following the facts and the historicity of events, so it appears true to the naked eye. And the other, upon close inspection, it is clear that what seems true to the *narrative self* may not have been felt by the *experiencing self*. Everything but the facts – *can be fluid* and changeable after more introspection and with the passing of time.

This marriage of truth and unconscious emotional truth appears no less true to the mind than the historical event itself. In an autobiographical discourse, the text promises a similarity, which does not equal the original, but only poses an approximation with the possibility of lying (Spicer 387). The reasoning behind calling self-narration a mere approximation relates to the missing referent, as well as the author's memory, which has to be viewed as subjective. Sartre best explains it when he says in his autobiography, *The Words* – "I have reported the facts as accurately as memory permitted me. But to what extent did I believe in my delirium?" (69). The different identities in the person prevent a unanimous truth from being maintained over time.

So, we could say that "autobiography has been truly caught in a tension between language's referential promise and its threat of mendacity" (Spicer 387–388). The promise refers to respect

[29] Autobiography in a narrow sense is mentioned only as a historically accurate genre classification. However, modern definition of self-narration includes autobiographical discourse as a more accurate broad definition of personal narratives we encounter, in Coetzee as well as other modern authors. Be it a journal, life-writing, autre-biography or other, they all belong under the umbrella of autobiographical or semi-autobiographical discourse. It is almost taken as read that autobiography had proved itself impossible, thus only autobiographical discourse and the approximation to autobiography exists.

[30] See Laura Marcus for more on the topic, 263.

towards historical facts, but once the facts have been kept, the mendacity refers to being able to explain one's emotional inner life in any way the author sees fit. In the process of writing, for example, an author may be embarrassed about adultery s/he had committed, even potentially admit it but also claim having felt bad while the affair was happening, despite the fact it may not have been true at all at the time. That type of mendacity remains a gray area in personal narratives as it is dependent of personal interpretation, or storytelling to oneself and others.

Autobiographies may never reach the realms of truth. Autobiographical discourse is, then, "a special kind of fantasy, one that allows for both a potentially psychotic belief in the impossible and a fully nonpsychotic recognition of the limits of reality," says Lejeune (qtd. in Spicer 390). His proposed solution to de Man's impossibility of truth in self-narration – autobiography should be viewed as a "fantasy" (Spicer 390). Whereas de Man is convinced that autobiography may not exist as the notion of truth is unattainable (truth being equal to fact), and he would rather dispose of the whole genre as it appears closer to fiction for comfortable genre classification, Lejeune believes it is necessary because fantasy also reveals something about the author (390). This coincides with my view and claim that Coetzee's treatment of subjects, such as the ones discussed here, the truth, the self, identities, and authorship reveals a lot more about him, as will be discussed in *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man*, than any carefully concocted self-narratives per se. In context, Coetzee reveals the truth about his interests and his self, not in isolated texts. Autobiography as a genre represents a mode of telling one's own truth, a type of fantasy, and daydreaming in which both the author figure and the reader are consciously taking part (390). Because "the fantasy has not died, even if the author has" (391), we may extrapolate conclusions about the author's choice of topics and his/her fantasies of him/herself.

Truth is nothing but subjective. And the process of writing proves invaluable for the discovery of one's subjective truth. The truth can be measured only with regards to the author's intention but not as mirroring reality (Spicer, Olney). Anything an author says about him/herself is no less truthful and indicative of him/herself than the author intended, it characterizes the author's truth and says something about him or her, without necessarily needing to be equal to the "fact" (388). It also represents "recovery of personal history" on the road towards a final product, as the narrator of "the self" (autobiographer) struggles with "options of truth and integrity" (Hart 511). Hart emphasizes that any author or "individual autobiographer" gets a better grasp of their own truth, of themselves and their respective journeys *on their way* towards getting the truth defined, or in other words – in the process of writing (511), and Coetzee agrees (see Smuts).

But what if telling the truth is not even necessary when writing your personal narrative? If we take our initial premise to have been off, then new opportunities for interpretation of truth open up. An author does not necessarily have to tell the truth, just the illusion of being truthful. Authors should be credible, and then the truth-telling is implied (Danielewicz 438). She argues that the story of the self is a cultural one (like Eakin), an embedded notion of identity that inevitably discusses historical circumstances, indicative family values, and invariably focuses on "environment, context, world" (437). Thus, in a matter of speaking, it represents *a truth*, a collective cultural truth. Therefore, the cultural identity of the author and his/her likability is on trial in personal narratives.

However, interpretation is hindered in this way since authors pray on this. If appearing to be truthful, or sorry, or a good person equals – being truthful in personal writing, then readers get deceived because of their belief in the pact. Readers participate as well because, without them, the interpretation is impossible – the premise of liking the author trumps all other shortcomings of the story. And in Coetzee in particular, the premise of being sorry for one's actions, even self-deprecating – preemptively stops judgment on the part of readers.

With this in mind, audiences gain more importance than the truth itself. The truth, arrived at through the process of writing and self-inspection, invariably differs according to purpose – if done for personal use or publication. A journal that may never see the light of day could arguably be more honest because it is not done for an audience outside the self. Similarly, an audience introduces a cultural, societal element to the story – the judgment of others in accordance with their upbringing and socially introduced implicit and explicit beliefs.

Two interesting questions arise – what the possible effects of appropriation are and what effect writing per se produces in comparison to versus writing one's life for publishing purposes (Velleman 222-228). If you participate in the creation of a story, you are entitled to tell it. However, if you merely rewrite it without embellishing or participation, that can be construed as appropriation. He provides an illustration of this in the confessional narrative of a woman, Helen,[31] who discovers her parents to be Polish Jews, which they had never mentioned. After relocating, they had reinvented their personal histories, as well as, in extension – hers. Helen ventures into a forceful extraction of truth so as to assume her own full identity, while she is in the process of writing a book. But Velleman wonders if her parents owe her that truth or an explanation? If she uses embellishments, a fictionalization of facts, and an invention for emotions and events she has not experienced to write her story, does that classify as appropriation (222)? If Helen claimed narrative confessional truth, then yes. But Velleman concludes she has all the right to do so, as "maybe by embellishing her parents' story, Helen gains the right to tell it, because it is now partly her creation" (222). The same applies to Coetzee's autre-biography as he struggles with whose stories he has the right to tell deciding on his parents,' but refusing to openly appropriate his children's' life story.

With regards to the second question, we should bear in mind how these questions affect the living of the mentioned life (222-228). How the life of the author is affected if s/he knows it will be published – is closely associated with the *observer effect*. The observer effect mainly denotes changing one's behavior by becoming more careful and slower when you know you are being watched. It is a very powerful tool in social sciences in general and in psychology in particular. Most definitely, then a choice of what actually gets written, as well as what the authors elects to do if being observed, gets taken into account and changes the life-lived. It fluctuates the truth in a reversed fashion, from the perspective of seeking and creating the truth according to a script of what would "look good on paper." Velleman questions not the writing but the life of a person who has decided to write something confessional – how is that *private* life influenced, in a reversed process by the fact that it will be written into the *public* sphere? Perhaps protagonists overemphasize their experiences in order to have something about what to write. They might push themselves into events, motivate themselves "to make it happen" (228) to have something to write about at the time? The intention of truth switches from reporting to living out an event in order not to lie, which in itself is fake.

In Coetzee, I encounter numerous references to notions of truth and fiction of one's self, predominantly in his discussions with Arabella Kurtz (*The Good Story*) and David Attwell (*Doubling the Point*). The first deals with types of truth available to us, referential truth and collective truth of nations. Whereas the second book of interviews and essays elaborates on ideas of truth in autobiography and confessional writing in Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, as well as other authors. So, what does Coetzee's view on truth in self-representation reveal and who does he side with of all the aforementioned critics? Well, all of them.

The truth in personal writing to Coetzee is self-serving, fluid, dual and changeable – it is essentially a type of fiction of ourselves (for ourselves, and others). In the discussion of truth in self-representation in Coetzee's correspondence with Kurtz, several types of truth emerge. Their conversations predominantly refer to self-representation in patients in psychotherapy and self-representation in writing. Whereas Coetzee focuses on fiction of ourselves as our personal truth and claims that truth is elusive, as it should be, and that people might benefit from reinforcing positive fictions of themselves, not destructive realities – Kurtz concludes that the truth in psychotherapy "is internal," "dynamic, provisional and intersubjective" (*The Good Story* 11). She emphasizes that the truth as such is necessary as liberation in psychotherapy, otherwise, people act out unconscious content.

Coetzee promotes the view that in self-representation it is impossible to divulge the truth as you might be preoccupied with hiding your true self from yourself – "I have a story about myself

[31] See Freemont, Helen. *After Long Silence: A Memoir.* New York, Dell Publishing, 1999.

which I sincerely believe to be true," but someone from the outside, an "omniscient, godlike observer" knows "not to be true, or at least not to be the whole truth" (*The Good Story* 67). He differentiates between omission and the whole truth – handpicking facts authors prefer of themselves versus self-serving stories. "Well-placed observers (my parents, my spouse, my children)" could destroy the illusion of such a story since they know it to "be flawed, probably self-serving, perhaps even to a degree delusional" (67-68). Even though authors may realize the story not to be true, "I concede that it may not be true by the standards of (a) or even (b), an emotional attachment may prevent them from entering corrections – "it is 'mine,' it is all I have, and therefore I give it my allegiance" (67-68). No ideal observer means that the person writing can "negotiate some kind of life-narration," a story "that feels honest and sincere, even though I know at the back of my mind that there are interests at work – interests to which I am blind" (67-68). The interests we seem blind to represent the unconscious.

Oppositely, Arabella Kurtz argues it is the truth, no matter how painful, that sets the patient free, eventually. They remain divided on the issue. Namely, from these conversations, Kurtz introduces several concepts of truth, some of which correspond to Coetzee's ideas (subjective and ethical truth). There is the real truth, the one that coincides with external events (5). There is the emotional truth "when the thing is both true to itself" and the facts (5). The unconscious truth, the one that may not even get presented except in incongruent behaviors or acting out (5). Communal truth or preconceived notions of how life ought to be lived, often clashes with the unconscious or emotional truth (5). Furthermore, the dynamic (evolving) truth or how one's vision of him/herself changes over time (6-7). Intersubjective truth is represented as an acknowledgment of ourselves, which we receive from interactions with others or as information from others in our interactions (9-10). Self-serving truth, or the notion of poetic truth that feels and sounds good to the poet, has aesthetic value over simple naming of facts (7-8). Finally, fixed or external truth, an idea Kurtz introduces, but which matches closely to the concept Coetzee has on ethical or whole truth (11).

Out of all of the above-mentioned ones, Coetzee agrees with the concept of the *truth as dual* (15). He considers that people possess the ability and freedom to interpret their own experiences from a subjective perspective, as close or far away from reality as they want, but this is alarming to him, as it is similar to lying. Although this ability to have one's version of events could be useful if you are depressed and psychologically, it could benefit you more than the truth. As a way of conclusion, perhaps, Arabella Kurtz brings the conversation to an end, as she believes that Coetzee's search for transcendental truth is pointless in therapy (74). The process of therapy has "the trajectory" of "a partial subjective truth to a greater subjective truth" only (74). That in therapy could equal the collaboration of the people who know the client/patient and share their story of the event.

This "greater subjective truth" comes from our interactions with others, and Coetzee sees it as fiction as well – fiction of nations. Despite his attempts to equal therapy to self-narration, I must agree that the very presence of the therapist changes the dynamic. Authors write alone, indulge in their confessions and half-truths, determining the limits of their experience and fluid truth on their own whereas a therapist holds a mirror to one's delusions and takes part in the process. Also, the therapeutic process forces that the client to release control, whereas the writing process promotes just the opposite – rewriting one's thoughts to rehearsal and perfection. Confession,[32] written down for posterity and for a motive, perhaps unknown or admitted (such as seeking forgiveness or asking for love, adoration) is mentioned in interviews with Attwell in *Doubling the Point*. Similar to the therapeutic situation comparisons with Kurtz, confessional situations in autobiographical discourse also divulge one's motives.

[32] See *The Good Story*, pp. 58-61 for more on confession. Coetzee assimilates the Catholic confessional situation to that of therapy in the sense that there is "the silence," "the confessor," "the code of confession" and "the liberating formula with which the session ends" (58). Although Kurtz disagrees – to her the therapeutic situation is more connected to Protestantism and individual responsibility, hard work on "the self" and taking responsibility for your actions (60-61), still Coetzee finds confession to be more related to the act of professing to an unknown presence that brings closure to a religious man, whereas in the post-religious society he professes not to know what brings closure.

Distinction in types of confession we perceive in Coetzee, refer to confessional intention or the reason why the confession is being made (*Doubling the Point* 41). To him that is key. The concept of a public confession may only have the aim of gaining something, such as in *The Scarlet Letter* and that is accepted in the community as a pennant. But privately, to Coetzee, the person may be "rejecting judgement of her" (43). He is mostly interested in the confessee, as the confessor will have his/her motivation. To Coetzee, discrimination does not exist among any wrongdoer's stories as they tell themselves whatever it is that they need in order to justify their actions in their own eyes (I did it for the country, my kids, for passion, etc.).

Writing about Pozdnyshev's confession (in Tolstoy's *The Kreuzer Sonata*), Coetzee especially emphasizes that various truths in a confession come out depending on what information we choose to stress or eliminate. "No doubt we can read third and fourth truths out of the text" (257). However, the point of the matter to Coetzee is not whether the unending cycle of truths exists, as it may, but that sacramental confession turned secular focuses on admitting what one knows about oneself, as well as "the truth about [himself] that he does not yet know" (252), but arrives to in the process of making a confession (or writing). Coetzee refers to this intrinsic element of confession as "twofold confession" (252) – trying to tell the story of the self, all the while knowing your mind might be hiding dome insights from you, thus being as truthful as possible without guaranteeing the truth of yourself.

Be it called subjective, twofold or double, the only blatantly obvious definition we encounter is that Coetzee considers truth in the personal narration of nations and selves – fluid and open to interpretation. But, what are the limits to truth in personal narratives? Or better yet, what is considered off-limits? Can authors openly lie and pretend they forgot details of some events? Essentially, no. Obvious misconstructions of the real world and references may not be used in successful personal narratives. So, what is Coetzee's take on truth versus fiction in the narratives of the self?

3.2 Coetzee's Truth *Is* Fiction

> What ties one to the real world is, finally, death. One can make up stories about oneself to one's heart's content, but one is not free to make up the ending. The ending has to be death: it is the only ending one can seriously believe in. What an irony then that to anchor one self in a sea of fictions one should have to rely on death!
>
> (Coetzee, *The Good Story* 69)

The truth in Coetzee's self-narratives is subjective, fluid, and open to interpretation. He takes this even further – he believes both history and personal writing represent stories we tell ourselves, and by extension, both history and one's identity – is fiction. Psychological mechanisms prevent authors from perceiving themselves realistically or critically because they have agendas with the legacies they leave behind. History, as well, gets written from the perspective of winners, enabling them to decide the version of fiction that best fits the winners, so he finds it also fictional. The death of the author, however, is the death of fiction. Death to Coetzee is the ultimate limitation to personal narratives that represents referential facts – or as he puts it – "the only ending one can seriously believe in" (69). The body and death end imagination as they stand as ultimate proof, according to his poetics.

Bearing in mind that Coetzee defines autobiography as similar to history – "[a]utobiography is usually thought of not as a kind of fiction-writing but as a kind of history writing, with the same allegiance to the truth as history has" ("Truth in autobiography" 1), he points out it is a misconception. Because of the fact that it is merely "a kind of writing in which you tell the story of yourself as truthfully as you can, or as truthfully as you can bear to" (1), it implies that writing

unawares is quite common as well. Psychological processes at work impair authors of personal narratives from seeing clearly what exactly had happened, despite the fact they may be, at the same time, most knowledgeable about how they felt. What we do encounter in his ideas of *the truth as a type of fiction* – are notions of *doublethink, Zeitgeist,* and arrival at the *fluid truth* of oneself, which authors become aware of in the process of writing.

The differentiation of the event itself from the memory of the event is essential to J. M. C. (*The Good Story* 75). All people are left with – are memories and feelings of the events, thus, the events themselves viewed as facts may be out of reach. This holds true both in collective and personal truths. With regard to collective truth, he provides examples from history made to accommodate historical facts according to developments in human consciousness. Historians often rearrange and retell the official story (76), which means that there is never a single version of the event, not even in science.

History appears as a story (fiction) to Coetzee, later revised and revisited, especially so in the case of whites in Africa and his own history – "I am sure that my dogged concentration, here and in earlier exchanges between us, on the ethical dimension of truth versus fiction, comes out of my experience of being a white South African who late in life became a white Australian and, in between, lived for years as a white in the United States, where whiteness as a social reality is more masked than in South Africa or Australia but is still there" (77-78). When the story of his whiteness was so severely revised due to "reasons of world-historical nature" (78), he understood the truth as merely a story that could be changed – "My great-grandparents were criminals (the revised story goes), complicit in an evil project whose fruits I am at present enjoying. Yet at the same time my great-grandparents were courageous, upstanding people who suffered hardship so that their descendants could have a good life" (79). It is from this concept of dual truth in national stories and our abilities to know our ancestors were wrong, but still respect them and love them post facto, that Coetzee develops the idea of larger truth of nations and equals this to the concept of "doublethink" (89).

The strategy of *doublethink* refers to living a life in duality – in personal truth as well as the truth of one's nation, even if the two oppose. He especially sees *doublethink* in nations with difficult histories and white guilt, whereby people simply do not feel any error on their part and dismiss the errors of their grandparents as "limits to the moral capacities" (89) common in the era those ancestors lived. This strategy, in his view, allows us to survive despite the knowledge we dislike, truths we encounter, and especially histories that change during one's life.

The concept of "Zeitgeist" is similar to doublethink but related to moral values. It transfers the idea that in the olden times, "racism was in the air as a sort of miasma that invaded everyone's lungs," but "[i]nhaling it involuntarily, our ancestors became, willy-nilly, racists," but their "racism was not an active, conscious racism" (86). Coetzee emphasizes the irony of "doublethink" and people's ability to believe simultaneously in opposing constructs when it comes to their ancestors but attack others' ancestors for the same events. It is even possible for one's relatives to pronounce they were racist, for example, "but not racists in a real sense, as Hitler (say) was a racist" (86). The truth as a concept, then, changes according to "Zeitgeist" or the morals of the times we inhabit, which in no way clashes with the concept of truth in people's minds. "Therefore while from our vantage point, within our Zeitgeist, we rightly reject their standards, it would be unfair (unjust) to reject our ancestors themselves, caught as they were in their own Zeitgeist, for being exponents of those standards" (87), or so goes the doublethink. As "moral standards change and evolve with time" (87), so does our capacity for the truth and our ability to live in the "doublethink," says Coetzee.

Similarly, on a personal level and in self-narratives of ourselves, Coetzee extends the notion of fantasies of ourselves rather than the truth as the only obtainable option. Smuts agrees with the concept that the autobiographer reveals the truth about himself "*as he writes*" it, which Coetzee was quoted to have said about Russo (Smuts 27, emphasis his). Authors reveal what they want to say as they write it, meaning preconceived notions exist, but the truth also pushes through the text, and authors sometimes understand something about themselves and the world through deep analyses of

themselves done for the purpose of writing. The truth gets simultaneously developed as the process of writing develops (Smuts 27). Authors do not possess previous preconceived ideas of truth, which means s/he runs the risk of "bringing his enterprise to an end" (27). This can be interpreted as a necessity or remain open on a subject instead of pushing for an agenda your initial idea included. To Coetzee, the fact that the truth escapes the author represents a "propelling" mechanism pushing the writing forward, and by no means a lack of personal writing.

If we take the process of writing a personal narrative to be key in discovering the truth, several questions arise. What is reality? Is the representation of the real possible as *mirror imaging*, or only as *symbolic representation*? Do fictional elements within a narrative of oneself have to exist, or could they be avoided? Merely judging personal narratives based on factually proven evidence in the author's life outside the text has been a bone of contention in more recent explorations into personal writing (Effe, Smith & Watson). Whereas autobiographies per se used to be considered as fact-only narratives, it has been proven without a doubt that even mere emphasis or neglect to mention certain events or even daily routines lead to an implosion of such narratives, thus rendering autobiography as fact-writing impossible. This is essential, if we ask Wisniewski, because otherwise, "an autobiography would become a sterile accumulation of facts" (313).

The process of choosing what to exclude or include, on the other hand, may be perceived as unwilling or even deliberate misrepresentation of truth for the sake of fictionalized portrayal of life. Such and other examples of fictionalized autobiographies, fiction within personal writing, elements or characters fictionalized to portray an idea or notion, and other transgressions into blurred genres lead us down a path of discovery. All for the sake of answering questions: how much fiction is permitted within factual genres, and what is fiction as opposed to autobiographical intention to Coetzee?

Instead of becoming sterile fact-gathering expeditions, the narrator decides to include fiction or exclude mundane life to make the narrative more vivid and story-like. The process of neglecting to mention mundane life events in writing that have factually happened, such as brushing one's teeth or getting up in the morning, amounts to omissions that could be benevolent or malevolent. Even though we could agree that enumeration of facts would not make for quality reading, fiction or autobiographical writing-wise, still we know "that the first-person narrator selects these events and interprets them in the process of writing" (Rader 319). Aside from cherry-picking the events, the author chooses the light in which s/he would present his/her history in hindsight (319), proving the importance of voice for personal narratives.

In a sense, Schaeffer adds that "fact itself is a mode of fiction" (98) as all narratives construct a world. Following this definition, Coetzee in the real world is not the same man as in the representational world, but if we follow this view, he is *fictio,* imaginative representation of the world (100-110). She proposes competing definitions of what constitutes factual and fictional narration. In a semantic definition, it is claimed that factual narrative has a referent or reference in the real world, as we mentioned in fluid truth, whereas the same cannot be said of the fictional world, says Schaeffer (98).[33]

Coetzee shares Schaeffer's view on fact as fiction, as he believes stories we tell of ourselves, to ourselves and others represent fiction in the sense that "they are constructions (fiction from Latin fingere, to shape or mould or form)" (*The Good Story* 3). On the face of it, Schaeffer also uses the Latin definition to add that the main issue with fact and fiction may not be only cognitive, but dating back to problems of definition that we have inherited from predecessors (100). The example she provides is also the Latin *fictio*, which could hold the meaning of "the act of modelling something" as a sculptor or "pretending, supposing, hypothesizing" (100). Thus, the fact is to be interpreted, the same as Coetzee says on subjective truth as an interpretation of facts. Coetzee proposes fictions as personal truths viewed from someone's perspective about themselves and

[33] See Schaeffer, pp. 98. In a syntactic definition, the distinguishing factor is "logico-syntactic syntax" oppositely, in a pragmatic definition referential truths are advanced, making them varied as opposed to semantic in only that the semantic definition proposes a referent, not referential truth (98).

others: “I feel that, seen from the outside, the lives of other people almost always have a somewhat made-up, fictional quality” (*The Good Story* 154). This occurs because people seem unaware of who they truly are, they “inhabit” fictions of themselves and try them out for size:

> But, more radically, I feel that our own needs and desires have a similar fiction-like status. We attribute them to ourselves. We try them out and if they suit us we inhabit them. A desire that is too thoroughly understood loses its force and in effect ceases to be desire. Hence all my talk about relations between people as a matter of interlocking fictions. (154-155)

What Coetzee calls desire here could be interpreted as verbalization of subverbal content that drives one’s behavior. In personal narratives, the act of realizing your roles, your fictional interpretations of yourself, gives you the power to change the role if you do not “inhabit” it well (154-155). The most essential idea here is represented in the statement that we are always “interlocking fictions” (155) people have of themselves and others, that the truth is interpreted. The only important factor here refers to whether it is a type of narrative everyone is informed is invented.

The perception that something is classified as fiction influences the reader. There appears to be a sense of deception at work if autobiographical writing does not meet the truth criteria (Schaeffer 100-105) since the autobiographical pact is presupposed (Lejeune). Just by classifying a narrative as autobiographical discourse, the readers’ expectations shift towards facts over fiction, and if the narrative is personal writing, the readers are “deceived.” The promise of being truthful to one’s detriment, or regardless of all cost trumps the knowledge that some mechanisms might be at work preventing the author from being completely truthful. The pact with the reader is naturally stronger than skepticism, and authors take advantage of this process. Coetzee in particular, does it by being self-deprecating so that the reader would defend him in his/her mind. Despite what he might have done, the reader has the impression he is massively self-punishing and has no heart to judge him. Partially a literary technique, partially a personal choice made by the author – this self-deprecating tone has become a signature. Coetzee himself believes in the masters’ (Tolstoy and Dostoevsky) “power” resides in their ability “to tell the truth as well as to subvert secular skepticism about truth, getting behind skeptical ploys to get behind them (‘What is truth?’)” (*Doubling the Point* 243). By extension, he tries similar ploys.

The fact and fiction divide invokes theories of characterization and the role of the reader in particular. Lang believes that “the presupposition of a universal human nature which permits the reader to commune with and discover himself in even the most ‘personal’ of autobiographical narratives” (3) was wrongly missing from Olney’s work on the autobiography (1972, 1980). A reader essentially reads to find his/her own thoughts in personal narratives. And “the feasibility of drawing a sharp line of demarcation between ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’” (3) is not that possible in personal narratives. Because the reader has an ultimate say in interpreting meanings, the only truth is truth to fact, and the rest is interpretation.

Returning to classification once again, we could argue that myths and stories, which exaggerate unbelievable events, still hold truths and imitations of the empirical world, but the reader is not deceived (see Walton 1990). Just by naming narratives – fictional, the readers expect “lies” and invented worlds, so they seek the truth. The argument then goes that by naming narratives personal writing or autobiographical discourse, the readers search for – fiction. But the deception only implies if the name of the narrative does not match its content.

Simulation and playful pretense may provide understanding for fiction, as a “process of mental simulation” (Schaeffer 111). Every narrative requires a certain level of immersion and simulation (111), which potentially explains the interplay of factual and fictional representations, as they both involve the same cognitive processes and participation in scripts (see Currie and Ravenscroft 2002). This distinction falls under the concepts of “*haple diegesis*” and “*mimesis*” (Schaeffer 102, emphasis hers), the former being truthful in Platonian concepts as the author speaks

for himself or herself, and the latter – simulacrum since the author uses characters to make a point (Schaeffer 102). The way these concepts relate to personal writing – we now understand cognitive mechanisms are prohibiting complete factual and truthful narration in *haple diegesis*, so personal narratives are partially simulacra as well. However, just like myths, something must be true in all that fiction of the self.

If we take J. M. C.'s essays and interviews on the topic into account, a few positions emerge clearly. He believes, on the one hand, that we have at our disposal only fictions of ourselves and fictions of others, that interlock and correlate, which does not seem negative to him, just a fact of life: "To my mind, it will be enough if we can settle on fictions of ourselves which we can inhabit more or less comfortably, fictions that interact sans friction with the fictions of those around us. In fact, that would be my notion of a good society, even an ideal society: one in which, for each of us, our fiction (or fantasy) of ourself goes unchallenged" (*The Good Story* 177).

This seems rather naïve, as well as highly improbable. Claiming fantasies of ourselves are all there is might work, but being unchallenged seems rather far-fetched, especially if personal growth would represent the cost of such living. An ideal society to Coetzee, by extension, is nothing but "billions of personal fictions," which "interlock seamlessly, so that none of us need stay awake at night wondering anxiously whether the world we inhabit is real" (177). Whereas Arabella Kurtz believes that psychologically we need others, especially when we are young, to learn the truth about ourselves, Coetzee still argues that even in that case, we are only glimpsing others' fiction of ourselves: "We need fictions of others about us in order to form our fictions of ourselves" (143). In this way, we dispone only of fictions of ourselves and others, and glimpses of the truth of ourselves and others.

The breakdown of any reference from the real world would inevitably lead to a dissonance between the self and history. Truth as consensus is necessary so that a personality does not break. Essentially, psychotherapy versus self-narratives as confessions differs in the presence of the therapist. "In the therapeutic situation there must be two persons, whereas stories are written (dictated) by one person" (52), which in itself provides Coetzee with the answer to why intermediary truths must exist, not only fictions of ourselves. Readers provide that reference in the real world for personal narratives because a confession is mean to be heard by someone. It is the audience that disables "[a]ny analogy between writer and therapist, between the composition of fictions and the coaxing of patients into constructive ways of telling their life-stories to themselves, breaks down at this point" (52). Audiences have options of liking and disliking, buying a book, providing feedback, but they do not have a say in the confession and the writing itself. Readers have a post-writing echo at their disposal, however, there is no true dialogue, and understanding (to Kurtz this is not a dialogue, but a growth-promoting relationship (53)).

Finally, Coetzee's world of greys allows for fiction over truth and the victory of subjective truth to emerge. He does, though, give way to the notion of fact as an event:

> Although, like most well brought up people nowadays, I am careful to avoid the impolite locution 'transcendent truth', I confess that privately I continue to distinguish between things that really happened in the past and things that did not really happen. Don Quixote did not couch his lance and charge a giant: he charged a windmill, and if he says he charged a giant then he is lying, or, to put it more usefully, is delusional – is making up a fiction without being aware it is a fiction. (74)

Whether something had actually happened or not, it is out of our control. The truth as fact must take precedence – "I would resist classing Quixote's story of the giant as truth of any variety, for example, poetic truth or higher truth or transcendent truth or subjective truth" (74). However, in personal writing, he argues that it is the memory of the event that takes precedence over the fact of the event. "That is why I would call the double awareness I tried to describe tragic: one believes sincerely in the truth of what one is writing at the same time that one knows it is not the truth" (*The*

Good Story 76), although that knowledge is arguably subconscious. Regarding the one and only truth, Coetzee feels it no longer exists, not even in illusion. He admits a "longing and nostalgia" for it (68), as he believes times have changed and we cannot but change with the times. One-sided stories no longer exist

> I am alarmed by the prospect of a world in which people's notion of liberty includes the liberty to reconstruct their personal histories endlessly without fear of sanction (fear of the reality principle). On the other hand, if an individual who is deeply miserable can be cheered up by being encouraged to revise the story of their life, giving it a positive spin, who could possibly object? In the first case the truth seems to me to matter, finally. We can't all simply be who we like to think we are. In the second case the truth seems to me to matter less. What is wrong with a harmless lie if it makes us feel better? (15)

So, when does J. M. C. concede that fiction clearly takes over and the truth stops? When it is palpably obvious to all, but not a second before – "When this self-narrative clashes blatantly with reality, with the way things really are, we as observers conclude that the subject is deluded, that the truth-for-the-self produced by the subject's imagination is in conflict with the real truth" (4), the personal truth no longer withstands the scrutiny of reality.

In the end, because "the stories we tell about ourselves may not be true, but they are all we have" (67). Coetzee with truth in postmodern society – in a postmodern fashion – fragmentally and from many perspectives in self-representation,

3.4 Questions of Memory and Questioning Memory

> To think of a life-story as a compendium of memories which one is free to interpret in the present according to the demands (and desires) of the present seems to me characteristic of a writer's way of thinking. I would contrast this with the way many people see their life-story: as a history that is forever fixed ('you can't change the past').
>
> (Coetzee, *The Good Story* 13)

Questioning one's *memories versus interpretations* of those memories is pivotal to Coetzee's take on remembering and *empty spaces* in personal writing. A memory written in retrospect employs the process of remembering. The question then becomes into the nature of remembering one's life versus mere facts versus other people's lives, and especially how memory behaves faced with immortalization on paper. Do authors further self-censor faced with their legacy as they write it down?

This process of remembering is followed by choosing events to include or exclude, and only then – putting them to paper. In the censorship of one's life, authors inevitably exclude events, whether because of memory loss or intentional forgetfulness. This creates empty spaces, which arguably serve a purpose. Arguably, not everything that has ever happened deserves writing down. Coetzee posits the question, then – how many facts may be enough and who decides that (*Doubling the Point* 18). Since "[a]ll the facts are too many facts," he concludes it best to "choose the facts insofar as they fall in with your evolving purpose" (18).

By mentioning the writers' take on memory versus other people's in the title quote, Coetzee explains that authors pretend as if memories represent "a compendium," which is "free to interpret" (*The Good Story* 13). If so, interpretation is more important than the event (fact). Depending on the interpreter's mood or intentions – the interpretation takes place (13). This echoes Coetzee's positions on truth as fiction (or interpretation) of real-life events. However, he also believes that

people can change despite their efforts otherwise. If they view their "history" as something "that is forever fixed" (*The Good Story* 13), they deny themselves a different interpretation, and he claims that is more common to people other than authors. Fixing "our life-story, by repeating over and over, to ourselves and to others, one or other preferred interpretation of it" (13) enables authors to create varied versions of their initial memories. Authors, in general, prefer to leave histories open to interpretation, and that in itself makes their life stories and autobiographical memories more vulnerable to truth, they are more malleable.

Memories seem disintegrated to Coetzee. The claim goes that *only traces of the original memories* exist, and they get penciled in with interpretations or fictions, in retrospect. It is the level of control we exert over our lives or the resemblance of control that enables memories to become malleable versus fixed. Memory acts as a filter through which a person recollects an event as their own interpretation to Coetzee (12). This is a concept he calls "memory-trace" (12) as he remains unsure whether it is ever possible to retain a complete, identical memory by two people present at the same event. What we as humans do, then, is remember events depending on the "will to interpret" which is similar to how we feel towards someone in general or at the time. Coetzee asks if it– "[i]s it possible – philosophically but also neurologically – to speak of a memory that is pristine, uncolored by interpretation?" (12). Probably not. His main claim is that if we are willing to give somebody the benefit of the doubt, we will interpret a negative event as benevolent, and if we doubt the intentions on somebody's part we will interpret the event as malevolent. Regardless of the truth, interpretation of our memories of that event will depend on our feelings for the person in question.

The not-so-innovative discussion of memory takes a turn towards mechanism of defense and splitting, projection and repression (19). At least familiar with the theory, we note that Coetzee introduces the concept of *memory-trace*. Memory-trace refers to ideas "subjected to a certain interpretation" (12), not original. They represent "an aspect that may turn out to be central to distinguishing real life from fiction al life, real people from people in books" (20). He is worried children do not possess original memories but "entrenched" memories their parents gave them through retelling stories over and over (21). "My sense of the malleability of memory is simply too strong" (21)

Additionally, the very formation of our memory of the event will depend on the authority of the person, says Coetzee. "What is an event itself, as opposed to the event as we interpret it to or for ourselves, or as it is interpreted to or for us by others, particularly authoritative others?" (12):

> 'When I was eight my father hit me with a tennis racket,' says a subject. 'Not true,' says his father. I was swinging the racket and accidentally hit him.' What really happened? Specifically, is the boy's memory of the event true, or is the father's true? I call it a memory, but that is an oversimplification: it is a memory-trace which has been subjected to a certain interpretation. I might even go on to say that it is a memory-trace which has been subjected to an interpretation behind which lies a certain will to interpret (in the boy's case perhaps a will to give the event its darkest interpretation, in the father's case a will to give it a harmless interpretation). How are we to disentangle the memory component from the component of interpretation, leaving aside for the moment the will behind the interpretation? (12)

What Coetzee also struggles with refers to implanted memories or externally-driven memories that our parents or other caregivers provide (21). Authority to him provides leeway for implanted interpretations on events we personally do not recall. If a child does not remember an event, it is because autobiographical memory comes with the integration of self. He points to the fact that children are often retold the same event but from a subjective perspective, which may be all as well, unless the person is malleable and young, in that case – "implanted memories can exert a force well into the future," and one becomes "the kind of boy who doesn't cry" or something along the same lines (21). Coetzee warns that authority-driven instilled memories of this kind may be

false and disingenuous. Due to a lack of comparison in the person's memories (maybe they recall nothing before the age of 3), implanted memories may be the only ones we have. He provides proof that untruthful memories may be accepted as true due to a general lack of evidence otherwise.

According to Kurtz in her correspondence with Coetzee, two types of memory – procedural (responsible for movements, walking riding a bike) and episodic (coding memories in verbal narrative codes) are responsible for our lack of narratives prior to 4 years of age, and for implanted memories (23). In the continuation of their correspondence on memory, they mention procedural and episodic, especially connected to the concept of non-verbality versus verbality. Namely, the first one is non-verbal, and since children learn how to speak later that motoric capabilities it is perhaps answering as to why the trace-memory may be molded in retrospect. Having lacked the ability to store something in the episodic memory properly, a child might lack the tools, except for emotional remembrance to recall the original memory that gets rewritten.

Autobiographical memories are viewed as distinct from episodic in that they rely on autobiographical consciousness and language, requiring social interaction and coherent stories of the unified self, which also emerges in the process of "defining self and regulating emotion" (Fivush and Graci 119). In other words, Coetzee correctly notes on the fact that he did not remember anything in his boyhood before certain age, especially as a baby (*The Good Story* 135). He posits we may access some feelings through memory, we can imagine how we felt and "project" ourselves "sympathetically," but we may never "be such a baby" (135). Identification with something is not a memory, it construes sympathetic imagination (135). Inhabiting characters that stand for otherness is just one such example – the author imagines and hopes for the readers understanding but in no way does he possess the memory or knowledge of the feel of the experience. Elizabeth Costello represents one such example as the "evil" Coetzee depicts in that novel, is mainly feminine in nature, and he was heavily criticized for not doing her justice.

Despite the fact that "the sole access we have to past mental states of our own is through memory," still "we can't remember what it was like to be a neonate, any more than we can remember what life was like in the womb" (135). Most importantly, we encounter the idea of fiction here again, similarly to Coetzee's ideas of the truth as fiction he says memories we don't actually remember but inhabit work similarly – "When we sympathetically inhabit our neonate selves, we are inhabiting a fiction" (135). So, autobiographical memory is a wonderful tool as long as authors remain aware whether it a s true memory on inhabitation of fiction, ours or someone else's.

Autobiographical memories as "self stories" represent merely a type of stories we tell ourselves and others, however, they are socially dependent and perform a service (Nelson 125). The service provided is both inclusion within a system being discussed (gender, race, profession), as well as a vehicle of exclusion (individualism). Nelson's main argument is that through memory as "the medium of shared memories, collective memories and fictional creations" interconnectedness to we have a window into a bigger narrative (125).

With regards to personal writing, we conclude that the "self" cannot exist in a vacuum, but uses connections to satisfy a belonging to a group, a script that is repeated through generations. This would entail that Coetzee-the-author of his personal narratives, knows that John-the-boy might have some memories the author had instilled, in other words, some memories of his parents' interpretations. In turn, in order to belong or not belong within these narratives, he might also present some memories that are culturally accepted as a medium to belong, as part of shared memories, such as those on Africa and his upbringing, which require interpretation according to how plausible and how self-serving they might be.

The theory of autobiographical memory most relevantly comes into play in clarifying how it differs from or includes the notions of episodic and semantic memories. Two distinctive memories exist – "*autonoesis* and *noesis*," in which the first one represents a re-experiencing of the past, and the second one a sort of semantic, factual memory with no inclusion of the self (126). Autobiographical narratives contain episodic memories that have been repeated and adopted as the "general scripts of 'what happens'" (126). The connection between individual episodic memories and cultural narratives claims episodic narratives may turn into cultural narratives if they get

"passed on through symbolic means to later generations" (Nelson 126). If they transcend individuality and include origin stories, religious belonging, heroics, etc. (126–127), we could have episodic memories become cultural. An occurrence in which Coetzee describes imaginary memories of events he actually does not remember as illustrations of the age, time, culture or if he repeats stories from his parents' upbringing he did not witness, but he heard later on in life as their interpretations of "what it was like to live in Africa in the 1940's" we could argue this example of autobiographical memories illustrates them as cultural.

On the other hand, the gaping distinction between the "self" stories and cultural narratives is perceived to be their societal role – whereas the former need temporality and a sense of self, the latter do not require either as part of the communal identity (127). In terms of her views of the self, Nelson agrees with Eakin ("Fictions in Autobiography") that a correlation and even a close resemblance between fiction and "reinvention of the self" in autobiography exists (130). Fully agreeing with Coetzee, Nelson goes so far as to claim that "autobiographical memory is as imaginative as a future projection of the self" as "both are based on past experience re-imagined" (130).

In a study in cognitive psychology, "The Functions of Autobiographical Memory: An Integrative Approach," the authors dealt with exactly this question – what were the functions of autobiographical memory for the self, and what was its appeal. Harris, Rasmussen, and Berntsen (2013) set about proving whether functions (or reasons for remembering) of autobiographical memory broaden possible definitions from earlier research. What they concluded was that the dominant functions were Reflective, Generative, Ruminative, and Social functions of memory (Harris, Rasmussen, and Berntsen 2), but they added in Study 2 interactions between functions, which broadened earlier research. Namely, these functions were responsible for how people "make meaning of their selves, their environment, and their social world more generally" (2).[34]

We aim to point to these separations in our analyses of Coetzee's *autre*-biography. In order to illustrate these functions and clarify some of the writer-characters in Coetzee, we have chosen items from a table available as Appendix A in the above-mentioned study to quote here as relevant for life-narrative research (47-48).[35]

Essentially, according to this study, the Reflective function is a psychodynamic function, self, or identity function – it focuses on remembering so that memories tell us who we are (2). Reflective function is mainly a learning one, an integrative approach to finding what is relevant from our past in order to learn the lessons for the future. The concern extends to change over time, change of one's beliefs integral for the self.[36]

The Generative function of autobiographical memory represents a connection for the individual to their personal history and legacy over time (47-48). The Generative function is a directive function that represents a problem-solving usage; we remember in order to solve a problem, learn a lesson, or plan for the future (2). It provides one with a sense of personal accomplishment, a wholesome story of the self and personal history (47-48). It also provides closure and allows preparations for one's death to take place, among other things (47-48).[37]

The Ruminative function of memory seems destructive but necessary to some people, it holds grudges, vivid memories of how we were wronged and ashamed – alive. The Ruminative function refers to a type of self/attentiveness that is motivated by "perceived losses" and belongs to "neurotic self-attentiveness" (12). Instead of problem-solving, the tendency of this type of thinking focuses on negative events passively. Also, it provides gratification that we were right,

[34] For more on this topic see Pasupathi 2006, Habermas 2007, Bluck and Allea 2008).

[35] The following sentences represent illustrative areas of the table itself as we plan on implementing this division in the analyses. Quotation, interpretation or rephrase of the study is included.

[36] Reflective ("When I believe that thinking about the past can help guide my future," "When I am concerned about whether my beliefs have changed over time," "Because remembering my past helps me define who I am now," "When I am concerned about whether my beliefs have changed over time").

[37] Generative ("Because it gives me a sense of personal completion or wholeness," "Because it helps me to prepare for my own death," "Because I feel less fearful of death after I finish reminiscing," "In order to leave a legacy of family history," "In order to teach younger persons about cultural values").

misunderstood and generally misconstrued by the big bad world. It may also help keep dead people alive or anything we are not ready to let go of in our memories, despite whether it is useful or detrimental.[38] The Ruminative function of memory is what creates fixed stories, and repositioning oneself requires the belief in change. Thus, in Coetzee, despite the rumination when he gets caught in a loop of certain thinking, he still believes in the changeability of stories we tell ourselves and others.

The Social function provides security and belonging, we enable it in order to discover more about someone and find common ground.[39] The Social function could be invoked for gaining new friendships or preserving the existing ones through the invocation of intimacy (Harris, Rasmussen, and Berntsen 2).

Another relevant point for life-writing in this study stems from the discovery of additional reasons why people think about the past: Problem Solving, Identity, Conversation, Boredom Reduction, Intimacy Maintenance, Death Preparation, Teach/Inform, Bitterness Revival (5). Finally, conclusions of the study refer to a positivity bias connected to life narrative and embellishment critics often note in writing personal narratives retroactively. In a nutshell, the study proves that "older adults remember more positive events and fewer negative events than younger adults" (21). Adults ruminate less or with a different function, such as putting a positive spin on events or correcting mistakes or emotional regulation. In the personal narrative in Coetzee, like anyone else, the positivity bias must be present.

Finally, in Coetzee, we find the conclusion that the past self "refuses to be buried" (*The Good Story* 32). Discussing the story Oedipus Rex, which he reads as an anti-detective novel, the hero both represses his past in memories and acts as a detective (32). Despite his disbelief in this theory, Coetzee raises the question in light of so many novels proclaiming this idea of poetic justice is – what if it is untrue? "But what if the true secret, the inadmissible secret, the secret about secrets, is that secrets can indeed be buried and we can indeed live happily ever after?" (34). If we believed this to be possible, "the secrets can be buried, that the past can be obliterated, that justice does not reign" (34), would that mean that people may forget what gnawed at them and "prosper nonetheless" (34)? In light of self-serving truths, it is essential to revisit this selective memory in personal writing so that we, as readers, might understand our expectations of truth versus mechanisms of ego-defense in the written representation of the self.

Negotiation of facts seems to be one of memory's overwhelming number of tasks as "memory is not a stable, static record that could ground a reliable written narrative; rather, it is itself a text under continuous unconscious revision" (Causer 17). On the one hand, literary critics agree that free association in writing one's life would literally be "unreadable" (Marcus 260). Nevertheless, empty species of input silences worry critics since authors could protect massive egos under the guise of not having enough space to write it all in personal narratives. A finely tuned dance, indeed.

Despite having the luxury of choosing information, the author may not lie blatantly. Coetzee believes that the biggest gift a writer disposes of is that as "a writer of his own story he is in a privileged position to dictate readings" (*Doubling the Point* 279). Including his/her own reading of their lives in retrospect. "[L]iberation from the oppression of the memory" is provided to those who confess (251-252). But, if they lie, absolution remains unavailable. Coetzee struggles with this idea, he says:

> Why can't I install a new set of memories that suit me better than the old ones? Or, to rephrase the question: Even if I have to accept that trying to install a set of new memories – a new past – doesn't work in practice, why can it not work? (*The Good Story* 20)

[38] Ruminative ("To reduce boredom," "To keep painful memories alive," "To keep alive the memory of a dead loved one," "To remember people I was close to but who are no longer part of my life").

[39] Social ("When I hope to also learn more about another person's life," "When I want to help someone by telling them about my own past experiences," "Because it promotes fellowship and a sense of belonging").

It is the truth that sets us free – deep down inside if a lie is uttered, we may still know it is a lie. His interest is peaked by what gets left behind, what gets left out from a story as well as what gets introduced into it – "what interests me in these fixed life-stories is not so much what finds its way into them as what gets left out" (14). Coetzee connects the involuntary leaving out of information as repression, but he raises questions whether it is even possible ever to remember everything, there must be some limits to memory.

> Leaving things out is, I suppose, repression; and the theory seems to be that the bits that have been left out are still there somewhere in the dark recesses of memory. I know the human brain is huge, but is it really big enough to hold everything that has been left out? Doesn't what we leave out add up to everything in the universe minus our small part? We leave it out, we say, because it isn't relevant. What that means is that it isn't relevant to the present interpretation we prefer to give to our past. (14)

As his way of concluding he explains exclusion is only important if it affects our current interpretation of the past.

> Above all, given the wealth of material I hold in memory, the material of a lifetime, what should or must I leave out, bearing in mind Freud's warning that what I omit without thinking (i.e. without conscious thought) may be the key to the deepest truth about me? Yet how is it logically possible for me to know what 1 am unthinkingly leaving out? (2)

3.5 Identity in Personal Narratives – May *I* Be My*Self*?

> You have an identity, which belongs to you alone. It is your most valuable possession, from a certain point of view, which you are entitled to protect. Vigorously.
>
> (*Diary of a Bad Year* 59)

Personhood belongs to an era of psychological investigation that believed the character was fixed and merely reported, and it has been replaced by more recent investigations into the self. Similarly, the relationship between the self and identity depends on the investigative science in question – in cognitive science we could say that identity is represented by a variety of views, interconnected beliefs, goals, and personal standards of the self (see Cervone 2004) that constitute identity (see Erikson 1963; Blasi 1984). Blasi's studies of the self determine that the self is not a collection of self-representations, but that some self-related information is more relevant than other, there is an order to them (131). In accordance to this, in Blasi "identity is considered equivalent to the essential self" (130).

If we go about defining identity as something fixed, entrenched in culture and represented in language, we might fall in the trap of viewing identities as collections of opinions – merely reported by language and unchangeable. Nevertheless, if we view identity as an intersubjective process between individuals and their social circumstances (Mead, 1934), it correlates, then, that identity reflects a process reported in dialogue between the "I"-s (Bakhtin, 1973). Canepari-Labib in "Language and Identity" sees Coetzee predominately as an author who "sets out to investigate the role language plays in the constitution of identity (whether of an individual, a nation or a race)"

("Language and Identity" 105). Language is used as a tool to "stage[s] the confrontation between the 'I,' the 'You' and the 'Other'" – all basis of identity (105).

The Dialogical Self Theory – DST (Hermans et al. 1992; Hermans, 1996, 2001) provides an insight into the dynamic nature of identity. In this theory, identity is defined as a variety of positions occupied by the self in the identity space, which remain in endless dialogue, changing permanently throughout life and a change of circumstances. The concepts of positioning the self, and polyphony of selves in dialogue, negotiation, and repositioning – stem from Bakhtin's ideas of identity as a narrative – a storytelling mode in which even the authors themselves may position their identities to multiply and simultaneously, negotiating the self that comes to the fore (depending on the situation a person may choose to be, to react at the moment as a father, teacher, husband, immigrant, friend etc.).

If overwhelmed by outside circumstances that seem uncontrollable in social contexts, an identity crisis may occur – due to immigration, major life changes, and other events. So it is relevant to mention also that social practices may allow specific positions of the self to emerge in some contexts (Harré and Van Langenhove, 1991). With this in mind, if we view the narrating "I," the narrated "I" and the idealized "I" in personal writing as manifestations of identity, it extends that they coexist and merge in a way that emphasizes the narrator's conflicting position of identity, which might explain the appeal of blurred genres. The author-character may opt to respond as the author or character, bringing to the fore one of their assumed identities, or even facets of the self s/he remains unaware of while participating in a dialogue between the selves. We, as readers, prove invaluable for the deciphering of the authorial "I" that addresses us from the page, thus engaging the role of the reader and blurring it into that one of the writer.

Basing our theoretical position on Bakhtin and Dialogical Self Theory, I posit this line of exploration in Coetzee's personal narrative. Not only do cultures and identities operate within contexts of uncertainty in Coetzee, as defined by postmodernism, but also language and the grammatical category of pronouns represent manifestations of identity. To Canepari-Labib, "the personal pronouns which offer a reference for his / her identity" allow for a person to "become a social human being as opposed to the biological being s/he was born" ("Language and Identity" 105). One can legitimately write from the position of the female "I," while being, in reality, a male "I," or as Coetzee does – refer to his old self (identity) as "he" while writing from the position of "I," the author.

With this in mind, Coetzee's oeuvre juxtaposes "the confrontation between the 'I,' the 'You' and the 'Other'" (105). The identity of the written "he" – represents the old narrative "I" he has incorporated, rejected or repositioned, but which he (the one now) does not equal to the "I" who writes, but rather to "Other," the one I am not. Construction of identity, in this way, becomes post-structuralist in fashion, something "achieved through language and through the confrontation of the subject with the Other, and that the reality as we know it is actually a linguistic construct" (110). In other words, Coetzee focuses on the discovery of *I* through the juxtaposition of the *Other*, of what the *I* is not.

We trace this line of thought to Coetzee's critical essay published in 1977 and republished in *Doubling the Point* 1992 – "Achterberg's *Ballade van de gasfitter*: The Mystery of I and You" (*Doubling the Point* 70). David Attwell refers to Coetzee's essay on Achterberg as the beginning of his interest in "patterns of *I* and *You*" (58, emphasis his). Attwell connects this interest to Roman Jakobson "on shifters" and Emile Benveniste "on pronouns" (58), and he refers to this as Coetzee's corpus of work called "poetics of reciprocity" (58). Coetzee analyzes the fluid identity because he believes it is impossible to find a fixed identity to *I* and *you* in the poem:

> Does the poem present us with a single firm identity plus masks of that identity, or is the notion of identity it embodies more complex and fluid? Answers to questions like these, on which critical debate has centered, all depend on our establishing significations for the I and You of the poem. Here, however, I want to begin by asking not what I and You signify but how they signify in the field of language and in the field of the poem; and then to proceed to

> the central symbolism of the poem, the symbolism of gas and the hole. (*Doubling the Point* 70)

Depending on the definition of I and you, the rest of the interpretation ensues. Because of the lack of explanation, however, Coetzee ends up concluding that the identity in this particular poem is "a suspended one" – "that *I* and *You* exist and have their relations in ways still prior to the ways of true names, with their firm significations, or true identities, and that the poem therefore works at, and sometimes absurdly beyond, the borders of language" (75). Meaning that the identity may not be pinned down by language if the signifier and signified remain undetermined.

From this conclusion, the question of the identity of the subject in autobiographical discourse arises: "Coetzee seems especially to be asking questions about the specific characteristics of language. Which different kind of languages are available to us? What can and cannot be achieved by language with respect to the relation of the subject to itself and the regulation of human interaction?" (Buikema 315). Identity in Coetzee also reads as a mere "consequence of the very nature of language, which replaces the real thing with a linguist sign, any identity achieved can in fact only be a fake, a pale shadow and a representation" (Canapari-Labib, "Language and Identity" 114), because the variety of *I*'s can only be read as fictional if authority is necessary and presupposed:

> As a consequence, Coetzee strongly suggests that the Other, just like the 'I,' simply corresponds to a dialectical position constructed by the language of authority spoken by the system, and it is precisely against this that some of his characters consciously try to rebel, not only attempting to disrupt the language of authority they have to submit to, but also, and more fundamentally, trying to evade language as such, thus overcoming the split between signified and signifier. (114-115)

Coetzee creates new meanings and helps spread divergent stories by creating "an awareness of our conventionally coded ways of dealing with the world. It liberates the signifier from entrenched correlations of meaning, provides the work with wings and the attribution of meaning with new and potential coalition partners" (Buikema 318). This means that Coetzee breaks with the language of authority, metafictionally understanding that the existence of authority, on the one hand, presupposes the creation of personal narratives since either someone important, with authority – writes their biography, or someone who establishes rapport and credibility with the reader does so. But, in either case, authority or trustworthiness renders necessary.

On the other hand, Coetzee plays with this idea by making metafictional comments, and he focuses on the broken linkages between signifier and signified to prove autobiography is impossible, while writing one. That, in a nutshell, explains his position on identity as well, just like his characters who evade language (Friday, Lucy), they also speak their identity without using language, but by enacting trauma and denying the collocutor the satisfaction of knowing them completely. Canapari-Labib calls that a *resisting text*: "Owing to their refusal or inability to speak (Coetzee's characters symptomatically have great communication difficulties), all these characters come to stand for the resistant text which opposes the attempts at penetration and categorization enacted by readers" (120).

Not necessarily disagreeing with Canapari-Labib's position, we concur that language is essential in Coetzeeian personal narrative identity struggle and discovery, but we also posit that it is not the only relevant element. Actually, a congruence of Bakhtinian notions of the dialogical self and identities in cooperation, with the idea of positioning and repositioning in the process of writing – come to the fore and make up the body of fluid identity in Coetzee. One must always be aware that Coetzee uses language almost religiously to prove a point and every word matters, but also he focuses on a person's, especially a writer's ability to use language in the repositioning and allowing

that one identity (that of a child, culture, etc.) sets apart from others, as well as disappears when another point is being made. Also, his authorial persona evades a fixed identity by proclaiming he was once John, the boy, but in the moment of writing, he is the writer J. M. Coetzee, and the two identities require different names, tones, and even manners of writing. Such treatment proves repositioning and dialogical self theories.

Coetzee's inability to bring a story to a close in an unambiguous ending is also closely related to language and the concept of power – both fought by many of his characters (see Canepari-Labib, 2000). The fight relates to a refusal of language to lead to a fixed identity (119):

> It is precisely because of this ambiguity that all of Coetzee's novels offer so many possibilities for interpretation and different directions of analysis: they stimulate the reader on different levels, raising various questions; yet, in accordance with the notion of language's perpetual deferral of meaning which Derrida proposed in *Of Grammatology* (1967, 157) they never offer definitive answers. (120)

In interviews elsewhere (*Doubling the Point* 1992), Coetzee has agreed that an ending to one's confessional narrative of any type proves a most difficult challenge. As opposed to a biography done after the physical death of the author, deciding when to end one's story during a life lived seems impossible as it requires lying and choosing one line of the story (one identity) to follow without being able to prove it true. How to end one's self-narrative – "how the problem of *ending* is solved when the tendency of self-consciousness is to draw out confession endlessly" (275), if autobiographical discourse demands resemblance of truth and inventing one's ending would most definitely break with the pretense of telling facts? Coetzee solves this either by omitting all the truth (*Youth*) or by inventing the author has died, and a biographer was writing his story (*Summertime*).[40]

Aside from pronouns and the ending as depositors of identity, we find several types of identity mentioned in Coetzee's conversations with Arabella Kurtz (*The Good Story* 2015), proving either that he believed in the definitions or that he was aware of them as they formed part of the conversation. Arabella Kurtz, in the same book, mentions social identity several times or leaving the "non-work" identity at home to become one of the group in institutions (100-101); this is also referred to as "shared identity" of belonging to a group (112). Additionally, they mention the "historical identity" (176) and a sense of belonging to a nation, with all that might entail, in terms of inherited guilt of belonging to an oppressing nation in Coetzee's case.

While Kurtz remains matter-of-fact, finding a positive note to a shared identity, in music, for example, Coetzee, on the other hand, focuses on identity in groups by equaling it to race and nationalism – exclusively negative notions in his book. He sees group identity in practice, in human history as "*against* other nations" – "a common identity on a negative quality" (117, emphasis his). Submitting one's identity to a group – a pulsing body, disinhibited and alive, above all uncontrollable, to Coetzee, provides only negative examples such as him as a boy misbehaving because he would not be caught individually, or his college students not listening to his teachings in large groups – in other words behaving out of character (145). Group identity used as an excuse for bad actions, of any kind, but mainly as an excuse for loss of inhibitions – Coetzee calls "gang identity" (145):

[40] In *Youth,* Coetzee conveniently just avoids mentioning his wife, children and periods of life he dislikes talking about. We could argue that he does so because they may be irrelevant to the storyline, or that he chooses to protect his privacy contrary to what a biographer may do. Additionally, J. M. C. jump starts his following *autre*-biography, *Summertime*, with his presumed death, beginning and ending his story as he likes, demonstrating overt control over the text and over a death he ultimately will have no say about, thus providing fiction instead of truth-telling. Either way, to the identity of the author, Coetzee has repeated numerous times that the ending of a personal narrative is the most difficult one to write as one does not know when to end a story of one's life except with death (*Doubling the Point,* 1992)

> If I think back carefully to what happened when the gang assembled of an afternoon, it seems to me that we came together as ourselves, as individuals, in our social identities; but then at a certain moment someone said, 'Are we all here?' after which we dropped our real-life identities and became gang members with the made-up identities we were embracing that particular day, bank robbers or outlaws or whatever. We assumed these fictional identities and we confirmed each other in these identities, and thus a group fiction came into being which sustained us through the afternoon." (*The Good Story* 145)

But he does yield one positive example of social identity by differentiating between nationalism and faith. Although both demand a loss of personal identity to the cost of social, still "in this respect the negatively defined nation is different from a faith, where group identity rests on shared beliefs and observances, or from a craft guild, where it rests on each member having passed a set of tests" (117-118). If positively defined, instead of in an "us" versus "them" mentality, he agrees it is useful for people to acquire a social identity.

Now bringing all this back to how may one become more aware of one's identity in personal narration, if not create it completely, we encounter *The Constitution of Selves* (1996), in which Marya Schechtman presents her narrative self-constitution view of personal identity. She even posits that we become persons by creating self-conception that is narrative in form. In this view, until we as personalities account for our own responsibility for past actions – both ours and other peoples', we do not demonstrate identity but belong to an outdated view of identity as something inherited, cultural or innate. The process of taking ownership of personal stories and mistakes renders the narrator an active participant in one's life, instead of a passive receiver of destiny, thus, she believes identity *takes place* in the personal narration of the self. Coetzee also shares this belief – that the process of writing leads to identity discovery:

> Writing reveals to you what you wanted to say in the first place. In fact, it sometimes constructs what you want or wanted to say. What it reveals (or asserts) may be quite different from what you thought (or half-thought) you wanted to say in the first place. That is the sense in which one can say that writing writes us. (*Doubling the Point* 18)

Coetzee goes so far as to claim that the process of writing reveals what we wanted to say in the first place, that writing represents a reciprocal process of discovery – we desire to learn something, and it is discovered to ourselves in the process of writing by clarifying itself and even changing while we narrate. To him, "truth is something that comes in the process of writing, or comes from the process of writing" (18). "I don't see that "straight" autobiographical writing is any different *in kind* from what I have been describing," says Coetzee (18). But I posit that discovering something new about one's identity requires repositioning, negotiating, and a decision whether to make it public or hide from the audience, even the audience of one's mind:

> Whether the confessant yields to the new truth about himself depends on the nature of his commitment to his original confession. The more deeply he has avowed the truth of this confession, the more deeply its truth has become part of his personal identity. Yielding subsequently to the new truth entails damage to that identity. (273)

The simplistic view of ancient criticism would just equate the narrator's identity to the character of the author and fish for similarities and differences as a fact-checking exhibition in personal narratives. However, checking for holes in one's self-narrative is limiting and limited to language. Identity as a social construct still leaves freedom to the individual. The problem with the

outside-the-text fishing expedition, then, has to do with the characteristic of personal narratives, which allows them to be partially correct, as well as connected to the authors' innermost thoughts, thus rendering them beyond the bulletproof check in the outside world.

But how much fiction is too much fiction to personal narratives, and who decides that? Regarding characters, especially the characters of authors that abound Coetzee's oeuvre, there are other methods used to determine the identity of the real author and the character author, such as: finding the ego speaking, an alter ego of the author in question or the ego that had been invented to fit the character. Telling one's life story may be told in terms of "constructing" one's identity as a life-long process. The identity of the author-narrator may speak to his/her personality or identity as s/he recollects it to have been some years ago. Hence, concepts such as constructing or reconstructing identity explain whose identity "matters" more in the self-narrative.

> That the self is socially constructed and contextually variable is not inconsistent with individual freedom and power. That the self may be not only conditioned but in some sense produced by language may challenge our sense of our individual originality and uniqueness, but the resources of the language are vast, and our selves are perhaps more enabled than constrained by their linguistic dimensions. Just as the self may be artifactual without being artificial, autobiography may be fictive without becoming fiction." (Couser 250-251).

Conversely to Eakin, who basically proposes the identity of the real author hides in the overall choice of topics and the whole oeuvre of an author, we encounter Lewis Bagby, who introduces the notion that identities of authors, as well as authorial figures, may be completely fictional (63). In "Playing with Authorial Identities," he describes how Dostoevsky often does "direct authorial discourse" (63) to create intimacy between the character of the "narrator" and the reader. "Authorial persona turns directly to readers of every stripe in the creation of an illusion of direct conversation" (63). In this way, identities of who is speaking become blurred, as readers remain stunned as to whether the author injects him/herself in the narrative by pretending to speak of the "other," or whether the personality of the author bears no resemblance at all to the author.

And the question of identity seems pivotal in defining genres that are blurred. Autofictional pact presupposes the existence of a mixture of reality and fiction, not only noticing it, but welcoming its presence. Sicart says that it is clear in the pact that the "Author, narrator and protagonist share the same nominal identity and whose text […] indicate it is a fiction" (qtd. by Ferreira-Mayers 210). By speaking from a personal perspective and openly so, the author forges a bond with the reader by promising to lie, to tell the story from a subjective perspective (210), thus replacing the autobiographical pact with the autofictional pact.

In other words, if "first-person accounts are identity constituting" then also "third-person interaction with and participation in the act of making the first-person account intelligible" is also aiding identity construction (93). In this case, the narrative is "*co-autobiographical*" (93). Referencing Coetzee's third-person writing about himself as a younger "self," we could conclude that according to Plainticow (2008), it is exactly this technique that co-autobiographically helps him understand the full identity he possesses by discussing the old ones from a third-person generative perspective. What Coetzee uses, a bit innovatively, is the reference to himself as a child, his identity of then, as a "he" – third-person denominating a past identity he no longer identifies with:

> While I hope what I say has some integrity, I see no reason to have any particular respect for it. True or false, it is simply my utterance, continuous with me; whereas what I am doing when I am writing a novel either isn't me or is me in a deeper sense than the words I am now speaking are me. (*Doubling the Point* 205)

Furthermore, if we posit that some authors intend to lie in personal narratives, Bugby further analyzes "authorial trickery" at authors' disposal in the representation or hiding of identities, which is more prominent in personal writing (Bugby 66). For example, he mentions the identification with a child's identity, which Coetzee uses in combination with present tense to mark imminence that would be lost in the past tense narration (66). Furthermore, the "narrating-I" pretending to be "experiencing-I" (66) or writing from the perspective of the *moment of happening* also represents trickery for the readers. In Coetzee's personal narrative, as he is someone who carefully exposes his public persona, commandingly and to an extent he finds pleasant, we must be careful, as he is much closer to autofiction than autobiography in a narrow sense. How would we know, except by inserting personal judgment of genres and knowledge about his life outside the text, if his personae represent anything but his power of imagination? To an extent, an invented identity could best be hidden with interspersed truths. Research then leads in the direction of repetitive leitmotifs and topics of interest, as the best authors in the world have always written what they had known or cared about the most.

Coetzee, who studied Dostoevsky avidly, knows how an author may pen a text from the perspective of "authorial persona (with its twenty-twenty vision of hindsight)" about the author who is "the dramatis persona" and who had experienced all that is being described – all the while considering identity and text as acts "of ventriloquism" without a direct view into the authentic authorial person (69). The authentic persona may not even be available to the real author due to psychological impediments and mechanisms such as forgetting, trauma, and others. As Coetzee explains it, "the author's position is the weakest of all" (*Doubling the Point* 206). Identity changes as well as intentions, so "neither can he claim the critic's saving distance – that would be a simple lie – nor can he pretend to be what he was when he wrote – that is when he was not himself" (206).

Additionally, authorial projections of identity ascribed to the historical author could all together represent the author (Bugby 63-68). Free indirect speech that glides from one character's voice to another without clear demarcation meant for the reader to pick up on is common (63-68). In terms of the former, we perceive in Coetzee a repetitive representation of a professor, scholar and writerly persona that accumulatively, perhaps inscribe him, although it would be dangerous to claim that any one of the characters of Dostoyevsky, JC, Señor C., and others – represent J. M. C. the historical person/author in all his glory. However, perhaps all the characters cumulatively offer a glimpse.

Conversely, Eakin (2001) even goes so far as to say that, with reference to our presumptions about self-narration and identity, all these authorial tricks could be viewed as methods of hiding the true identity of the author but not only from the audience but from one's own cognitive judgment. Namely, he argues that a narrative represents a "cognitive self-experience," meaning that narrative cannot be "merely *about* identity but rather in some profound way a constituent part of identity" ("Breaking Rules" 115). In other words, Eakin posits that the actual "pact" of trustworthiness of a person in life-writing is represented in questions of their identity, which is actually on trial, thus the reader is judging whether the narrator possesses "the prerequisites in our culture for being a person, for having and telling a life story" (114). Somewhat derisively, Eakin posits the question: "What is expected of this individual, as manifested in this self-narration, for him or her to 'count as' a person?" (114).

Prior to Eakin's stance, the identity of an author in personal writing had been questioned from the stance of memory and whether he or she would likely recollect experiences correctly and expose the darkness of one's identity. The reason why this position – that the personality is on trial rather than the truthfulness of the life exposé – represents something groundbreaking in personal narrative, is because it brings to light that the readers have been judging personalities of authors/characters in personal writing. Not merely was it being decided whether authors were trustworthy, but also whether they were worthy of writing their stories, whether they were human enough. Paradoxically, this line of inquiry equals past autobiographies of exceptional people to self-narration of everyday, unexceptional personalities because the judgment, according to Eakin, seems always to have been about whether identities of these individuals were similar enough, or equal in

their exception to everyday human experience, making it trustworthy ("Breaking Rules" 114).[41] Eakin is "approaching autobiography not as a literary genre but instead as an integral part of a lifelong process of identity formation" (114). With that in mind, "narrative is not merely a literary form but a mode of phenomenological and cognitive self-experience" (115) since it is the extended self that anticipates in the narrative of self (115). The extended self refers to a notion of how we narrate our experiences, developed from childhood and corrections to our narrative of past events that we receive in the period:

> The extended self emerges in tandem with autobiographical memory and the acquisition of narrative competence during a particularly rich phase of early childhood development. It is at this time—from the age of roughly two-and-a-half to four—that children are initiated into the narrative practices of their culture; they learn that they are expected to have and to display in narrative form a set of autobiographical memories. (115)

The conclusion Eakin reached refers to three transgressions in self-narrative. He "identifies three primary transgressions—there may be more—for which self-narrators have been called to account: (1) misrepresentation of biographical and historical truth; (2) infringement of the right to privacy; (3) failure to display normative models of personhood" (114). The last one proves that by invoking the authority of witness testimony and claiming that something had happened in front of you personally, you (as a narrator) are also placing your personhood for the trial of trustworthiness. Eakin's conclusion in a study of two cases in which narrators had erred in all three was that the public opinion depended on the perception of the narrator's personality and intention, proving that ultimately personality and identity are on trial in personal narratives.

Finally, all these theories reflect in Coetzee's *autre*-biography, and we will discuss how and to what extent. What for now can be concluded is that the process of self-narration proves essential for identity – not only for the representation but also the discovery of one's identity. "The self may be an integrated whole, rather than a mere repertoire of roles" and this integration takes place "in continuity of consciousness not in consistency of behavior" (Causer 17). If we view the process of personal writing as essential, we concur with Causer in that "internal autobiography" takes place as "identity hangs by a narrative thread" (17). As Coetzee concludes, "identity is not a purely personal matter" as we are not just our private selves but also "caricatures" of our social identities (*Inner Workings* 107).

[41] The way Eakin corroborates this position is by stating two varied examples in life-writing – that of Rigoberta Menchú and Binjamin Wilkomirski (114). Somewhat haphazardly at first glance, although both authors had stretched the truth and even blatantly lied to having witnessed events regarding guerilla fighting and Nazi death camps respectively, one was allowed to get away with it and was even praised for having brought closer a national question to readers, whereas the second one, Wilkomirski, was stripped off his prize. Eakin asks himself about this phenomenon, and what "tacit constraints" (114) in self-narration have led to these "stretching of truth narratives" in otherwise credible individuals. In both testimonies the first rule was broken, they both misrepresented what they could possibly have witnessed at the time, and where they were located during historical events (115-119). Regarding the second transgression, both jeopardized the privacy of people deemed in the wrong, the oppressors, hence it proved irrelevant for public opinion. What tipped the scales then – was element three, their personas as well as intentions. Eakin argues that Menchú's "large-scale facts were accurate even if she was guilty of presenting the testimony of others as her own" (117), whereas Wilkomirski's did not resonate with facts, and he "proved to be an impostor" (117). It appears that motivation was focal in the public's perception, since Menchú was seen as noble, motivated by representing others' stories and voices in order for the oppressed to gain fracture, whereas Wilkomirski was perceived as "delusional" at best and exploitative at worst (117). The punishments given went accordingly to public opinion's perception of their personalities and intentions, thus proving Eakin's claim that personality and identity may be on trial in life narrative.

IV

Coetzee and His *Autre*-biography

IV COETZEE AND HIS *AUTRE*-BIOGRAPHY

4.1 Personal Writing as *Autre*-biography in Coetzee's *Scenes from Provincial Life*: *Boyhood*, *Youth* and *Summertime*

> Has the enterprise of autobiographical writing changed my life? It has certainly changed the story of my life, or rather, since the story before I wrote these two books was rather inchoate and fragmentary, given it a shape it did not have before.
>
> (Coetzee, "All Autobiography is *Autre*-biography" 216)

The very story of one's life, neatly packed and bow-tied for devouring in literary clubs, salons, and bedrooms, cannot but change one's life, or as Coetzee says, "the story" (216) of one's life. All events lived, forgotten, suppressed, and surpassed – emerge for reevaluation and re-writing into the public persona's official (un)masking. How does this affect the life lived? Do we relive the events unraveling in front of the white pages of time; do we simply retell factually as we remember people, places, and events, including breakfast each day and trivia on television? Or do we consciously talk to our old selves and consult what the official stories of our lives should unravel? Does the *"historical I"* reply to the *"lived I"* and help coherently tell all the *fragmentary I's* into place? Coetzee sees the enterprise of writing personal narratives as changing one's story from more fragmentary into a shapelier event, not necessarily changing the life lived but turning the events more coherent (216).

J. M. Coetzee provided his *autre*-trilogy – *Boyhood* (1997), *Youth* (2002), *and Summertime* (2009) with the subtitle *Scenes from Provincial Life*. To this day, publications of all three usually bear the same subtitle, although originally *Youth* was not covered by the same subtitle, and logically so, as it was not set in Africa, but in the cosmopolis of London. The American edition of the said books also had an addendum – *memoir*, which in agreement with Kusek and in light of more recent "genre-bending" theories – no longer seems rational to maintain ("Writing Oneself, Writing the Other" 97). But, since we are well-aware of Coetzee's post-structuralist ideas, let us decipher possible meanings of signifier and signified of the *Scenes from Provincial Life*.

The subtitle *Scenes from Provincial Life* is reminiscent of Russian artists, and a countryside juxtaposed in its tranquility to tumultuous inner lives of characters, settled in seemingly calm, small-town environments in which time stands still. And yet, their internal clocks speed away, their thoughts gather with clouds and their time to ponder leads to the inner discovery of the true self. Since Coetzee's whole oeuvre may be understood as a search for the self, we might not be too far off in imagining Constantin Levin (*Anna Karenina*), Ilya Oblomov (*Oblomov),* or Alyosha Karamazov (*The Brothers Karamazov*)[42] in a book of such name. Heavily influenced by Russians, Coetzee's "provincial life" extrapolates the imagery and the idea of rich inner lives nurtured in slow-paced communities – if we replace a Russian countryside with an African province, the idea becomes even more poignant.

Essentially, *Boyhood* and *Summertime* do take place in provinces, whereas *Youth* is set in 1960s London but covered by the same publication/intention without the same subtitle (Kusek 2012; Kossew 2011). What immediately comes to mind regarding possible inspirations for the subtitle *Scenes from Provincial Life*, with self-referentiality and metafiction in mind, is Balzac's *The Human Comedy: Scenes from provincial life* (1893). Although Balzac also wrote about scenes from Parisian life, military life, private life, and other areas, unlike Coetzee, he does represent an author whose characters live on in other books and sequels. Young John transforms from his cocooned and over-nurtured brat life (in *Boyhood*) into a man forgiving and nurturing towards his elderly, once-hated father (in S*ummertime*), so there is the notion of sequel and interconnection between

[42] These famous Russian characters have come to symbolize rich inner lives, even revolutionary thoughts in apparent regular personalities as observed from the outside: Levin – politics, Oblomov – infinite potential fraught with laziness and Alyosha – idealism.

characters/protagonist in the trilogy and the atmosphere of growing up and appearing across worlds. Balzac also created metafictional worlds, similar to those Elizabeth Costello inhabits, in which characters make appearances across novels to render a seemingly wholesome experience of inhabiting reality.

Other references to the subtitle include Tolstoy and his *Childhood, Boyhood,* and *Youth* (1964), clearly similar in title, and due to Coetzee's love of Russian writers quite possibly mirrored in his work (Valkenberg). Such is Tolstoy's *Boyhood*, perhaps the best of the trilogy, that we may draw similarities to Coetzee in topic and wealth of inner lives of two protagonists respectively, who both "think" vividly and recollect ironically, albeit somewhat disappointed and knowing beyond their age. Tolstoy's derogatory and self-derogatory tone aimed at his failure and his unhappy marriage life choices does echo Coetzee's sometimes ill-founded speech of the self. So the similarity is drawn in tone for the most part.

Finally, William Cooper (Harry S. Hoff originally) is also mentioned because of his *Scenes from Provincial Life* (1950) title (Kossew, "Scenes from Provincial Life" 12). I would exclude his influence on Coetzee because of the comical tone in this autobiography. Cooper's protagonist enforces comedy, and Coetzee cannot be said to "approve" or replicate the tone as such. His character of John may rather be described as a "tortured artist" than comical, child-like, or funny in any way. Edele went so far as to say that "Coetzee's portrait of hypersensitive youth is extraordinarily bleak, but wrenchingly honest" (178), and as such, there is nothing comical about him. Kusek mentions both the aforementioned William Cooper and George Eliot's *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857) ("Writing Oneself, Writing the Other" 102), but, again, Coetzee proves in his essays, his interests have always been leaning more towards the Russians.[43]

With regards to the use of third-person singular in *autre*-biography and possible literary models preceding Coetzee, Margaret Lenta attributes its use in personal narration (autobiographies and instructed biographies) as a method to appear objective and historically accurate. She draws a parallel between Caesar's dispatches to the Roman Senate and Lord Harvey's references to himself as just another character in George II's court (Lenta 158-159) to demonstrate this invention had some literary tradition. Having been written centuries before Coetzee's *autre*-biography, to Lenta's mind, these works predicate a connective streak and tradition of impartiality Coetzee was leaning on. Despite the fact it had no specific name, this tradition demarcated a specific use – "protagonist, who must never appear his advocate" (159). The presentation of oneself as heroic, as well as the temporal difference since Caesar, writes immediately and Coetzee decades apart from the events – differ. Otherwise, a connection can be drawn in terms of style (159).

Inevitably, due to their common ground in depicting the "growing pains" of an artist in the making, Derek Attridge says *Youth* often gets compared to James Joyce's *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* ("J. M. Coetzee's Boyhood" 79).[44] There is clearly mirroring in self-deprecating tones towards the self, but Coetzee himself said he was never too intrigued by Joyce because he seemed too limitedly interested in Ireland instead of the human condition overall (*Youth* 199).[45] Despite his proclaimed disinterest in James Joyce,[46] Coetzee did use *Ulysses* as inspiration for *Elizabeth Costello* in an ultimate intertextual text, "The House on Eccles Street," which was originally his lecture.

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[43] See Attridge's "J. M. Coetzee's Boyhood, Confession and Truth" (79-93), Lenta's "*Autre*biography: J. M. Coetzee's *Boyhood* and *Youth*" (158-159) and Sheehan's "The Disasters of Youth: Coetzee and Geomodernism" (23-24) for more on possible influences for the title and style of *Scenes from Provincial Life*.

[44] Similarly, in different researchers we have encountered possible interpretations of possible inspirations for Coetzee, but found them not substantiated enough to include in the paper: *The Education of Henry Adams* and *Madam Bovary: Moeurs de Province* (1857) (Attridge, "J. M. Coetzee's *Boyhood*" 79-93); Ezra Pound's "Provincialism is the Enemy" (Sheehan, "The Disasters of 'Youth'" 23) etc.

[45] Coetzee's character John says this of Joyce: "He admires Joyce, he can even recite passages from *Ulysses* by heart... But Joyce is too bound up with Ireland and Irish affairs to be in his pantheon," however, I take this with some reservations as it is uttered by a character, be it in *autre*-biography.

[46] See "An Interview with J. M. Coetzee," 848-849, by Lawrence Rainey et al. for Coetzee's ideas on "language sensibility" that is communal and by that effect impossible to be coded by someone from South Africa (or somewhere else). This argument is originally said of Beckett, but it extends to his opinions on Joyce as an Irishmen as well.

Essentially, a made-up character named Elizabeth Costello "recast *Ulysses* – which recast *The Odyssey*" through an invented character of "Molly Bloom who, of course, Joyce made up" (Briggs 11). So, an ode to intertextuality by Coetzee who re-wrote his lecture as a lecture by an imaginary character, after which he sings in a voice of a fictional character another author originally penned (Coetzee» Costello» Joyce» Ulysses» Odyssey). But, the surprising part remains that Coetzee first writes in his own words, and intertextuality follows:

> We know that Coetzee's openness to dialogue with other writers is part of his creativity, but the other side of this coin is that the process of invention is thoroughly autotelic; which is to say, the intertextuality doesn't precede, but *follows* the process of invention. (Attwell, "Reading the Coetzee Papers" 376)

In other words, Coetzee initiates the conversation with the masters after he has achieved some resemblance of a text that speaks to him. Only after attaining his original intention, even if his text's "point of departure" is in "a prior, canonical work" (376), Attwell argues the dialogue with the canonical texts takes place after his process of invention. In the case of *Youth*, the comparison to Joyce stands in terms of third-person narrative and deprecating tone, but similarities to Joyce may be drawn especially to Elizabeth Costello's intertextual inspirations.

Finally, as Coetzee has more than once asked about genre and audience's inability to leave texts "hoovering" in-between genres (Briggs 11),[47] *Scenes from Provincial Life* was abbreviated as "memoir." Highly encouraged by the publisher, it was meant to be read as an accurate interpretation of an aging author's private life. The note "memoir" was placed on the back cover of the book in a blurb (Kusek 103). Due to Coetzee's views on interpretation – that it should be open and left to the reader, it is doubtful this was done to his encouragement,[48] but rather as a method to boost sales.

In conversations with Paul Auster, Coetzee clarifies interpretation as the right of each individual. The "difference on the issue of interpretation (what a written text means or can be said to mean) closely mirrors the theological difference between Christian fundamentalists and their progressive opponents, and no doubt differences within other text-based religions like Judaism and Islam" (*Here and Now* 200). In other words, what the author of the text meant and the interpretation of the said text may yield limitless options or limited only by the number of interpreters. It is the context, and only the context that provides meaning – "My own feeling is that the spectacle of scholars (or judges) trying to tease out what two-thousand-year-old texts have to say about stem cell research is more than a little comical" (200). Interpretations deserve context, otherwise, they lose merit because of the public agenda of the hour. This context failed in placing "memoir" on the book because it completely disregarded Coetzee's *autre*-biography.

Pushing *Boyhood* as a *memoir* was money-driven at the time (1997). By annotating *memoir* to the title, the publisher wanted to tease out increased sales of the book written by a notoriously private author to boost the audience's expectation of "airing dirty laundry" straight from the horse's mouth. Patrick Hayes highlights "profiles and marketing agendas" ("Book Review" 28) as something relevant for genre theory in Coetzee. What *Scenes from Provincial Life* provided was an issue of marketing. It unequivocally felt autobiographical, which sealed the deal – it had most of the original names intact and it dealt with the character/author's childhood thoughts. In a definition of memoir, we are provided with clarification, as memoir is "a written record of a usually famous person's own life and experiences" ("memoir" *Cambridge Dictionary*) or "a written account of someone's life, a place, or an event, written by someone who knows it well" ("memoir" *Oxford Lerner's Dictionary*).

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[47] "So Coetzee said in remarks preliminary to his reading at Hamilton College, Nov. 2, 2001. When his publisher asked whether *Youth* should be listed as fiction or non-fiction, Coetzee said that he replied, 'Does it matter? Can't it just hover in the space in between?' The book was merchandised as a memoir." (Briggs 11)

[48] See *Doubling the Point* for Coetzee's ideas on interpretation and reading into a character and out of his words, 173-174. He also does not comment on his work, which is widely known and accepted, because it is up to the reader and the critics to perform this task, so it is unlikely he would have printed an interpretation onto a book cover.

It also requires the person to be famous, relevant, or intriguing for readers, but unfortunately, genre-wise, it does not qualify because it renders all Coetzee's previous work on authorial trickery – irrelevant.

The trilogy is written from a third-person perspective, autofictional and openly discursive of power tactics and authorial trickery – so it inevitably falls under *autre*-biography. We may note that as books progress, from *Boyhood*, *Youth* to *Summertime* each one becomes increasingly more playful in narratological techniques. Thus, we concur with Kusek it should be classified as "intimate conversations Coetzee is having with himself, or, to be more precise, the multiple alter egos that he invents for the purpose of his fiction" ("Writing oneself, Writing the Other" 100). Conversations with one's self (or as many selves as cacophonous s voices of one's present and past allow) represent personal writing and more clearly, *autre*-biography or writing about one of your past selves in retrospect.

All three books demonstrate individualism and can be read separately or one after the other. Somewhat unusually, this proves that chronological order takes a back seat compared to each book "being a unity" onto itself. Since events are chosen into his selective manner of chronologizing one's growing pains, "empty spaces" emerge more clearly than in other types of writing. With no resemblance of unity, gap years between sequels provoke wonder into methodology and reasoning behind choosing certain "scenes" from life at the detriment of others – how did Coetzee determine what events to include and exclude? Life does not get organized in an orderly fashion because that makes for good writing, but the author, unlike a biographer, handpicks information s/he deems interesting for the "story."

Prior to the *autre*-biographical trilogy, Coetzee's novels heavily depended on the masters such as Dostoevsky, Defoe, Kafka, Beckett, Elliot, Pound, and others. Coetzee purposefully points to the fact that even great authors whose work will live forever must be reexamined because of the blind spots their work foregrounds these days. He does so by reevaluating, re-writing, and redoing the classics, questioning the dominant voices in light of new theories of feminism and postcolonial studies. His subversion of the greats' traditions sheds light on innovative struggles within the realms of feminism, poststructuralism, identity, the dialogical self, and many other postmodern topics he decided to revive. As Janes so metaphorically puts it, his work up until his *autre*-fiction revives the dead's poetry innovatively in order to highlight changes in society – "it plunders the tradition, and carries on" (118). As long as he is "snatching the phrases" his "occupants need from the limp pages of the dead" (118), he is relying heavily on his predecessors.

Something original takes place in his *autre*-biography, however, if we juxtapose it to the work preceding. In *Scenes from Provincial Life,* he relies heavily on the critical tradition in personal/autobiographical writing, but since he even needs a new genre name for what he has created, that in itself represents a feat. "The endless spiral of confession" is suggested to end by forgiving oneself instead of providing the reader the power to forgive – "acceptance and authority" prove invaluable (D'Hoker 37). The authority in the story of *Foe* passes on to Friday the marginalized, as Susan Barton who despises the authority of men (Cruso,[49] Dafoe, and Coetzee by extension who write *her* story), decides to stop passing on the mistreatment she has endured and let Friday tell his story, or tell anything he likes. Thus, she prevents appropriation from spreading, and Coetzee essentially uses her character to shed light on doubly, triply marginalized – Susan has no voice unless a white man writes her into existence (as a woman), and Friday too, but even more poignantly as mute (tongueless), black and slave. Since a confession is ended by authority, we learn that if not God or the reader, then the author or narrator has to finish the story, provide a voice, lend authority. All expressions point to the view that authority is a gift some people have and some do not, but those who have it also have the moral obligation to share it with those who do not. In a bleak twist, just to prove his realist streak, Coetzee steals back authority from Susan and ends in an omniscient voice – stating that authority is rarely given away once you have it.

[49] Coetzee's original spelling Cruso instead of Crusoe will be kept if we discuss *Foe*, and the other spelling will be introduced if we discuss Daniel Dafoe's original book *Robinson Crusoe*.

The ultimate authority in *autre*-biography resides in subjectivity. Irrelevant to whether correct or incorrect, the promise of truth given by the protagonist must be trusted since Coetzee suffocates all other voices by limiting any dialogues to a minimum in *Boyhood*. *Youth* is no different, but *Summertime* depicts monologues as ultimate authorities. The interviewees are given more credibility than the "deceased" author's journals because the biographer supposes they are less vested in lying. Authority is questioned by the reader, and no one but the reader, because Coetzee's tales of a "provincial life" may only be corroborated by other voices, which he silences in the previously mentioned ways in order to highlight subjectivity. Namely, in *autre*-biography, everybody is correct in their opinion or memory of the protagonist.

Coetzee's texts are most often placed under the "referential pact" scrutiny, especially these self-narratives, because that is easier than to believe everyone is correct. Usually, the texts do not endure this scrutiny, and in the table provided, it is offered how *autre*-biography has failed this test of complete reference to the world outside it. It depicts the periods covered and the overall organization of the books, as well as how they fail the test of direct referentiality:

Table 2
Scenes from Provincial Life: *Boyhood*, *Youth* and *Summertime* as organized by the "real" author J. M. C.

	Boyhood	***Youth***	***Summertime***
Covers period	1940-1955	1959-1964	Post mortem
Narrator	J. M. C. in retrospect	J. M. C. in retrospect	J. M. C. through notebooks, biographer Vincent, and interviewees: 1. Adriana Nascimento, 2. Julia Frankl, 3. Sophie Denoël, 4. Margot Jonker, 5. Martin.
Protagonist	John the boy	John the programmer	J. M. C. the deceased
Tense	Present	Present	Various: notebooks depict present and interviews past tenses
Missing information "empty spaces"	1. Anybody else's opinions and perspectives but his own 2. Dialogues	1. His brother 2. His marriage to Phillipa Juber 3. MA from Cape Town (1963)	1. His two children 2. His brother 3. Death of his mother took place 8 years later

Scenes from Provincial Life create new pathways of referentiality between authors and characters, thus, uncharted territory is not meant to endure the test of reference or the test of

real/historical 'I' and the narrated 'I' (Smith and Watson 58-68). In a "third-person autobiography" later on called "heterodiegetic autobiography" as defined by Lejeune (Kusek, "Author in Time" 167), unearthing pathways between one's own sense of self-referentiality and the truth is the point of the entire enterprise. The power struggle in authorship between author/character's ultimate prevailing I – proves essential in its postmodernity, responding to the time's beliefs on truth and self-representation. Thus, referentiality can be proven or disproven; it can even be forgiven if it is missing as long as it has an innovative twist and experimental usage in the auto-self/writing. Similar to gratuitous violence and nudity, anything goes if it embellishes and/or proves useful to the story.

How many of his views echo true, if he maintains a narrative in characteristically third-person narrative, we may never definitively know. Derek Attridge, one of Coetzee's most important researches even raises the question "is confession possible in the third person and in the present tense?" ("J.M. Coetzee's *Boyhood*" 80). I believe not only possible but perhaps even more honest as the authors unveil the truth about themselves as if speaking of another. They are simply more removed from the self. In light of the distance, more essential truth dispersed with episodes of brutal honesty and even disgust emerge out of the woodworks. My claim is that Coetzee's thoughts on writing, i.e., everything we write writes us back (*Doubling the Point* 17), should be taken as read. Here follows an example of how he appropriates his varied memories and fictionalizes them into his autobiographical discourse.

In the short story "A House in Spain" Coetzee provides some views on property: "Once he put a house behind him, he became quite incurious about its fate. More than incurious. He wanted never to see it again" (68). Having ridden a bicycle through the Catalan area, Coetzee did visit the area in real life, and he capitalizes on the readers' awareness of this. The conversation he is providing here refers to the readers' referential ability to connect Coetzee's life outside the text and the text itself. In a characteristic literary manipulation, he uses the ruse of the correct information from his personal life to confuse the reader – the narrator mentions being a writer, having two wives, being in his fifties, and being fastidious about language (68). Despite this, there is no reason to doubt he had written honestly about the property in Spain that never was. If he had it, that is how he would spend his days, so texts always refer back to the author, one way or another. So, the insistence on referentiality proves helpful in creating a ruse of reality when there is none in autre-biography, backfiring the original intention.

Coetzee arrives at the specific confessional tone in *Scenes from Provincial Life*, which he is lauded for, through experimentation in his novels. Several attempts at confessional/semi-autobiographical writing in J. M. C.'s novels before the trilogy form a part of this "substantial subgenre of the contemporary novel" (D'Hoker 31). They can be considered a precursor of life-writing in South Africa due to the technique of metafictional semi-detached alter-ego characters and their confessions done on a larger scale. In *Dusklands* (1974) a world inhabited by Coetzee's alter-ego representations takes place in the form of Jacobus Coetsé as his distant cousin the historical person; Jacobus Coetzee, the character; S.J. Coetzee, the editor; J.M. Coetzee, the author of *Dusklands*. Such interplay of worlds only continues in the future. David Attwell researches *Age of Iron* and *Master of St. Petersburg* as Coetzee's subsequent novels in which he was initially reworking the relationship with his mother and death of his son, respectively. The proof of this is also found in the manuscripts of these texts (Attwell, "A Life in Research" 258-261). "I discovered in the manuscripts just how autobiographical his writing often is. It was astonishing for me to see this," says Attwell (258).

So, why study *Scenes from Provincial Life* separately if almost everything mentioned can be found in his novels as well? The technique of writing about the self in the third person has been done before, and everything Coetzee technically does has been done previously with the text, however, he is able to elevate that to another level with his vast knowledge of criticism. His *autre*-biography essentially reads like a manual of how *not to do* a biography, but it engages the reader with the text, and it is intriguingly unputdownable. The creative process involved in order to reach that level of text manipulation in a confession was developed for years in novels and his critical work, but when he turned the spotlight on himself – it truly became masterful. Previously discussed elements of his

essential contributions to authorship studies, memory, identity in personal narratives all come together in *autre*-biography, which is his invention in name and particular stylistic choices of voice, person, tense, and tone.

Not all heroes wear capes, and sometimes it is difficult to decipher the innovative from experimental, however, *autre*-biography is an exciting read as opposed to being utilitarian or just untried and innovative. All heroes (protagonists) are textual, but not all texts are worth the heroics. Coetzee has no doubt that the "distinction between textual and real heroes in fiction" is questionable (*Doubling the Point* 206), but he provides an essential distinction between his texts and others'. His process of alienation and himself as Other proves "all heroes in fiction are textual; only some fictions are more self-conscious than others about their own textuality" (206), meaning self-referentiality is key to the confessional enterprise of this trilogy. Since he admits he is a protagonist, a fictional hero belonging to the text, then Coetzee-the-writer must also be encountered in the text so we can understand the underlying difference. Who is Coetzee's writerly identity, and how does it feel to interact with him in *Scenes from Provincial Life* as opposed to the protagonist?

4.1.2 How It Feels to Read *Scenes from Provincial Life*: Coetzee's Writerly Identity and Narrative Choices

How does it feel to have a "dialogue" with Coetzee the writer of *autre*-biography? *Autre*-biographies feel like emotional confessions of a deep-seated introvert, coming out to himself in the only way he knows how to appease his public persona, which is by burying his innermost feelings in meta-ramblings about the language, philosophy, and psychology of the self. In a way, these self-narratives represent Coetzee's impotence to take the world, and himself, at face value because he tries to control and re-write history. Despite feeling there is more bubbling under the surface, the reader does encounter the "essential" truth about Coetzee but even more so about his creative processes in his metafictional didactics on the creative process. Therein lies the true value of *autre*-biography, in the discovery of Coetzee's creative processes applicable to his entire oeuvre.

Infamous for being too private, difficult to work with, obsessed with doing interviews in writing in order to exert control over all "his" texts, Coetzee's *autre*-biography is different in that is much more emotionally charged and uncensored than previously thought. David Attwell points to this interesting phenomenon in Coetzee's mythology as an unapologetic recluse, which bears only a resemblance to reality because, as he jokingly says, Coetzee "does a lot of interviews for somebody who doesn't do interviews" ("A Life in Research" 253). J. M. Coetzee admits aversion towards interviews, he says "my general irritability and uncooperativeness with interviewers" proves that "[w]riters are used to being in control of the text and don't resign it easily" (*Doubling the Point* 65). But there is more to it than that, essentially the medium itself is inadequate for him as "[s]peech is not a fount of truth, but a pale and provisional version of writing," says Coetzee (65-66). Interviews he does agree to do are performed in writing.

Despite being aloof if unfamiliar with the interviewer, Coetzee is sometimes on the verge of being non-responsive even with acquaintances.[50] His reasoning correlates with my impression, which is that his "resistance is not only a matter of protecting a phantasmatic omnipotence" (65) but a matter of finding an equilibrium in numerous countervoices. He is unable to do this editing, the quiet reevaluation of multiple writerly and character voices in speech:

[50] Famously he is said to have mortified a colleague, Joanna Scott, with delayed responses in a written interview that resulted in her not meeting a deadline for the *Paris Review* (Akins par. 7). Despite the rewriting of the interview for a subsequent publication, the urban legend remains and some televised interviews testify to his change of tone and general disposition if unwilling to respond.

> Writing is not free expression. There is a true sense in which writing is dialogic: a matter of awakening the countervoices in oneself and embarking upon speech with them. It is some measure of a writer's seriousness whether he does evoke/invoke those countervoices in himself, that is, step down from the position of what Lacan calls "the subject supposed to know." Whereas interviewers want speech, a flow of speech. That speech they record, take away, edit, censor, cutting out all its waywardness, till what is left conforms to a monologic ideal. (*Doubling the Point* 65)

Having thought something through, Coetzee proceeds towards relentless editing expeditions in order to produce final drafts. The final versions render more of a public persona image and a calculated appearance rather than the most dominant voice of the original first version, and it is done this way on purpose. He searches for his voice from the original to the last version. His first version of texts appears as an emotional reel, which is entirely unexpected. Then through numerous countervoices and perspectives, he stumbles, like all writers, towards finalized texts.

His process patterns also shed light on the fact that he had written in the same way previously in his novels (*Age of Iron*, *Master of Petersburg*) but edited them out to oblivion afterward to hide the underlying emotion. To "evoke/invoke those countervoices in himself" is a matter of the seriousness of the author towards his craft (65), says Coetzee, so it is no surprise to discover that he takes his craft to the extreme and does almost all interviews, novels and personal narratives in numerous versions (only *Slow Man* is said to have 25 versions). The feel of his *autre*-biography, then, rests on finalizing texts one step before the novels, as there is a more emotional feel to them as if Coetzee had not finished editing to the fullest extent of his private persona's abilities.

David Attwell proves this in his research on patterns in Coetzee's creative process. By going back to the source and the manuscripts, Attwell was able to draw his own conclusions. Knowing the man himself helped, of course.[51] Having left the US in 1972 for the University of Cape Town, Coetzee, the unwilling exile, donated post facto his legacy of manuscripts in gratitude to the University of Texas. These hand-written mines of possible interpretation still ignite interest and get exhibited from time to time. They definitely form an important legacy for the University of Texas as well as all interested scholars who flock there, given the financial liberty to do so. In that Texan library, "The Harry Ransom Center," the proof of Coetzee's emotional approach to meaningful and heart-wrenching personal prose lies in wait. Light on the luggage or confident of his imminent fame, he left the excess memories behind for posterity.

Rummaging through the baggage, Attwell offers powerful insights into Coetzee's creative process, which he calls research into Coetzee's "literary genesis" ("A Life in Research" 258).[52] In the intellectual biography *J. M. Coetzee and the Life of Writing: Face to Face with Time* (2015), Attwell focused on Coetzee's ideas and how they had shaped the man's creative process, instead of writing a biography on the man himself (like Kannemeyer's factual biography). The reviewed manuscripts (Attwell was able to lay his hand on) comprised of everything written up to and including *Elizabeth*

[51] Coetzee was Attwell's MA thesis supervisor, because of which at the age of 30 Attwell tried to interview him for his PhD, which failed, but he still ended up writing a thesis on Coetzee and doing his interview. Coetzee was intrigued by a disagreement in opinions they had about the topic of Attwell's thesis as he was trying to contextualize Coetzee in the South African domain and historical reading, something Coetzee notoriously denies about his novels as most essential to his writing. Because of this disagreement Coetzee proposed a series of interviews between them, in writing, that ended up published as *Doubling the Point* (see Attwell, "A Life in Research" 253-255). I personally love this anecdote because it scratches the surface into Coetzee's personality and shows he thrives on disagreement and chooses his company really carefully. His ego may come through as dominant in a lot of his texts, but real-life anecdotes speak volumes about his ability to rain in his ego and enjoy intellectual disagreement.

[52] See Attwell, David. "'A Life in Research' with J. M. Coetzee: An Interview with David Attwell." Interviewed by Michela Borzaga. *Life Writing*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2015, pp. 251-263, DOI: 10.1080/14484528.2015.1053031, 267-261.
———. *J. M. Coetzee and the Life of Writing: Face to Face with Time*. Text Publishing, 2015, 137-163.
———. "Reading the Coetzee Papers." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 58, no. 4, U Texas P, 2016, pp. 374-377. *ProQuest*, DOI: 10.7560/TSLL58403, 374-377.

Costello, meaning the early fiction and personal writing up to the year 2003 and the publication of the said novel (Attwell, "A Life in Research" 258).

Most surprisingly, all manuscripts initially depict Coetzee's "anguish" as it "pours into page" (259), then slowly "these passages become less personalised and he introduces fictional elements" (259). Compelled from within and ushered foreword by a nagging voice trying to break through the personal, the perspective changes. Coetzee begins to fictionalize another voice, more removed, more writerly as the drafts progress so that in the end, the manuscripts represent an idea and linguistic phenomena towering over the emotion he was initially trying to work through on a personal level. Coetzee's process of creation reveals "[h]e really does pour himself into them and the shaping comes afterwards" (260). Coetzee revises little, rather redoes the same topics until they make sense.

In another article, "Reading the Coetzee Papers," Attwell summarizes all his research of Coetzee's mentioned manuscripts:

> In the context of Coetzee criticism, I would speak of four surprises in the papers – The first is about impersonality. For a writer who is so famously guarded, who polemicizes against the idea of fiction being a straightforward expression of selfhood, Coetzee's manuscripts reveal him to be much more autobiographical than we would have imagined. With few exceptions, the provocations are experiential; the confessional impulse is as strong as the tendency toward self-masking. (375)

So, the key idea here is the comparison between "the confessional impulse" and "the tendency toward self-masking" that are equally strong, whereas criticism mainly argued that authorial trickery in Coetzee dominated any emotional impulse. The "movement away from the intuitions of a writer responding to the world, and toward an almost scientific analysis of the subjects under scrutiny" (Phillips 65) occurs post facto and is written into as a technique. The emotional streak comes out of the texts also because they remain hand-written. Attwell says: "He writes almost every day and every entry is hand-written. He's an incredibly diligent writer. The personal discipline is quite extraordinary. The drafts become electronic much later, in the early 2000s" ("A Life in Research" 261).

It is this personal touch to the manuscripts that reveals the private persona, as it feels journal-like. Following the surprising emotional surge to his narratives, the second element discovered from the manuscripts relates to Coetzee's lack of planning and note-taking, as he has a specific goal of reaching subjectivity and self-directedness of the text. "An acute and at times even debilitating self-consciousness" (Attwell, "Reading the Coetzee Papers" 375) comes about as a product of Coetzee's uncertainty with the direction the text would take. Loose structure and very little planning in his initial writing allow us to interpret it as a confessional surge:

> The second lesson is about uncertainty, already touched on. Coetzee's control over the representation of subjectivity is essential to what is most compelling in his fiction, but it emerges from the papers that this control is an outcome of managing persistent insecurity. (375)

The next step in his creative process relies on metafiction. "Contrary to widely held opinion, Coetzee's metafiction is not developed programmatically" (376). Instead of artificial inferences about language or "general statements" about fictionality, Atwell connects this incessant need to self-reflect to "a matter of bearing witness to the self in the act of writing" (376). This "existential impulse to bring self-consciousness about the process into the writing itself" (376) manifests itself in the process of writing and questioning of the self, observing oneself scientifically and almost through a microscope. This procedure feels unnatural, so if we talk about how it feels to read Coetzee's *autre-*

biography, it inevitably must be mentioned it feels overtly conscious about the consciousness of writing. Simultaneously the reader feels confused by all the questions about one's inner world and overwhelmed to choose a stream of consciousness whom to trust. In the process of writing, this is how it comes about:

> Typical questions that he poses in the notebooks are, for example, "Where in this work is there room for *me*?" or in more sophisticated form, "When is this book going to achieve self-consciousness?" In the course of writing *Waiting for the Barbarians* in 1978, he read Robert Alter's *Partial Magic: The Novel as Self-Conscious Genre*, and recorded the following: "I have been reading Robert Alter on the self-conscious novel. He correctly observes that the important question is *why* the novel should be self-conscious. His answer is that the self-conscious novel is aware of impermanence and death in a way that realism cannot be." (Attwell, "Reading the Coetzee Papers" 376)

Coetzee remains skeptical that realism can capture the nuisances of one's mind under scrutiny in the process of writing unless the writer remains self-conscious throughout the process. "The self-conscious novel is aware of impermanence and death" (375) because it is constantly aware of the self in the moment of writing. The psychological trickery at play, trying to promote the self-masking and protect the fragile ego if exposed, Coetzee calls it "anti-illusionism" (*Doubling the Point* 27) and equates it to a common practice in postmodernism:

> Illusionism is, of course, a word I use for what is usually called realism. The most accomplished illusionism yields the most convincing realist effects. Anti-illusionism – displaying the tricks you are using instead of hiding them – is a common ploy of postmodernism. But in the end there is only so much mileage to be got out of the ploy. Anti-illusionism is, I suspect, only a marking of time, a phase of recuperation, in the history of the novel. The question is, what next? (27)

This anti-illusionism represents a "distinctive Coetzean touch, so to speak, and it arises as a result of a relentless revision" (Attwell, "A Life in Research" 259). Reading Coetzee's *autre*-biography also feels like his last quoted sentence – "The question is, what next?" (*Doubling the Point* 27). During incessant revisions and exposures of his anti-illusionism techniques, everywhere except in *Scenes from Provincial Life* "he writes himself and the immediate historical situation of South Africa out of the text, except that the core of feeling that was there from the beginning, remains intact" (Attwell, "A Life in Research" 259). Caryl Phillips confirms this "geographical anonymity" to Coetzee's fiction (62). In Coetzee's words – "The room in which my fictional action takes place is a pretty bare place, an empty cube, in fact; I import a sofa only if it turns out to be needed" (*Here and Now* 193).

Scenes from Provincial Life differ in this aspect. Despite the general feel of the unknown, readers in *autre*-biographies are aware of the locus. The geographical location follows the biographical data from the outside of the text. But the manuscripts allow us to infer Coetzee sometimes removes the locus because it is too emotionally charged, not because it represents a ploy of some kind. Self-referentiality champions "the absorption, in radical metafiction, of reference into the act of writing, so that all one is left with on the page is a trace of the process of writing itself" (Coetzee, *Doubling the Point* 203-204). So reading Coetzee always points to the writing Coetzee, absorbed in the process, revealing his tricks. Having reveled in one's thoughts, he puts them to paper, and truth is liberated about the self – "truth is related to silence, to reflection, to the practice of writing" (65-66), once again confirming the process of writing as arrival to the truth.

Scenes from Provincial Life provide a glimpse of the ultimate truth about the author who reveals his "underlying motive to tell an essential truth about the self" (252). This essential truth may

merely be subjective, we as readers have to settle with trickery and the subjective truth about the creative process. *Autre*-biography is revealed as metafictional speech to the self (the author's self to the protagonist's self) in search of a unifying identity. Third-person self-referencing provides the emotional distance Coetzee requires to tap into the fallible memories of identity in creation. Pseudo-characters further enable him to approach this subjective question for heeling in the confession, but also castigating and chastising his old self for not knowing any better, for not doing better. The "empty spaces" provide a bubble for the reader to creep into the self-narrative and finish the story or the interpretation of Coetzee's various scenes from life, handpicked and hand-excluded. If one sentence can summarize the difference of Coetzee-the-writer from Coetzee-the-protagonist of this trilogy, it is that the moment he made choices to exclude someone and some events, he became the writer focused on the plot twist and privacy rights rather than the protagonist. If his humanity and likability are on trial, like in all autobiographies, then they reside in the "empty spaces" and choices he makes to protect the lives of people still alive and close to him. *Scenes from Provincial Life* show the procedures he utilized to do just that – expose the public persona of J. M. C., call him to account for his life and art, and hide the people John loves.

4.2 *Boyhood* – John Before the Artist

> I too had a childhood that – in parts – seems ever more entrancing and miraculous as I grow older. Perhaps that is how most of us come to see our childhood selves with a gathering sense of wonder that there could once have been such an innocent world, and that we ourselves could have been at the heart of that innocence.
>
> (Coetzee, *Doubling the Point* 29)

A remarkable discovery took place in 2014 after Coetzee had put his apartment up for sale in Cape Town – photographs of his childhood and boyhood years, pertinent to *autre*-biography – emerged abandoned in a box there. These "sheafs of yellowing prints that depicted 'scenes from provincial life'" (Farago 1) got left behind, be it for some reason or none at all. Apparently, the new life he had begun (in Australia) required no reminders or undeveloped negatives in order to be turned into personal writing. What they testified was that Coetzee chose a different age for John's "life scenes" in the personal writing, since these photographs depict John as a committed teenage photographer at the age of 15 or 16 (in 1955-56), a few years older than the John of *Boyhood* (who is 10-13). The fact that photographs laid abandoned in boxes of his African apartment also offers insight into John-the-boy as well as Coetzee-the-aging-artist: the first one adamant at cultivating his talents and love of imagery we have had the pleasure of repetitively hearing about in Coetzee's life-long interviews, and the latter much more functional and decidedly cold towards his cobwebbed memories.

What the boxes did not reveal was any kind of determinate settlement on the question of genre. The debate on the genre of *Boyhood* is still alive and well, although recently three theories have arisen as most prominent: nonfiction (Edele 178), autofiction, and "memoir" (179). While I do agree that the beauty of *Boyhood* and what makes it "so engrossing is that it reads like a novel" (179), still it represents a culmination of genre theory and should not be minimized by being read as a referential text only. Kusek declares that a reading of *Boyhood* in any single genre would prove erroneous as he was able to connect it to multiple depending on the interpretation – "autobiographics (L. Gilmore), autofiction (S. Doubrovsky), heterobiography (P. Lejeune), otobiography (J. Derrida), and periautography (J. Olney)" ("Writing Oneself, Writing the Other" 102). [53] In conclusion on the matter, let us say that Coetzee fathered *autre*-biography as a cobweb of theories purposefully mimicking the novel-reading experience, and the biography-like tone of trustworthiness.

What critics do agree on is that *Boyhood* reads like a "short (and very selective) account of the young John Coetzee's life in Worcester" (Attridge, "J. M. Coetzee's *Boyhood*" 78). It in no way represents an extensive study into the author's life, but rather scenes and windows into the miasma of Coetzee's life's work on criticism, novel-writing, and lecture-creation all applied to his childhood memories. As a "chronicler of the interior self" (Edele 178), he encounters ways to make the scenes from his young life extend over all childhoods in Africa of that period, as well as become a commentary on childhood in general. By making his experience universal, Coetzee's "scenes from life" speak of and for Africa, his family, himself, but also his life's work on autobiography of other masters and his creative process of metafiction and the removed self in retrospect.[54] The metafictional comments on the process of writing reflect his accumulated wisdom in writing criticism on other famous authors in his other career as a college professor.

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[53] Genre has been discussed extensively already, but especially in the case of *Boyhood* some authors such as Kusek elaborate on the necessity to read it as a mixture of genres as it is relevant for its interpretation. See "Writing Oneself, Writing the Other" for more on the topic, pp. 101-104.

[54] See Coetzee's essays on autobiography as testimonies to a lifelong interest in autobiography and famous autobiographers. "Truth in Autobiography" (1984), "Confession and Double Thoughts: Tolstoy, Rousseau, Dostoevsky" (1985) in *Doubling the Point* (251), and references in *Inner Workings* about Márquez and Proust (268-270; 57) all attest to Coetzee's extensive knowledge and interest in the topic.

Boyhood opens a window into critical research of memory in personal writing. Essentially, by admitting "childhood […] seems ever more entrancing and miraculous as [I] grow older" (*Doubling the Point* 29), he is partially commenting on himself and partially giving proof to his theories on memory. Having written his boyhood out, Coetzee testifies to the allure of memories that become ever more "enticing and miraculous" as years go by (29). For this reason, I argue that *Boyhood* mirrors best Coetzee's ideas on memory (as traces and interpretation). Closely connected to that, he reviews authorship and authority in personal history, and to whom that history belongs (primary vs. secondary families). The self in retrospect, additionally, proves a concoction of varied voices within one's self and voices of characters and protagonists as outlets of the author's voice.

If anything could be emphasized as highly relevant in Coetzee's self-writing endeavors in particular, I would say his interpretations on the assumed distance between characters and authors merit more interpretation. Readers accept that more distance is possible between the author and their character self, which Coetzee debunks. In a lecture at Stanford (on Ian Watt), he is said to have reiterated that "though his works are somewhat biographical" Coetzee insisted on "a measure of space between author and protagonist" had to be acknowledged (Townley-Smith 1). Or in other words, readers believe mistakenly that the author possesses the capacity to switch on and off his/her ability to think from the perspective of author-only or protagonist-only, whereas they coexist and no one may say with absolute certainty where one begins and the other ends.

Seemingly, the reason he never responded to questions about the meaning of his fiction was that, in a way, "he was 'not the right person to ask' about what his writing meant because the fiction took on its own life out of his hands" (1). The mentioned lack of boundaries between the author and the protagonist also spills into the reader who participates in the creation of the processes of one's personal history. This relates to issues of belonging and authority in one's subjective story and personal history of the self. Coetzee draws the conclusion with his experiments in *Boyhood* that *autre*-biography in the end, in its final interpretation resides with the reader.

Boyhood also deals with the idea of the author – or the private person behind the public persona. Coetzee refers to this as "pseudolives" authors adopt, which extends to the private and public personae they have to assume in their chosen professions (*Here and Now* 186). To illustrate this point, he mentions a fan who writes to him constantly, but he is sure "[s]he is well aware that the *vous* to whom she writes is a construct and may bear little relation to my own construct of myself" (186, emphasis his). The public lives of private persons, of authors, sometimes take on a life of their own and perhaps remain the only legacy for posterity because, as Coetzee and Auster discuss here, the people who really know the e two of the can be calculated on the finger of one hand. Whereas their pseudo lives, even the one self-created in books such as personal writing, speak volumes about their public personae and only pages about their real selves. But perhaps history is only left with that, and private persons disappear under the weight of their public jobs.

On the other hand, Coetzee remains appalled by "biographical reductionism" pushed upon authors in the narrow sense in which "fiction as a form of self-disguise" is "practiced by writers: the task of the critic is to strip away the disguise and reveal the 'truth' behind it" (173). It is too simplistic either way. Rather, readers should realize characters (protagonists) sometimes have something to say about the author, but mostly they embody pseudo-selves: "characters in novels have a degree of independence from their authors, and – particularly in the case of secondary characters – do not unfailingly speak for them" (96). Coetzee reiterates, then, that protagonists speak for authors but not all of the author's self, and secondary characters, perhaps are utilitarian for the story and speak nothing of the author.

In light of these views, *Boyhood* should be read as a failing memory quest for the truth that says something about John of *Boyhood*[55] before he became J. M. C., but also as a quest for identity recovery for the aging J. M. C. whose memories of the events could, admittedly, be agenda-driven. Or at least, the fabrication of his public self – the author J. M. C.

[55] To avoid any possible misunderstanding in reference to Coetzee, I will refer to the real author as Coetzee or J. M. C., whereas his embodied imaginary protagonists will be named John of *Boyhood*, John of *Youth* and John of *Summertime* respectively according to their *autre*-biographic feature.

4.2.1 Positioning *Boyhood* – Organization and Significance

> I tend to go blank on genèses. I simply don't remember how books I have written started off. Part of the reason is that the beginnings generally get abandoned during the course of revision. If there's an archeology of the book, then the beginnings are deep under the surface, under the soil.
>
> (Coetzee, "Voice and Trajectory" 95)

In the style of *autre*-biography, *Boyhood* supports the sense of immediacy in a narrative form that reads like a novel, rather than a confession. It embraces a circular narrative, perfectly organized in a very writerly fashion that could never have been the case in real-life events or random narratives with no post-facto reworking of memories. Despite his claims that he holds no memories of how his books began (95), let us also remember Attwell was quite surprised with the "immediacy" and lack of reworking in Coetzee's drafts, including those to *Boyhood* ("Reading the Coetzee Papers" 375-376). So perhaps it is more an inner feeling Coetzee has about the lack of planning going into his work than the actual evidence attest because if he lacked planning, at least in the process of reworking his past, it would have demanded more changes in the text.

The plot begins in Worchester and ends with the move and a new life in Cape Town. Between the years 1950 and 1953, the Coetzees "slide from middle-class respectability into something approaching poverty" (Attridge, "J. M. Coetzee's *Boyhood*" 79) mainly because of his father Zackary's inability to hold down a job or deal with money effectively. The immediate family comprises also of his young brother David, whom he takes on adventures, for better or worse, and his mother Vera who makes his entire world go round. Young John depends heavily on his mother, views the world from her perspective, and resents his dependence by rebelling against her suffocating love. The extended family has complex relationships because the Coetzees keep a farm, but have never been too welcoming to Vera, and by extension to John who adores the farm, and the Karoo but resents his paternal family's treatment. In turn, John's father dislikes one of Vera's brothers and makes it blatantly obvious, so they bicker about everything but most painfully around family, money, and his father's inadequacy to hold a job.

The backdrop to the Coetzee family drama plays out the Afrikaner Nationalist government's[56] attempts to preserve its stronghold against the black awakening. Written from the perspective of the boy John, but in the third person, John also illustrates class problems in his conflicted state love for the farm and servants without whom the farm would crumble, but awareness that their position in life prevents them from owning anything to their rightful names. They keep his beloved farm alive, however, that requires keeping the servants down in social strata and John takes note of the injustice. His identity remains half English, half Afrikaner, attempting to reconcile his illegal presence on the South African land and his white legacy of oppression on the continent. The "scenes" end in an important revelation John makes about his identity – he comes by it at a funeral of his aunt Ann. He comes to the revelation that he is meant to become a writer like his cousin who had published a book, so finally, he assumes ancestry of belonging somewhere, since he feels ill at ease in his family, wider kinfolk, and Africa.

The first of the trilogies mostly illustrates scenes from John's life, aged 10-13, who lives a double life. Quiet and wise beyond his age, he is placed in the impossible position at home as the most important person in his parents' marriage as the first born son. Within the household, John is thrust into the position more important than the husband, even the wife – the extent of which burdens him to the extent that he takes his revenge by mistreating everybody in bouts of incomprehensible rages. At school a cowardly, meek little boy, at home a rascal and despot, that is his secret and duality – a face for himself only and various masks for the parents and society

[56] This more nationalist government was elected in 1948.

(*Boyhood* 12). The masking and unmasking of the self is replete with guilt as he rebels constantly – passively outside and actively in his home life. Essentially he attempts to reconcile his varied selves into a more coherent and unitary self which he eventually achieves through the process of writing and acceptance.

An assortment of other dualities torture John. He feels he is different, he is divided between English and Afrikaans, between Cape Town and Worchester, between the Russians and Americans, between his father's and mother's families, and his indescribable love and hate for his mother. Most of these encompass identities pushed onto the youthful John, by birth or circumstance, and he is trying to find his place and start feeling at ease his skin. The only certainty he has in this life is that he will become a writer and that he adores his beloved farm in the Karoo. Lopez argues, and I agree, that locus and displacement play a major role in John's feeling of illegitimate visitor everywhere (in Africa because of the European origin, in England because of the African ancestry) – "[i]n both the child and the young adult, the tension between location and dislocation, belonging and unbelonging" (220) takes center stage. The "unbelonging" and struggle to find common ground anywhere, including within his own family, prove a life-long endeavor and spill over to all three volumes of personal narratives.

In terms of other topics extrapolated from *Boyhood*, most often criticism has focused on autobiographical inferences in Coetzee's previous interviews (Attridge 1999; Attwell 1996; Kusek 2012; Collingwood-Whittick 2001, etc.) and the notion of shame and guilt, which was further developed in his only novel between *Boyhood* (1997) and *Youth* (2002) – *Disgrace* (1999). The shame and guilt mainly correlate to John's duality and attempts at understanding the world – his family's thrust into poverty, the role of religion in this enterprise, his road towards becoming a writer, and his place in the world. The rejection of the status quo fills him with the desire to become an author instead of his parents' wishes for a lawyer – "[h]e becomes a writer when he fills his world with doubt, self-loathing and rejects authority in all forms" (Phillips 69).

I maintain that *Boyhood* is formed based on negation, denial, and refusal of the establishment and the legacy of apartheid. Formally, John's development of identity and individuality is achieved through the family context and juxtaposition of "I versus not I" – Africa versus the world, Protestants versus Catholics, mother versus father, I versus brother, etc., and his position in the world. From the earliest age and the family subtext, he struggled to find a voice separate from his mother as she helicoptered around all his decisions and choices with her immense personality. Very early on, John had to struggle for a voice of his own, thus the dichotomy of "I versus not I" took place in the household from the earliest age, only to spill over to all life facets.

Coetzee says as much about the weathering amongst varied binary oppositions he did not belong to – "[h]is years in Worcester are followed by adolescence in Cape Town, as a Protestant enrolled in a Catholic high school, with Jewish and Greek friends" (*Doubling the Point* 393-394) he had to make choices whom to play with, what language to speak, how to define his religion in spite of being non-binary. The identity quest and the sense of social marginality from a young age have contributed to the feeling of isolation that turned out to become his strongest weapon because it confirmed: "his (quite accurate) sense of being outside a culture that at this moment in history is confidently setting about enforcing itself as the core culture of the land" (393-394). And being outside of mainstream culture empowered him to become himself at a younger age than the youth constricted by a sense of being a part of the establishment usually achieves. When he "ceases visiting the family farm, the place on earth he has defined, imagined, constructed, as his place of origin" (393-394) for a variety of reasons, John is ready to ascend to his new identity of an author, as described in *Youth*. He negates belonging to the oppressive culture of apartheid by birthright and leaves South Africa as the ultimate gesture of dislocating himself from the "not I" binary choice.

In terms of style, *Boyhood* represents a natural sequence to some third-person style narratives that precede it, namely *Doubling the Point* (1992) and its last interview. Whereas it provides a glimpse into several techniques that would, later on, render a name for itself – *autre*-biography, the intellectual interviews offer a setting for *Boyhood* and genealogically similar styles in comparison. Attridge believes the same – "[t]he last of the interviews in that book ends with a

rather extraordinary passage in which Coetzee tells the story of his life up to the years 1982-83" ("J. M. Coetzee's Boyhood" 78). Compare the following two paragraphs, the first one from critical interviews with Attwell and the second one demarcates the beginning of *Boyhood*:

> His years in rural Worcester (1948-1951) as a child from an Afrikaans background attending English-medium classes, at a time of raging Afrikaner nationalism, a time when laws were being concocted to prevent people of Afrikaans descent from bringing up their children to speak English, provoke in him uneasy dreams of being hunted down and accused; by the age of twelve he has a well-developed sense of social marginality. (*Doubling the Point* 393)

Notwithstanding the interview's more analyzing and retelling style, rather than descriptive like *Boyhood*, clearly both demarcate the unique flair of *autre*-biography. Third-person repositioning of the self is followed by a narrative style befitting the novel construction more than autobiographical discourse.

In the Coetzean succinct style, the second paragraph mimics the worldview of a child, while providing insights beyond the age of a regular schoolboy. The descriptiveness shows an attempt to replicate a child's perspective. It follows the doctrine that children have a tendency to blur out unfiltered statements, and as such leave the integration and descriptiveness to adults, while they provide the backdrop for analysis to the reader. Coetzee mimics that style and leaves to readers the analyses of what is actually being said:

> They live on a housing estate outside the town of Worcester, between the railway line and the National Road. The streets of the estate have tree-names but no trees yet. Their address is No. 12 Poplar Avenue. All the houses on the estate are new and identical. They are set in large plots of red clay earth where nothing grows, separated by wire fences. In each backyard stands a small block consisting of a room and a lavatory. Though they have no servant, they refer to these as 'the servant's room' and 'the servant's lavatory.' They use the servant's room to store things in: newspapers, empty bottles, a broken chair, an old coir mattress. (*Boyhood* 3)

The ironic note-taking of the fact that streets have "tree-names" but no trees, and that his family is too poor to have servants, exemplifies this child-like perspective Coetzee attempts to replicate. Before *Boyhood*, he was heavily criticized for numerous reasons such as that his work lacked unanimous voice and quality, that it ranged in relevance, or he was too analytical to be read easily. He mostly suffered criticism for the scientific scrutiny of his subjects – placing them under a microscope instead of being an author who responds to the world (Philips 65). This unnerving quality seems to prove to his detractors that he is an unfeeling author, calculated and cold. Attwell provides arguments to the opposite – having read his papers marking the creation of *autre*-biography, Attwell maintains Coetzee is much more relaxed and uncalculated, he writes in free speech flow and edits less than anyone expected ("Reading the Coetzee Papers" 374-375). Attwell's evidence to the contrary means that Coetzee's style is set before begging to write, after which flow of speech follows instead of analytical planning.

To position *Boyhood*, I will analyze how Coetzee describes John in connection to the dichotomous relations of I (or he) versus others. Coetzee used the "not I" paradigm to feel his way through relationships such as negotiating falsehoods (real versus lie), family versus I, one's role in society versus personal identity (Africa versus I), and authorship in retrospect by implementing a variety of voices and styles (language versus I). To my mind, Coetzee felt his way through these paradigms to recover the identity he once possessed – the John of *Boyhood*'s identity, but also to demark his right of passage and the process of coming into oneself, of being and growing up into one's self.

Phillips also believes that "Coetzee's passage out of boyhood toward the calling of writing" (70) takes place through negotiating choices more as trial and error processes than as self-aware endeavors. John comes into being through positioning himself against in all life narratives he is involved in family, school, society, South Africa, and language. It is how he becomes himself, by discovering whom he does not resonate with and aliening himself from the mass choices.

4.2.2 The Negation of Family as a Search for John's Unitary Self

> It is up to him to somehow get beyond childhood, beyond family and school, to a new life where he will not need to pretend any more.
>
> (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 29)

Coetzee's theoretical conundrum of authorship and appropriation takes center stage in *Boyhood*, as he is prompted to make a choice between what constitutes his story that he is entitled to publish, and what would amount to "treason" and invasion of privacy of his immediate and extended family members. In other words, what would belong to the appropriation of their lives and stories? His decision is uniquely intriguing. Whereas a biographer would not have opted out of depicting scenes from the lives of his wives, children, and brother, Coetzee had made a clear cut division – his primary family including his brother as a child – belong to him and his memories of the life lived, however, his chosen or secondary family: his brother as an adult, his two wives, and children – remain off-limits. [57]

I argue that the choice not to involve them in the stories of his life portrays a highly writerly decision on his part made post-facto. This choice is nothing but thoroughly calculated especially because it is made because these individual persons were alive at the time of the publication of *autre*-biographies, unlike his parents. Coetzee places ethics above personal benefit in choosing to write only about his deceased parents, but he also chooses against opening a can of warms because it would surely have been difficult to mention someone (i.e. his ex-wife), and then dose what to say about them.

Precisely because Coetzee excluded half of his family members from *Scenes from Provincial Life* (his ex-wife, current partner, and two children) or included some family members at the time of their childhood thus with reduced responsibility (brother David), I maintain that he had made an executive (writerly) decision to bare himself to the world, in the extent he found comfortable, but to doggedly exclude his immediate family as an ethical choice against appropriation. By depicting only his primary family members after their death or in their infancy like in the case of David Coetzee, J. M. C. exercises his personal right to his story without appropriating the private lives of the people around him and turning them into characters. For no other obvious reason other than appropriation, Coetzee must have felt their stories did not belong to him, so he refused to appropriate even his interpretation of the events for fear he would enter uncharted waters and comment beyond proprietary levels.

Of course, such authorship of one's life made up of chosen scenes rather than chronological time or main events, goes into the very heart of his views on mirroring the truth in personal writing rather than replicating it verbatim. To my mind, Coetzee does not blatantly lie, but he openly

[57] Whereas *Boyhood* was first published in 1997, the journalist David Coetzee, John's brother, died in 2010. Prior to that, his son Nicolas lost his life in 1989, at the age of 22, under unclear circumstances (possible suicide as he fell from the balcony of his 11th-floor Johannesburg flat. He left fingermarks on the balcony railing as evidence of his frantic attempts to save himself, so he might have changed his mind or been pushed). The mother of Nicolas, John Maxwell's first wife, Philippa Jubber, whom he divorced in 1980 after 17 years, died of cancer in 1990. John Maxwell's parents were Zacharias Coetzee (1912–1988) and Vera Wehmeyer Coetzee (1904–1986), a lawyer and schoolteacher respectively. So, before the book was published, David Coetzee, John's daughter Gisela and his current partner Dorothy Diver were alive, all of whom are not mentioned in the trilogies, but for David as a child.

ignores the existence of family members whose stories he does not feel entitled to tell because he refuses to play chess with the decision which truth deserves revelation and a launch into the public sphere.

It is the question of telling the essential truth about the self, rather than all the truth about, perhaps, irrelevant events – "We can demarcate a mode of autobiographical writing that we can call the confession, as distinct from the memoir and the apology, on the basis of an underlying motive to tell an essential truth about the self" (*Doubling the Point* 252), says Coetzee. So, the scenes he has chosen to illustrate his childhood include family life, extended family, South Africa, and language. These demarcations of identity elucidate his essence in character-forming years because he positions himself against the status quo in these varied facets of identity in order to acquire, nurture and come into being in a more unitary self. In an interview with Joanna Scott, he says as much, when asked about what "important aspects of [that] constructed autobiography" are ("Voice and Trajectory" 83), he replies as follows:

> A huge question. My relation to my parents. My relation to wider kinfolk. My relation to South African society, in all its fragmentedness (linguistic, ethnic, racial). My relation to language, in particular to English, the language I write in, and to the history embedded in that language. (83)

Joanna Scott asked the question to Coetzee about what the *constructed autobiographical discourse provides* versus what autobiographical discourse may arrive at in a speech-flow style. This elicited Coetzee to provide exactly the facets of identity I should like to highlight in *Boyhood* – his relation to his parents, his wider kinfolk, and language (83). Taking his words as read, the background to how to tell the truth about the self in a constructed autobiography is also revealed – by including high points or segments of truth at one's disposal, which explain the essential, chosen truth about the self we arrive at the essential truth at our disposal. To Coetzee's mind, these segments in his case include the parents, wider kinfolk, African society, and language as the tool at his disposal to bring about essential truth of his boyhood self to the reader and that provides a pathway for my exploration in *Boyhood* as per his instruction.

What continues to bother him, though, refers to the forgetful nature of memory and its fretful disobedience in lieu of self-defense – "[w]ho is ever to find out about it if I, the sole witness of the act, have successfully repressed my own memory of it" (*The Good Story* 35)? Memory serves the self in that it inevitably provides relief despite open, conscious desires the author may have against that lip service. Coetzee remains well-aware that good intentions get us only so far as long as the subconscious has other desires in mind:

> What continues to trouble me is the notion of a self constructed on the basis of memories that one may wish to call false (fictional), except that their falsity is indeterminable because the 'real' history to which they appeal for support is irrecoverably lost in the past, and also because the person who has created this (perhaps) false past is happy with it and has no reason to subject themself to the eye of a professional doubter (a psychoanalyst, for example) whose business might be to undermine it. (26)

The proposed path, if untrustworthy memory "is irrecoverably lost in the past" (26) offers the method of revision, of taking another look, or revisiting the past with "a cruel enough eye" (*Doubling the Point* 29). Childhood embodies the making of the man, and the psychological mechanisms of denial could be circumvented in the process of application of an "unflinching look" into oneself (29). The role of the past embodies forgiveness to oneself:

> Nevertheless, we can't wallow in comfortable wonderment at our past. We must see what the child, still befuddled from his travels, still trailing his clouds of glory, could not see. We – or at least some of us, enough of us – must look at the past with a cruel enough eye to see what it was that made that joy and innocence possible. Forgiveness but also unflinchingness: that is the mixture I have in mind, if it is attainable. First the unflinchingness, then the forgiveness. (*Doubling the Point* 29)

To my mind, the entire oeuvre of *autre*-biography represents Coetzee's unflinchingness towards the self, and the process of writing personifies the forgiveness that takes place on stage and invisibly to the reader. The essential truth about himself as the boy John, Coetzee divides in scenes from immediate family life, wider kinfolk, and African life scenes. In all of them, the unflinchingness remains obvious, while the forgiveness appears to take place, according to the previous statement, somewhere but the reader has no part in the private process but for the promise in the previous quote that it does occur. Arguably, if Coetzee had not forgiven himself the trespasses of youth, it would be difficult to put I to paper and commit to a legacy of attack: it takes quite a stamina to undertake the gaze of the entire world of one's most private and unnerving mistakes without flinching unless forgiveness and reduces responsibility have measurably been applied.

As the best guise under which to introduce the truth, Coetzee's *Boyhood* represents family at its core. The primary family's life sets the backdrop to the making of identity. Commencing from the immediate family as the *becoming* of J. M. C., John's identity forms as the denial of disliked selves his family claims. Since the identity-forming experiment for John appears as a sequence of negations of the commonly liked experiences other children enjoy, family life was no exception. He negates the mother as a warm and embracing influence but experiences her as a rather engulfing and omnipresent one. John views his father not as a role model, but an absolute obscure character who can teach him nothing of value except how not to become him. Perhaps his brother demonstrates some redeeming qualities as his ideal self if he were a normal boy, but still, John resents the peaceful nature he boasts because to John, that equals poor strength of character.

Thus, Coetzee describes John's only way towards discovering his identity in the family setting as the negation of the status quo and "unflinching" gaze into himself and his family. Eventually, *Boyhood* also zeros in on the denial of John's "kinfolk" and South Africa as symbols of parts of the white Afrikaner identity he denies, but only to discover how these various facets of the self point towards the essential self and cannot be denied in the projection of his life to personal writing.

4.2.2.1 The Mother as Inner Voice

> They have the same birthday. He was born to her on her birthday. This means, as she has told him, as she tells everyone, that he is a gift of God.
>
> (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 42)

As Derek Attridge puts it, despite his negation and wiggling, for better or worse, "John's life is that of his mother" ("J. M. Coetzee's *Boyhood*" 80). Fighting that attachment and her excessive love proves essential on his way towards becoming an independent teenager, and eventually a self-sufficient artist. Despite the fact that he "finds himself drawn to the protection of his mother," he is also "disturbed by her self-effacing love" (Edele 178). His identity is stifled by his love and respect towards her, which makes sense in light of her attempts to merge their identities since they have the same birthdays, and he was "born to her" (*Boyhood* 42), not as an individual person. As a child, he

is unable or unwilling to negotiate the right measure of separate identities that would allow him to find his voice and identity instead of replicating her views about his father and paternal relatives.

John's plight is multiple; on the one hand, he is angry at his mother because her love has made him "soft"; on the other, he admires her stamina and unswerving loyalty to her children. John appreciates his mother for being different that their neighbors in South Africa, which he views as backward – John wears shoes ("[h]is feet are soft and white; otherwise they look like everyone else's") (*Boyhood* 10), and speaks English instead of Afrikaans, and they are not religious. All this leads to him being different (10) as well. His mother's denial of the mainstream culture has also steered him to be different, alienated, and lost – he is ashamed of his interests in Russia (because he likes the letter "R" especially the capital) (23-24), his lack of religion and the fact that his parents do not attend the protestant Church instructed him to name himself Catholic in order to avoid a class, etc. He hides these shameful secrets from his parents (7) because he feels different from them too. John calls this his "life reserved for school" (23). The mask he has shamefully made himself wear so as not to be discovered for the unnatural ways of his parents, steers him to even more alienation as he hides his lack of belonging from the family as well.

Already an outcast because of his parents' shameful behavior outside South African mainstream culture, John feels all the more conflicted because he likes their lack of belonging to the official institutions. He comes from "an unnatural and shameful family in which not only are children not beaten but older people are addressed by their first names and no one goes to church and shoes are worn every day" (7) which makes him "sense he is damaged" (9). All of this exhaustive shame, interspersed with superiority, to his mind comes about as a consequence of his mother's "blinding, overwhelming, self-sacrificial love" and he begins to resent her for it. Other Afrikaner children get beaten if they commit a mistake, or have to participate in dull polite conversations with the elders, something he grows accustomed to avoiding, but still, the price seems too high if adulation of his mother in gratitude is the price of such a life:

> Her blinding, overwhelming, self-sacrificial love, for both him and his brother but for him in particular, disturbs him. He wishes she did not love him so much. She loves him absolutely, therefore he must love her absolutely: that is the logic she compels upon him. Never will he be able to pay back all the love she pours out upon him. The thought of a lifetime bowed under a debt of love baffles and infuriates him to the point where he will not kiss her, refuses to be touched by her. When she turns away in silent hurt, he deliberately hardens his heart against her, refusing to give in. (41)

A confession of a tormented child's action, however misguided in his beliefs and coping mechanisms, shows writerly expertise in delivering a child's psyche. J. M. Coetzee inundates his young-self character with wisdom beyond his age, like a sentence or thought such as "he hardens his heart against her" could have been uttered only post facto. In a balanced combination with a child-like behavior, but the adult perspective of regret, it represents a winning combination and grips the reader's attention.

Young John, in a roundabout manner, escalates because his position at the top of the mother-father pyramid feels unnatural and too much of a burden he is trying to shake. Coetzee-the-author metaphorically depicts John's feeling of presiding over this deeply strange situation in his parent's marriage – "[a]s long as he can remember he has had a sense of himself as prince of the house, and of his mother as his dubious promoter and anxious protector – anxious, dubious because, he knows, a child is not meant to rule the roost" (11). A parent to his parents, he is left to his own devices, not reprimanded, not taken down a peg when he makes mistakes, and unable to cope with the responsibility of being an adult his whole childhood.

The most poignant scene of John's boundary-pushing escapades he inflicted on his parents in the hope they would react, left him carrying guilt "like a weight upon him" (101) because he had his brother lose a finger. No one said anything – while he needed yelling and attention – "[h]e has

never apologized to his brother, nor has he ever been reproached with what he did" (*Boyhood* 101). The book reads as a manner of accepting blame for his involuntary actions, taking responsibility since no one else would hold him accountable.

So, the emotional life of young John in connection to his mother mostly evokes feelings of shame and guilt equally dispersed between them. Her shame arises from suffocating her children from a child's viewpoint, and I would say from a lack of clear boundaries and burdening the older son with issues beyond his age thus stealing his childhood from an adult's perspective, and his shame can be traced back to calling her out on her actions and refusing to play the husband she was lacking. His escapades mainly involve childishly appropriate reactions – overreaction and aggressive tantrums. She plays the other culprit in the family duo, the first being John's father, especially because she baffles John with the roundedness of her character and duality of her behaviors that remain mood-oriented mostly.

As opposed to his father, she itches his personality on a different level and the boy John seems unable to shake her duality, something he has apparently inherited. As his sole protector and enthusiastic promoter, she believes he is special and even encourages this feature in him. Since they share a birthday, she takes that as a proprietary sign of their sameness – "He was born to her on her birthday. This means, as she has told him, as she tells everyone, that he is a gift of God" (42).

Burdened by the expectancy of being a special delivery from God, John copes by finding fault with his mother's logic on all topics: "If she thinks farmers are better than attorneys, why did she marry an attorney? If she thinks book learning is nonsense, why did she become a teacher? The more they argue with her the more she smiles" (28). Perhaps, if he were to prove she had no idea what she was saying, he could believe she would not abandon him in one of her "passing moods" that "exasperate him" (29). In that case, if she were wrong about him, it might relieve his guilt for trying to be his own person:

> Of all the four sons, he is the only one who is not wholly under his mother's thumb. He has broken away, or half broken away: he has his own friends, whom he has chosen for himself; he goes out on his bicycle without saying where he is going or when he will be back. His cousins and his brother have no friends. He thinks of them as pale, timid, always at home under the eye of their fierce mothers. His father calls the three sister-mothers the three witches. 'Double, double, toil and trouble,' he says, quoting Macbeth. Delightedly, maliciously he echoes his father. (33)

These tantrums and occasional sidings with his father against his mother denote vessels for delivering his anger and separation of identity from his mother, which had to be equally aggressive as her merges of character seemed to the boy. Fundamentally, what Coetzee conveys can be equaled to the pains of growing one's identity as a denial of the family self. In no way were the isolation and painful realization that one's parents are only human, possible to overcome with no consequences. In fact, it is his strong personality that enabled the physical severance from his mother in the lack of touch, denial of her views, and generally careful demeanor around her John adopted in order not to be swathed by her massive personality.

These growing pains of becoming one's own person through the process of questioning, self-doubt, and denial of the family self had resulted in an unbearable sense of loneliness and shame. For this reason, *Boyhood*'s protagonist lives a double life – "[a]t home he is an irascible despot, at school a lamb, meek and mild" (12). This duality forces him to overcompensate at school and become the best student, while hiding his aggression at home, he continues to live "this double life" that has led to "a burden of imposture" (12).

It is his language that sets Coetzee apart from the protagonist John. Words such as "imposture" related to the imposture syndrome, and feeling superior to his mother show how Coetzee-the-author describes his ("his") actions and comments partially from a child's logic and partially in metaphorical language accumulated with age and distance:

> His rages against his mother are one of the things he has to keep a careful secret from the world outside. Only the four of them know what torrents of scorn he pours upon her, how much like an inferior he treats her. 'If your teachers and your friends knew how you spoke to your mother ...,' says his father, wagging a finger meaningfully. He hates his father for seeing so dearly the chink in his armour. (*Boyhood* 12)

These "torrents of scorn" if repeated in front of people would not bode well for his identity as a good pupil, because the imposed privilege of "the ruler of the roost" would not be comprehended outside of his quartet of chickens (11). His mother's blind love and exhaustive care have imbedded within himself her inner voice, the adult parent voice he projects towards the world, especially when "John" offers opinion beyond his age. For example, his guilt in loving the farm on his paternal side is extrapolated from their maltreatment of his mother. So, despite the physical distance from his mother that he has scrapped together for himself, what escapes John's boyish self, is the realization that he has adopted the inner voice of his mother as his worldview.

He feels unwelcome on the farm, his favorite place in the world as an extension of his paternal cousins' lack of welcome for his mother (68) – they "disapprove of him and of the upbringing he has had at the hands of his mother" (66). The mainly black vision of his father, rather than idolatry for a male figure at that age, comes about as the product of that inner voice, his mother's internalized experience over his own. His father turns into a monochrome character in his absence from home life and lack of dependability, but essentially more as a husband than a father, thus more from his mother's perspective than his own, which escapes the young John's understanding.

John's family identity, and even his self, can easily be shaken like any young boy's as they have not been internalized. He either adopts his mother's views unquestioningly and wholeheartedly or denies them just because they originate from her as a method of denying authority. He believes himself to be lacking normalcy, he just wants to be like everyone else throughout *Boyhood*, but when she utters the words – "'Can't you just be normal?'" (66), he goes into a rage – "'I hate normal people,' he replies hotly" (66). His identity in interactions with his mother remains reactive, instead of stable.

Coming back to Derek Attridge's words that John's life is that of his mother ("J. M. Coetzee's *Boyhood*" 80), but his reactive disposition due to an unstable, teenage self on the road towards discovering itself often exaggerates these similarities because they bring about feelings of overwhelm. John finds parallels between himself and his mother often, for example in browsing through her albums he sees that "[n]o matter how indistinct the images, he can always pick her out from the group: the one in whose shy, defensive look he recognizes himself" (*Boyhood* 34).

Similarly, in love relationships later on in life, John fears his mother's changeable nature and bouts of bad temperament because he awaits his turn when she would turn on him. She escapes definition as John fears the roundedness of her characters, he sees her wholly and fears her judgment:

> He does not understand these bitter moods of hers, when things almost at random come under the disparaging lash of her tongue: Coloured people, her own brothers and sisters, books, education, the Government. He does not really care what she believes about Eddie as long as she does not change her mind from day to day. When she lashes out like this he feels that the floor is crumbling beneath his feet and he is falling. (64-65)

Due to his father's absence and complete reliance on his mother for financial and emotional support at a young formative age (their father was in a war at that time), the child-like perspective that the world crumbled and he was falling (65) in her fits and moods swings quite accurately represents the feeling of complete exasperation at the loss of power and control over his physical

and emotional worlds. Having realized her limitless love, but afraid she would change her mind like, with everything else, John took revenge for his loss of power in the relationship with Vera by physically and emotionally distancing himself from her. In the case of his father, he went further by erasing him as the head of the family into a figurehead that he denied personhood. John often wonders what the point of his father is, almost as he had no excuse to exist within the family paradigm.

John denied to both of his parents what they most desired or wanted out of him as a denial of authority and a passageway into finding himself outside of his role in the family fold, outside of them as his denominators. While his mother's understanding of him remained unquestionable, also her protection of him as the extension of herself, still she unleashed her power over him in a bout of exasperation when she "let his father loose on him" ("J. M. Coetzee's *Boyhood*" 67). She did exactly what John feared, she on one occasion only, stopped being his champion and changed her mind just like he suspected she would:

> His mother is the only one who stands between him and an existence he could not endure. So at the same time that he is irritated with her for her slowness and dullness, he clings to her as his only protector. He is her son, not his father's son. He denies and detests his father. He will not forget the day two years ago when his mother for the one and only time let his father loose on him, like a dog let loose from its chain ('I've reached the limit, I can't stand it any more!'), and his father's eyes glared blue and angry as he shook him and cuffed him. (67)

Her true power resides, not only with the physical protection she provides for her kids in the form of food and stability, family organization, and protection but also in her reserved manner in which she remains biased in her love of her kids, never emphasizing their negative traits. To a young, self-conscious kid, this is tantamount to limitless love, as she pretends not to witness his negative traits and loves him adoringly anyway. But, the burning fear at the back of his mind remains that his mother would one day "pronounce her judgment" (*Boyhood* 136) on him, when the cool thoughts with no passion pass through her she will deem him a disappointment. His identity is enmeshed with hers to the extent he would not withstand hearing it: "He would rather be blind and deaf than know what his mother thinks of him. He would rather live like a tortoise inside its shell" (136). What particularly worries John is the realization that if he was borne to this woman as a gift of God, she, on the other hand, chose to love him and could just as easily choose to stop:

> For it is not true that, as he likes to think, this woman was brought into the world for the sole purpose of loving him and protecting him and satisfying his wants. On the contrary, she had a life before he came into being, a life in which she gave him not the slightest thought. Then at a certain moment in history she gave birth to him. She bore him and she decided to love him; perhaps she chose to love him even before she bore him; nevertheless, she chose to love him, and therefore she can choose to stop loving him. (137)

John's logic remains uninformed from the adult's perspective, but well-depicted from a child's psychological standpoint of the fear of abandonment. So much love for his mother leads to dependency on her opinion, which he suspects would unexpectedly strike him one day and he could not bear it. If John continues adoring her "once she has sacrificed herself entirely, once she has sold the clothes off her back, sold her very shoes, and is walking around on bloody feet" (133-134) – that would leave him with no power over himself or his emotions. The solution appears in the form of denial – denial of her love, of his loving self. By hardening his heart against her, not allowing her to touch him and make decisions for him he avoids demonstrating his respect for all she does for him, as that triggers fear she would stop if only she knew the real him. John rejects his mother before she

has the opportunity to reject him as "[h]er ant-like determination angers him to the point that he wants to strike her" (*Boyhood* 133). In this way, Coetzee describes the initiation of his anger-driven responses to love and affection.

I see the denial of his mother, both physically and emotionally as he "hardens his heart against her" (41), as an attempt, however misguided, to create boundaries for himself that his mother lacked in the family pyramid. In a way, it depicts a necessary growing pain and road towards discovering the self unstained by his mother's influence and opinions. As he promises he "will not accept the vision of the world that she wants to force upon him: a sober, disappointed, disillusioned vision" (137), Coetzee still describes himself as his mother's son. For better or worse, her somewhat negative worldview penetrates his fiction as she has established herself as John's inner voice.

What becomes blatantly obvious as you read and reread his work, Coetzee's guilt over this passage into adulthood infiltrates the reader, it floats between the lines to be picked up by the cleaver, experienced, authentic[58] reader because it is not something flaunted or explicitly explained. His choices afterward in *Youth*, the search for a complex woman, a lover, without actually allowing her to be complicated in his presence and defining her in a male-gaze dominated fashion as a black-or-white character stem from this period and his inability to cope with being placed center-stage in his parents' marital problems. So, just like Coetzee extends forgiveness to his mother in the elegy of *Age of Iron,*[59] and to his father in *Summertime*, I venture a guess that he extends it to his younger self in *Boyhood.* First the unflinchingness, then the forgiveness.

4.2.2.2 The Father as Negated Masculinity

> He seethes with rage all the time. *That man*, he calls his father when he speaks to his mother, too full of anger to give him a name: why do we have to have anything to do with *that man*? Why don't you let *that man* go to prison?
>
> (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 132, emphasis his)

Far from the representation of an ideal father, Zacharias (known as Jack) does possess noteworthy qualities that the boy John appreciates but still does not appreciate his father. As opposed to a clear-cut Freudian rivalry for Vera's love, the two seem engaged in a reversal of father-son roles, in which John feels compelled to become his father's father by overcompensating for the lack of stability in the original father-figure. John's hatred of the instability his father, whom he addresses as "*that man*" (132), brings into the home blinds him for the qualities in his father's character. Jack makes up for his instability, in a way, with other abilities John notes but finds marred and insufficiently credible to be his father's doing. He deems his father a random figure whose presence in the family home should be illuminated as he appears only to bring trouble to the household. The young child-self craves authority and attention from his father but finds anger in himself instead because "[h]e knows that his father sides with his family against him. This is one of his father's ways of getting back at his mother" (67). So, his father's treachery is juxtaposed to his own denial of the father's existence – everything his father loves or is, John would like to be the opposite, and in so doing to become Jack's opposite number – his negated self.

Sufficiently intelligent to feel the duality of his unnatural position (child more important than the husband, or the wife), John desires to change – "[h]e wants his father to beat him and turn him into a normal boy" (12). Having already been twisted into something shameful, cowardly, and bullying at the same time, he remains incredulous anything would work because "if his father dared

[58] Authentic reading in the meaning of internalized and full, see Katy Iddiols, for more on authentic reading, Ch 14.
[59] See David Attwell for more on *Age of Iron* and the theory Coetzee wrote about his mother - *J. M. Coetzee and the Life of Writing: Face to Face with Time*, pp. 137-153.

to strike him, he would not rest until he had his revenge" (*Boyhood* 12). Coetzee's older self is visible in these insights, he steps in with a metaphorical depiction of this cartoon-like postscript of a child only an older person could reflect on themselves, especially a writer: "If his father were to hit him, he would go mad: he would become possessed, like a rat in a corner, hurtling about, snapping with its poisonous fangs, too dangerous to be touched" (12). Merciless to himself in retrospect, Coetzee-the-author amuses in an ironical, almost cringing description of the callous, and impotent old self, prepared for revenge if slighted.

No clemency from the tangs of barbed language is given to himself, just like his other "characters," and especially his father in *Boyhood*. Instead of a loving memory of any kind, or even jealousy, the denial of his father extends to all aspects of his personality even to his existence – Jack emerges as a questionable presence, and "it is not obvious to him by what right his father is there at all" (11). John "has never worked out the position of his father in the household" (11) because in their inverted little world of "the mother and children who make up the core, while the husband is no more than an appendage, a contributor to the economy as a paying lodger might be" (11). A disgrace as a discredited lawyer who does not handle money matters well, John mainly resents Jack because he is unreliable – "[t]here is talk of Alcoholics Anonymous, of how his father should go to Alcoholics Anonymous to prove his sincerity. His father promises to go but does not" (132). Since he adopts his mother's voice as his own, on many occasions in *Boyhood* he talks about his father in words and style very much like his mother – tainted with disappointment and disbelief.

Boyhood deals with his father's humiliation and the resultant psychological rift Coetzee identifies in himself. His father is faulted with everything as "[h]e denies and detests his father" (67). While his mother resides in a world between remorse for slighting her efforts to care for him and guilt for still loving her, John admires her acts of kindness despite his attempts to alienate her completely. His father, on the other hand, has barely any positive attributes for him, and even when he inevitably has to be admitted some, John encounters a blemish on his positive qualities. Even he, secretly, cannot explain to himself how this phenomenon occurs, but anything related to his father heeds little value. In a child's mind, the father has no redeeming qualities, and even if he does possess positive characteristics, his inability to be depended on colors everything else he might have done right:

> His father likes the United Party, his father likes cricket and rugby, yet he does not like his father. He does not understand this contradiction, but has no interest in understanding it. Even before he knew his father, that is to say, before his father returned from the war, he had decided he was not going to like him. In a sense, therefore, the dislike is an abstract one: he does not want to have a father, or at least does not want a father who stays in the same house. (37)

His "father the attorney who did not make money" (28) jeers his mother's endeavors to become independent by riding a bicycle (4), but worst of all, "his father sides with his family against him" to get back at his mother (67). The brute force of the experience when his mother let his father loose on him and he got beaten while "his father's eyes glared blue and angry as he shook him and cuffed him" (67), left a mark on the sheltered John he never forgave. Jack's absence from John's early years turned his father into a flat character, unredeemable and impossible to respect. He comes to see himself as having "two mothers" (81). He is "[t]wice-born: born from woman and born from the farm. Two mothers and no father" (81).

Obliterating his father in *Boyhood*, rather than dealing with his varied feelings on his father's unpredictability, alcoholism, and disgrace to the family, enable John the boy to function but do not escape the adult Coetzee's attention and pen. John rather inundates "[h]is father's real-life avatar" (*Inner Workings* 232) with absolutist, unforgivable features in *Boyhood*, than speak of his feelings. This, in turn, leads Coetzee to write the first sequel as a form of forgiveness to his younger self, and S*ummertime* as an elegy for the relationship with his father that "might have been."

Following his disgrace as a failed lawyer, the whole family ventures into debt, and his mother is left dealing with the creditors as his father takes to bed and drinking. John struggles with the sight of his father's constant binge-drinking and "[u]rinating on the toilet seat" because he sees it as "his father's ultimate act of defiance against a wife and children who have turned their backs on him" (*Boyhood* 131).

Witnessing someone's demise, especially a masculine figure who is supposed to lead the family into betterment leaves the young John with feelings of impotence and proves too much of an adult problem that he snaps in child-like anger and frustration. Half-expecting his father would commit suicide, he makes sure he should not be the one to find him until one day he dares enter the bedroom and check but "[t]here is no sign of pills. The man is not dying, merely sleeping. So: He does not have the courage to take sleeping pills, just as he does not have the courage to go out and look for a job" (135). Scared and too informed about the household problems, John (but most likely from Coetzee's perspective) tries to come to terms with the fact that his childhood is denied:

> Yet at the same time he wishes he were not here, witnessing this shame. *Unfair!* he wants to cry: *I am just a child!* He wishes that someone, a woman, would take him in her arms, make the sore place better, soothe him, tell him it was just a bad dream. (135, emphasis his)

The father in *Boyhood* represents an antipode to Afrikaner mentality and the established masculinity of the time for which John is grateful. What John perceives threatening to the family status quo if his father were to take charge, amounts to the peril of potentially having to become a "normal" boy in Afrikaner standards of the time:

> He is chilled by the thought of the life he would face if his father ran the household, a life of dull, stupid formulas, of being like everyone else. His mother is the only one who stands between him and an existence he could not endure. So at the same time that he is irritated with her for her slowness and dullness, he clings to her as his only protector. (67)

Although written from the perspective of the event, it seems more probable that Coetzee-the-author had made a post-facto comment from the perspective of an adult lamenting the child self (he wishes he were not witnessing *the shame*). If the voice were immediate, rather than shame, a child would not have analyzed the event, but effectively pronounced "the horror of my life" or something along those lines. "Shame" as vocabulary bears the analysis of the event in retrospect, shame cannot be felt unless other people are taken into consideration. The multiple voices intermingled provide a poignant read and effect of immediacy in the line "*I am just a child*" (135). Despite the fact that the present tense provides immediacy, the memory testifies to the remembering and reconstructing quality of *autre*-biography that in tandem afford the feeling of an older self crying for the child-self in *Boyhood*.

The text is replete with binary oppositions to mimic a child's mind – the father or the mother, he either loves or hates them, he is the best student or he is shamed. Whereas the vocabulary connected to the father in *Boyhood* is borderline disgust and distaste, revealing a lack of sympathy for the weak, Coetzee, later on, vindicates the father in *Summertime*. As childhood disappears, so too the black-and-white constructs melt and his father becomes a sorrowful man, plagued by destiny like the rest of us instead of an evil, lost deadbeat dad whose very reason for existence is questionable in *Boyhood*.

A telling scene draws similarities between the father-son binary opposites, who both show equal awkwardness in social situations. The lack of knowledge of body and intimacy seep into the page when the father-son duo reveal how unaccustomed they both are to human touch. They were celebrating a game won by their team, South Africa's *Viccie Toweel* who became the new champion

of the world, on which occasion "[h]e and his father shout with elation and embrace each other. He does not know how to express his joy. Impulsively he grips his father's hair, tugs with all his might. His father starts back, looks at him oddly" (*Boyhood* 92). The scene stays with John. Aside from the simple telling admission that he felt emotionally awkward, another sign of John's inadequacy in relationships is the guilt that ensues: "He has never been so free with his father's body before. He would prefer that it did not happen again" (93).

The negated self that John experiences with his father extends to not only the desirable skill set he has acquired, unfortunately, but also to masculinity he had not mustered on time and in his father's presence because he was busy denying his father any qualities. I find Coetzee struggles with the body, sex, and desire in his oeuvre come about because of precisely this strained relationship with his father. Just like he became the opposite of Jack in that he never drank, and scrupulously earned and saved money, all very admirable qualities in a young man and later on adult, John never acquired the ease of being in male company, going hunting or having sex, which we can extrapolate from the previous quote. "He has never been so free with his father's body before" (93) means no spontaneous hugs, goodbye kisses, or even friendly pats on the back from and to him, as opposed to his mother whom he had to keep away or she would smother him with attention.

It is my claim that by negating everything his-father-related, John is led to the denial of his own masculinity. He describes the feelings of inadequacy and being ill-at-ease in his skin and out of place everywhere, especially with women. Because of his boyhood attempts to repudiate his father any qualities, to refuse to learn from him or even admire him, thus turning him into a negated self, John has also managed to deny himself the privilege of exuding, enjoying, or even learning healthy masculinity from his closest male role-model.

Just like in the case of his mother when John unsuspectingly adopted her inner voice of negativity and a derelict worldview, this process took place unawares for the young boy. Coetzee similarly depicts how John reluctantly missed out on the opportunity to acquire from Jack the comradery, military life, and many other potential joys hidden in the negated self of the father figure. By negating his father's qualities, he also missed out on the opportunity to acquire them and spent his youth in pursuit of feelings of ease in his own skin as a young male.

4.2.2.3 The Brother as Ideal Self

> If there is anyone to be jealous of, it is not his father but his younger brother. For his mother promotes his brother too – promotes and even, because his brother is clever but not as clever as he, nor as bold or adventurous, favours him.
>
> (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 11)

John-the-protagonist characterizes his brother as a meeker, nicer, more innocent, and normal version of himself, or as he puts it "a nervous, wishy-washy imitation of himself" (12). Coetzee represents David as a character antipode to himself at that age but also envies his innocence. Despite John's dislike of little David's character, he sometimes wishes he were more "normal" like him, and able to withstand his mother's attention, fight his father's influence less and in general, adopt some of David's mild character. He idealizes David's personality, while simultaneously exuding jealousy of him for the ease of life, the ease of self he has been granted.

Average in every possible way according to John, David possesses no duality of character. While David is clever, he is not that clever as he (11), a quality John values about himself above all else but finds a burden as well. The relationship of the two brothers is narrated solely from John's perspective, at a time his brother is already deceased so that some leniency could be provided for the idealized brother Coetzee remembers in most of David's portrayals. His existence replicates the image of "what if" nostalgia, what if he were more like his brother, which is the sort of depiction

between siblings reserved for a younger brother towards an older one in most autobiographical narratives. But, in *Boyhood*, readers experience the elder brother of the two wishing for the life and mind of the younger ones for the simple reason that David seems congruous. His desires in life and small ambitions are not at odds with his capabilities, whereas the same cannot be said of the young John in pursuit of a shameless life, a life of a famous artist and a know-all at a young age of thirteen.

The brothers' relationship provides the backdrop to the narrative of mischievous siblings who remain each other's sole companion day in day out, particularly at play. In an interview with Joanna Scot, Coetzee testifies to the importance of play in childhood as a framework of creation, for the only purpose of generating something with no other objective in mind. As he says in the interview:

> There's a kind of creative play – inventing games rather than just playing games – that I find very precious, one of the most precious things about childhood. Too many people who write about childhood – Freud, for instance – try to turn play into work. To Freud, play is evidence of the work that the unconscious is doing. Is there any theory of play in Freud? I suspect not. There's not much theory of play anywhere that I can think of. ("Voice and Trajectory" 84)

Boyhood describes numerous games between siblings, or at least role-play activities that the older brother John invents, and the younger one follows in his footsteps. To Coetzee, the creative spirit of children reveals itself at play. Their relationship appears textbook older brother – younger brother, as they get into mischief at every opportunity – they steal condensed milk from a young "Native" delivery boy whom they blame together (*Boyhood* 53), they "ridicule Gysbert Wynstra for his funny name and for the soft, helpless way in which he runs" and egg his house (53); and they embarrass their mother because they "scuttle away like wild animals, then sneak back to lurk and eavesdrop" (66) when guests arrive instead of politely saying hello. They seem inseparable in most scenes from boyhood, a couple of boys with "spyholes in the ceiling" climbing "into the roof-space" and peering at guests from above for fun (66). When he needs something, John "courts his brother," promises toys "if he will bowl to him in the backyard" (25). His brother says "no," and runs to safety as he "and scuttles indoors for protection" (25).

John does reveal his issue with David. For a while, he has been pondering David's loyally inflicted with doubts about whether David understood the family dynamics. Since they remain as thick as thieves, they go together on most adventures, even if "he has never been entirely sure of his brother's support" (134). In fact, what most of all troubles the young John is that he suspects his brother of being more like his father than he can bear, of being "soft" and normal:

> In the war he has waged on his father, he has never been entirely sure of his brother's support. As far back as he can remember, people have remarked that, whereas he takes after his mother, his brother has his father's looks. There are times when he suspects his brother may be soft on his father; he suspects his brother, with his pale, worried face and the tic on his eyelid, of being soft in general. (134)

Such betrayal on David's part, his alignment with their father rather than mother in the lodged war between spouses, leaves John ill at ease and simultaneously jealous of his brother's normalcy and well-adjustment to the culture. For David's most idealized self in John's eyes is his ability to be a young boy who loves his father and allows his mother to care for him. Although at times the boy John considers fighting for his mother's attention with David and allowing her to "hover" (*Boyhood* 11) over him just like she does over little brother, "he" or Coetzee's authorial alter ego, concludes he desires her attention merely as "a sign, a proof, no more" (11). Since "his mother seems always to be hovering over his brother, ready to ward off danger; whereas in his own

case she is only somewhere in the background, waiting, listening, ready to come if he should call" he succumbs to his childhood self at times and jealously wishes she would "behave toward him as she does toward his brother" (*Boyhood* 11). But the fleeting moment passes because John is unable to remain resentful of his younger brother for long. David is simply completely unsuspecting and he is also much younger at the time for John to suspect any malice.

What palpably lacks in Coetzee's representation of David, however, is anything tantamount to a protective streak towards his younger brother, which is highly unusual and appears forced. Quite oppositely, John is exclusively abusive or David remains in the background. No touching of any kind for protection or solace penetrates the pages. At no time has John acted as an older wiser brother. On the occasion his brother was thirsty his mother stopped a nurse in the hospital to get him some water, John comments to his brother's "whining" that "[e]mbarrassed, he looks away" (98). Weakness of any kind makes John flinch and he seems unforgiving even to a younger child than himself, unforgiving but envious he will never be that way.

Innovation on Coetzee's part regarding these descriptions of cruelty among boys epitomizes the technique of confronting the reader with child cruelty. Coetzee has John pronounce that he "remembers" how "he," at the time, had made a conscious decision to hurt David's hand, that it was no accident. In choosing to write about deliberate violence between children, he is touching upon the taboo of presuming children innocent and incapable of cognizant violence. Coetzee emphasizes cruelty and bodily harm John had inflicted on David in a game that went too far. John "remembers" the episode as pure viciousness:

> He persuaded his brother to put his hand down the funnel where the mealie-pits were thrown in; then he turned the handle. For an instant, before he stopped, he could feel the fine bones of the fingers being crushed. His brother stood with his hand trapped in the machine, ashen with pain, a puzzled, inquiring look on his face. (101)

Another taboo topic being tackled in the rest of this episode between John and David refers to a blatant disregard of the confessional mode. It is not only expected but also required to show remorse in confessions. Even implicitly, it is anticipated of protagonists to show even a resemblance of understanding that the confession should need forgiveness from the reader. And yet John is neither demanded to apologize nor asked to do so by his parents. In fact, "[h]e has never apologized to his brother, nor has he ever been reproached with what he did" (101). Coetzee blatantly disregards the confessional form and quickly changes the subject. He offers no insight into John's punishment, regret, guilt, or young John's state of mind.

The disregard of the form leaves the reader flabbergasted and rattles their expectancy of the confessional format. It brings about questions along the lines of what personal gain Coetzee might get from representing himself cruelly and with no embellishment for posterity. If carefully read, one sentence vindicates him as an adult at least, if not in memory of the child self – as he admits that "[n]evertheless, the memory lies like a weight upon him, the memory of the soft resistance of flesh and bone, and then the grinding" (101). For lack of more obvious repentance, this has to do.

Strategically, and from a stylistic point of view, I argue this literary maneuver has the aim of instigating doubt about Coetzee's intentions, his true intentions, and providing readers with a confession in the format of a novel. Attwell says about *Diary of a Bad Year*, but I believe it extends to Coetzee's work here, that it can be summed up as "semi-detached autobiography" that includes "explicitly fictional elements" ("Mastering Authority" 214). Although it is impossible to prove what fictional elements he has implemented accidentally or on purpose, the true power of his words comes about in the process of interpreting them autobiographically, i.e. as someone's statements about themselves with no hidden agenda. As Attridge testifies, "part of its singular power undoubtedly comes from the reader's sense that this is not fiction (in the narrow sense of the word)" ("J. M. Coetzee's Boyhood" 86).

In a novel, these portrayals would read as constructions illustrating the character's psyche in preparation for his/her inevitable fall from grace – the realization s/he has committed a grave mistake and an unforgivable trespass. There would be a side commentary from the infallible author telling the reader justice was recuperated in the world when the protagonist grew up or life taught him a lesson. But, if we take the writer is also the protagonist, Attridge believes "[f]iction becomes recollection; the intensity of the related experience becomes a mark of its power as memory, as lasting imprint on the same psyche that is relating it to us" ("J. M. Coetzee's Boyhood" 88). The struggle to bare himself to the reader becomes closely alike confession of a shameful burden he had been carrying from childhood to the reader's mind. The ungrateful son speaking up after the death of his parents is making "[t]he bitter acknowledgement of a mother's destructive love" so it reads like "a secret revealed" (88), whether the reader remains aware of this phenomenon or not.

As to the truth offered in *Boyhood*, it remains that of testimony, but secular in essence and puzzling as to some scenes. If the truth directedness has been established, or in other words, self-deprecating tone towards the self with no aim whatsoever, Attridge claims any subsequent lacking of truthfulness is attributed to a lack of knowledge about the self, not to lying (90). "Such is the sense of integrity […] that the book has conveyed up to this point that this sparseness comes across not as a withholding but as a sign of the adult author's continuing bafflement, of an essential truth that he, like Augustine, cannot penetrate" (90), asserts Attridge. What leads the reader to believe the protagonist in his puzzlement is the constant questioning about the motivation of his actions and his own attempts at discovering his motivation. Since John has no idea why he committed the mentioned cruelty, then the reader takes on the task of discovery. "If anyone is to take responsibility for judgements on the boy of *Boyhood*, it is the reader, and the reader is thus implicated in the ethical web spun by the work" says Attridge (82).

David's self remains ideal in that he is well-adjusted, which is something John openly craves. Secretly, however, and potentially unknown to himself at the time, John prefers being special because of the sense of purpose that provides him and because of the narcissism his mother has instilled in him. Given the option to switch places, John would never take his brother's meek persona, no matter how much the brother represents his ideal, adjusted self. Illustrated in the quote on irrational cruelty to his brother he unapologetically testifies to David's strength, but factually does not comment about his own actions. Of David he mentions that "no one pretended his finger would grow back, he did not complain" (*Boyhood* 101), and any side commentary to David's feelings at the time is omitted.

4.2.2.4 Conclusion

Such is Coetzee's style that the cruelty and irony evoke a necessity for an explanation, for elaboration, but still readers are left to their own devices. Coetzee forces readers to come up with explanations for the protagonist and characters by reading between the lines. However, only at times does Coetzee show his other voice, other than that of John. The following scene provides evidence there might be someone older behind John's worldview and provides a conclusion to the problems of a family in *Boyhood*.

The passage shows Coetzee-the-author and his unitary self as glimpses of reality instead of the haze of John's youthful point of view that readers were accustomed to reading. Having forgiven his parents their transgressions of ignorance and faults they displayed, "the author" hints to the perspective of the protagonist as an adult whose family no longer lives, so in the off chance of their post-mortem:

> Sometimes, in the days that follow, the gloom lifts. The sky, that usually sits tight and closed over his head, not so near that it can be touched but not much further either, opens a slit, and

> for an interval he can see the world as it really is. He sees himself in his white shirt with rolled-up sleeves and the grey short trousers that he is on the point of outgrowing: not a child, not what a passer-by would call a child, too big for that now, too big to use that excuse, yet still as stupid and self-enclosed as a child: childish; dumb; ignorant; retarded. In a moment like this he can see his father and his mother too, from above, without anger: not as two grey and formless weights seating themselves on his shoulders, plotting his misery day and night, but as a man and a woman living dull and trouble-filled lives of their own. The sky opens, he sees the world as it is, then the sky closes and he is himself again, living the only story he will admit, the story of himself. (*Boyhood* 135-136)

Rare lines like these demarcate the adult Coetzee and his twenty-twenty vision in hindsight, seeing his parents "living dull and trouble-filled lives of their own" (136). No longer the center of attention, he is able to perceive in "a slit" and for "an interval" the reality of his experiences (135). It is in moments like these, quite rarely, that readers can freely read *Boyhood* autobiographically and witness Coetzee's internalized John, his unitary, or at least his adult "essential" truth about his self instead of his constant version of denied self. The perspective of both times past and adulthood provides him with the unshakeable understanding in which "he can see his father and his mother too, from above, without anger: not as two grey and formless weights seating themselves on his shoulders, plotting his misery day" (136), but as troubled individuals who did their best.

Coetzee's writerly identity salutes the reader as John says "[t]he sky opens, he sees the world as it is, then the sky closes and he is himself again, living the only story he will admit, the story of himself" (136). The proof to my claim that Coetzee believes the only story he is entitled to tell is his own resides in the previous line, he recognizes no sense of entitlement for his secondary family members because of ethical reasons, so the only story he will admit to is that of himself, of his self (136). *Boyhood*, then, requires both an autobiographical and subjective reading because the author/character himself admits to telling the story only of his self, from the perspective of the other family members.

In essence, *Boyhood* shows the search for the unitary self through negation of various imposed, inherited or adopted identities that the character tries on for size and eventually sheds as inadequate. Coetzee's unitary self emerges through the reconciliation of John's varied identities, and most obviously so in *Boyhood*. It is the constant criticism of the self that we as readers have a preview to, nonetheless, as the process of "unflinchingness" takes place in front of us while the process of forgiveness takes place privately. Not that Coetzee is bereft of issues, but still the never-ending descriptions of himself in universally critical voice point to the fact that Coetzee-the-author writes publicly about the problem, but resolves issues privately. Namely, the issue of forgiving himself for boyhood trespasses.

The private resolution of issues of identity takes place, for Coetzee, in the process of writing personal narratives. Through writing out his history from memory, Coetzee achieves the "forgiveness" portion of his claim about childhood – "We – or at least some of us, enough of us – must look at the past with a cruel enough eye to see what it was that made that joy and innocence possible. Forgivingness but also unflinchingness: that is the mixture I have in mind, if it is attainable. First the unflinchingness, then the forgivingness" (*Doubling the Point* 29).

It is my point that the adult Coetzee must have achieved love and affection towards his childhood self in the process of writing, otherwise, the unflinching gaze would be too grimy with unresolved issues and unforgivingness towards the self to be read. Oppositely, however, *Boyhood* reads like a loving if an unflinching description of the young self one has resolved he no longer is, or at least no longer is in his entirety. Coetzee's self in retrospect must be read not as an either-or construct, but as a Bakhtinian and/and idea[60] – Coetzee simultaneously inhabits the author, the

[60] Bakhtin's dialogism refers to philosophy of language and social theory in which life is a dialogic and shared event, and everyone is participating in the dialogue. The dialogical thinking, by extension, occurs not only in the varied voices of protagonists in a novel, but also within the characters and authors themselves. It is the relational theory of constantly participating in conversations with the world, history and other's perspective that applies also to personal writing and

protagonist, the reader, his parents, his brother, and all other characters mentioned in the process of personal writing. Only if read autobiographically, or semi-autobiographically that we may conclude that John of *Boyhood* is loved and despised for his foolishness in a possessive manner only ascribed to family members or ourselves. Just like when we badmouth our parents to our friends behind their back, but would never allow any of them to use the same words about them, so does Coetzee write about John – with the unflinchingness and background information only he could muster. But most importantly, also with the forgiveness that had it not happened in the process of writing, *Boyhood* could never have needed the fragile ego of the boy would not have survived its publication.

At the end through the denial of his family subtexts, John comes to conclusions about his self in retrospect and finds forgiveness for himself by himself, which is why he never feels the need to plead the reader for it.

4.2.3 The Denial of Place, Culture, and Language as Identity Shapers

> I could have no idea of an alternative to the environment in which I lived, so what impressions I had can't, logically speaking, count as impressions of this country. They were just impressions of life. And by now they have been recalled, revisited, revised so often that I can hardly claim with any confidence that they belong to my childhood. They belong, by now, to the childhood I have constructed for myself in retrospect, that is, to autobiography.
>
> (Coetzee, "Voice and Trajectory" 82-83)

Critics trying to draw Coetzee into the African political battle took issue with his undetermined geographical spaces of implied Africa (in *Foe* for example).[61] Even though he did it to free "himself from being viewed as a mere commentator on the political situation in South Africa" (Phillips 62), still he was expected to share opinions, or better yet, the right opinions, about the place of his birth and his stance as a white South Afrikaner on Africa – his home. Opposed to geographical spaces as limitations, Coetzee preferred to develop his novels "in an unspecified landscape" echoing *Boyhood's* John in many ways (62). He believed it was a place of his birth, and any adornments he would add post-facto, from an adult's perspective, would clearly belong to "revisited" ("Voice and Trajectory" 82) and constructed perspective rather than that of a child.

Some view this geographical anonymity in novels as "falling off" in the quality of Coetzee's work prior to *autre*-biography, but I agree with Phillips that "Coetzee was never a writer who used apartheid to hitch a literary ride" (Phillips 64). *Autre*-biography shows the place and setting even if they remain the backdrop, not the main image of his African boyhood storyline. At the time, John could "have no idea of an alternative to the environment" in which he lived (*Boyhood* 82), so Africa was home like any other. Coetzee tries, despite the attacks on his apparent lack of stand on the issue of white Afrikaners, to describe Africa from a child's point of view. That point of view could just take note of what was happening but had insufficient knowledge of history and place to take a political stand on the issues involved in Africa as an epicenter of white and black struggles.

As a trained linguist and critic, Coetzee discovers his voice in questions of identity, marginality, power, authority, and belonging through the use of metafiction and language. All of

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the polyphony of voices and perspectives present there. According to Bakhtin, the author does not narrate between readers and characters, but characters embody a variety of perspectives available and create polyphony of voices – and types of consciousness all presented to readers at the same time. See Bakhtin's concepts on dialogism and polyphony, *Problems of Dostoevsky's* poetics, Ch. 5, and The *dialogic imagination: Four essays*, Ch. "Discourse in the Novel."

[61] See Kelly Hewson, for example, for more information about the attacks on Coetzee by even the famous Nadine Gordimer who advocates he should enter the African battle and take a stand. She finds Michael K unsuitable a character who is insufficiently on the side of the black African struggle, pp. 67-70.

these are also present in *Boyhood*, but I discern as his main preoccupations – identity, the self in retrospect, and power to tell one's story in personal writing most relevant in this first section of *Scenes from Provincial Life.* And what could be more identity-forming than the concepts of place and locus as the background noise to the music of his life? Similarly, language as a means that formed and enveloped his opinions should be investigated along the lines of identity-forming tool and his eventual attempts at denying himself that identity because of the inherited South African problem.

The locus of South Africa informs all of John's opinions, mainly implicitly in *Boyhood* and explicitly after he sheds place and moves to England in *Youth*. Coming from a "middle class Afrikaner family, in a city ninety miles from Cape Town in the hinterlands of South Africa" (Edele 178) John becomes a self-conscious child who draws his power from denying the reality of the middle-class Afrikaner society as an extension of denial of his family's values. In the process of teaching himself about what it means to be Afrikaner in the precarious times of the awakening white nationalism, the "precocious" and "perceptive" child (178) attempts to refute his legacy and inherited history of the place, culture, and language he does not resonate with in order to discover the self he would be proud of and whose legacy he could bear.

Unfortunately, in a child-like manner, *Boyhood* represents a testimony to the denial of all authority, even identity-shaping experiences. John, later on, finds his behavior from boyhood was mistaken and impossible, as he is ultimately unable to shake all experiences he was born into with no fault of his own. Not every identity must be disposed of just because it is an undesirable mainstream, such as history, place, culture, family, language, etc. The heat and landscapes of his boyhood come to haunt John in *Youth* as he slowly comes to appreciate the carved sceneries of Africa as his home country in his mind despite the attempts to assimilate the adoptive countries such as England and North America as his new homes. Also, the language of his Afrikaner identity proves impossible to forget as it attests to his personality he is unable to otherwise express – his language of paternal family and summers at the farm.

What *Boyhood* develops in its core refers to the refutation of place as inherited painful history of oppression John chooses not to become a part of, and by extension, forces himself to abandon the farm as the symbol of this denial of white enslavement on the continent. The farm symbolizes the "fruit of the poisonous tree" – if his ancestors came and forced themselves upon the natives, nothing else he does could erase the past except leaving Africa, except refusing his birthright. This extends to culture: by adopting his Afrikaner identity, John would have to side with the oppressor attempting to inspire nationalism to keep the status quo. Finally, language that forms one's thoughts, the process of thinking, and worldview, in John's case should have been Afrikaans like the rest of his extended family but he opts out of speaking it as an attempt to adopt the English identity rather than the one into which he was born. A testimony to the inclusive nature of language comes at the family farm where John and his extended family use Afrikaans as a means to include and exclude him on demand socially.[62]

4.2.3.1 Denial of Place and Culture – Africa Belongs to the "Coloureds"

> Freek is a hired man, he is paid a wage, he can be given notice and sent packing. Nevertheless, seeing Freek sitting on his haunches, his pipe in his mouth, staring out over the veld, it seems to him that Freek belongs here more securely than the Coetzees do – if not to Voëlfontein, then to the Karoo. The Karoo is Freek's country, his home; the Coetzees, drinking tea and gossiping on the farmhouse stoep, are like swallows, seasonal, here today, gone tomorrow, or even like sparrows, chirping, light-footed, short-lived.
>
> (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 73)

[62] See Carol Clarkson for more on Coetzee's language in *Boyhood* and other *autre*-biographies in "J.M. Coetzee and the Limits of Language," pp. 121-139.

John's boyish identity remains closely correlated to the feeling of alienation. Self-imposed though it might be, and colored by his denial of authority in all forms, his lack of belonging to any community occurs because of his unwillingness to be defined in dualist divisions – Afrikaner versus English, one language versus another, his family versus school-life and South Africa versus shameful history. Coetzee's plight is represented in John who never feels neither at home in his body, his country, or even the adoptive countries of his later life because of his immigrant status. His plight expands to the search for a fixed identity and a more unitary self that would correlate more with his feelings of being in the middle rather than clearly one side of binary choices.

I argue that Coetzee's "politics of space" in *Boyhood* should be read as an inner fight between the beloved farm in which he feels belonging to in his innermost self, and the veld of the Karoo where he witnesses people like Freek who belong there "more securely than the Coetzees do" (*Boyhood* 81). His reply as a child is to separate his identity forcefully, to dislocate it from his beloved farm as a self-imposed sacrifice because his ancestors transgressed against the people native to South Africa's veld. By denying himself the right to a white legacy, John attempts to disinherit the sins of the past. Two distinct places emerge from reading *Boyhood* – South Africa with its cities and the farm as agriculturally tamed subdued spaces, and the veld of Karoo as wild Africa, untamed, unfarmed, and unclaimed.

Maria Lopez also problematizes this issue in "(Un)belonging," focusing on "location and dislocation" as determining factors for John's identity in the trilogy (220). The politics of space young John encounters in Worchester refer to a demand from the community to accept binary oppositions and clear identity – either for or against the rising nationalism and Afrikaner identity. Binary opposition is contrasted with the boy's fluid identity as he had never been made to choose one way or another at home. Prior to the rising nationalism, his middle to the lower-class Afrikaner family had not followed the rules of speaking Afrikaans at home or going to church or even raising their children as hard-core veld kids with no shoes, and cushioning of any kind. At the moment the cultural paradigm shifts and the nationalists proclaim white Afrikaners need to defend themselves against the rising poverty and dissatisfaction, John begins to realize "[w]hat he hates most about Worcester, what most makes him want to escape, is the rage and resentment that he senses cracking through the Afrikaans boys" (*Boyhood* 58). In this manner, culturally stigmatic and suffocating parameters such as that having no shoes makes you belong, or merely going to church without behaving like a Christian has the same effect – become unraveled as methods for keeping a whole people down. Luckily for John, his parents did not subscribe to the culture of an oppressive sheep-like following despite the degradation to one's own advancement in society. They did not force him to join a church or speak Afrikaans for appearances only.

The idea of departure from the space of binary oppositions never quite leaves him, as from an early age it is suffocating to the extent he chooses to keep the choices that make him different from mainstream (about the language, religion, etc.) – a secret. Since They make him different from the surroundings, and by an extension lead him into the "I versus them" twofold opposition within the culture of white South Africans he belongs to, he prefers to keep his, even most naïve choices, to himself, which speaks volumes about the pro-nationalist climate popular at the time. Even the slightest questioning in times of crisis and oppression can be seen as a denial of overall values imposed by the mainstream and that would be impermissible if you wanted to belong.

In John, Coetzee also develops the struggle of youth eager to belong to the community he resembles, at least physically, when he comes to the realization that they are in the wrong. Privately, he yearns to differentiate himself from them as their values speak of something outdated and unintellectual. An example as to why he dislikes and denies all things Afrikaans is illustrated by why he has no friends of a similar background. John worries about befriending such boys because of urban legends of what they do for fun: "He fears and loathes the hulking, barefoot Afrikaans boys in their tight short trousers, particularly the older boys, who, given half a chance, will take you off to some quiet place in the veld and violate you in ways he has heard leeringly alluded to – borsel you, for instance, which as far as he can work out means pulling down your pants and brushing shoe

polish into your balls (but why your balls? why shoe polish?) and sending you home through the streets half-naked and blubbering" (*Boyhood* 29).

In a simplistic but potentially true frightening story between boys, John negotiates the cultural space of what it would mean to become Afrikaans and participate in such initiation processes. He denies himself even the notion of befriending these boys at school who could "take you off to some quiet place in the veld" (29). Just like his denial of Afrikaans culture can in this example be connected to the veld, as the location of wilderness, of true Africa, untamed insights and untouched by agricultural tools, also such depictions may apply to any spaces he avoids – Worchester, the boys' school, the veld. All these spaces are inundated with his impressions of potential danger, of wild-card effect that could engulf him and turn him into an Afrikaans boy if he is not careful.

For this reason, John adopts the policy of lying, as he attempts to hide his difference and lack of belonging from everyone else, even his family. What gets John into trouble one day is his fabrication about religion at school. In the politics of place, John fears the public spaces in which his difference can be discovered, and the threat at school where he spends most of his days remains higher than elsewhere. Placed on the spot to announce his religious affiliation, he fears that a lack of Afrikaans identity and the fact he does not attend church regularly and does not know enough about how to "properly" be religious would get him into trouble in the climate of rising nationalism.

To hide his difference, he lies and affiliates himself with the Catholic religion. Unaware of this choice would additionally leave him open for attack, he chooses Catholic instead of just Christian. Since the school provides only religious classes for Afrikaans boys, he is gathered with other Catholics and Jews and left in the courtyard until the end of their service. John seems satisfied to be left on his own devices while other Afrikaans boys pray. After they suffer being preached to, "the Afrikaans boys, big, brutal, knobbly, sometimes catch a Jew or a Catholic and punch him in the biceps, short, vicious knuckle-punches, or knee him in the balls, or twist his arms behind his back till he pleads for mercy" (17). John gets himself caught in the threefold situation of now lying to his Catholic and Jewish friends about religion, alienating Afrikaans boys, and hiding from his parents that he has falsely declared himself Catholic.

"Being" Catholic and left to his own devices instead of attending church, permits John a lot of free time for socializing with his Jewish and Catholic newly acquired friends. In fact, an overall tone of befriending outcasts begins to emerge. In the denial of mainstream white culture and the accepted South African norm that he should socialize with his own kind, John's "love for 'weak' people: white, Afrikaner, Coloured, Native, it matters little to Coetzee" starts to develop (Phillips 70). According to Phillips, "Coetzee's eventual rejection of his father's authority mirrors his rejection of the larger world of easy connections and lazy judgements that is South Africa" (70).

It all began with the celebration of his birthday when he was given money to get a "banana split or chocolate fudge sundaes" (*Boyhood* 61) for himself and his friends and "[h]e feels princely, dispensing pleasure like this" (61). The event would have been a complete success had it not been "spoiled by the ragged Coloured children standing at the window looking in at them" (61). The public spaces of entertainment such as this one remain out of reach even to John, except on special occasions, let alone to young Coloured boys, he calls "beggar children" (61).

It is the trespass into white space that allows John to notice inequality. Their invasion of his birthday "is not fair, it hurts my heart to see them" (62) – to see the disparity between them he would otherwise not become privy to unless the public spaces interacted. He does not chase them away, nevertheless, he is forever hurt by the injustice and by his shameful "participation" in it. As a white boy, he takes on the guilt that will forever be a part of his topics of interest in Africa, and later on in Australia.

> If he were someone else, he would ask the Portuguese with the brilliantined hair who owns the Globe to chase them away. It is quite normal to chase beggar children away. You have only to contort your face into a scowl and wave your arms and shout, '*Voetsek, hotnot! Loop! Loop!*' and then turn to whoever is watching, friend or stranger, and explain: '*Hulle*

> *soek net iets om te steel. Hull is almal skelms*.' – They are just looking for something to steal. They are all thieves. But if he were to get up and go to the Portuguese, what would he say? 'They are spoiling my birthday, it is not fair, it hurts my heart to see them'? Whatever happens, whether they are chased away or not, it is too late, his heart is already hurt. (*Boyhood* 61-62)

As a child, John tactilely begins to sense the world around him, and his anger at the existence of disparity between races comes about from a naïve perspective of a child born into the strata society. So young, he realizes and pinpoints the very reason gated communities and social clubs were created – which is quilt. "It hurts my eyes to see them" (62) can easily be translated into it hurts me they exist, and even more remotely that the "short-lived" Coetzees have contributed to their poverty and lack of status, and by that extension – he himself carries the quilt of history by right of birth.

Another such example of trespassing by the originally trespassed upon in *Boyhood* occurs when John's mother hires a young boy Eddie to work for her and send his mother money. Forced into labor, Eddie runs away as he never actually sees any money for his housework. John imagines "Ida's Valley, where Eddie comes from" (64) as "a cold, sodden place" with no electricity, damp with roof leakage and stones in front of the house to hop on (64). But it was home like no other to Eddie, and the Coetzees had no moral right to dislocate him, even if the historical right was on their side a time of reckoning would come.

Since his escape merited punishment, a logger in their house – the Englishmen Trevelyan, volunteered to administer it, and his father watched the process of "holding Eddie by the two wrists and flogging him on the bare legs with a leather strap" (65). Eddie, of a similar age, dark in color, "howled and danced; there were tears and snot everywhere" (63). John's family realized that flogging or no flogging, the apprenticeship had failed and the dislocation of Eddie would bear no fruit. They returned him to his place alongside his mother. Symbolically, in this scene John testifies to the significance of the displacement of colored people and the legacy his generation would come to bear because of the mentioned flogging:

> At this moment, in the leaky house in Ida's Valley, curled under a smelly blanket, still wearing his blazer, he knows that Eddie is thinking of him. In the dark Eddie's eyes are two yellow slits. One thing he knows for sure: Eddie will have no pity on him. (65)

One day, not so far away, Coetzee promises that the boy Eddie would grow stronger in his place and would recall his flogging by the usurpers. When they played, Eddie "[o]nly for a moment, when he had his opponent pinned on his back, helpless" allowed "himself a grin of triumph; then he rolled off and stood at a crouch, ready for the next round" (64). But one of these days, John knows this "victor cautious in victory" (64) will have "no pity on him" (65). In other words, the "Other" will rise.

John's denial of history and shameful legacy extends to his most beloved farm which he must relinquish if he is to truly make it up to Eddie and everyone else for his birthright. What Lopez scrupulously defends, and I agree, is the notion that Coetzee carefully denies the veld or the farm of Voëlfontein (Bird-fountain) as possessions, as dwellings, as objects ("(Un)belonging" 222-224). The boy is of the farm, but will never own the farm. He *belongs to the farm*; the farm does not belong to him (*Boyhood* 80). It is this major difference that sets his identity apart from that of an Afrikaner – the intent to possess and to conjugate to one's will, to dominate and change does not exist in him and for that, he is an alien in the existing climate of his boyhood.

His heart desires to say *I belong on the farm* and *I belong to the farm* (80, emphasis his), but the farm will never belong to me. That is a secret, not because it hides shame but because it cements his difference. John is irrationally guided by the fear that somehow someone would find a way to

forbid him from visiting the farm if his family confirmed he was not Afrikaner enough. Or it would be misconstrued that he felt the land *belonged to him* instead of *him being of the land*:

> He tells no one because the word is misunderstood so easily, turned so easily into its inverse: *The farm belongs to me*. The farm will never belong to him, he will never be more than a visitor: he accepts that. The thought of actually living on Voëlfontein, of calling the great old house his home, of no longer having to ask permission to do what he wants to do, turns him giddy; he thrusts it away. *I belong to the farm:* that is the furthest he is prepared to go, even in his most secret heart. (*Boyhood* 80-81)

Coming back full circle to the original quote in this section – "the Coetzees, drinking tea and gossiping o the farmhouse stoep, are like swallows, seasonal, here today, gone tomorrow, or even like sparrows, chirping, light-footed, short-lived" (73) and by extension, in his most secret heart he admits love of the place and temporary birthright do not forgive the history of his ancestors' oppression. The white entitlement of place and the Karoo, despite the love and belonging John feels there, turns shameful if history is taken into account.

Despite his love of the farm-place and that "there is no place on earth he loves more or can imagine loving more" (19), John realizes that the same history and stories that connect his mother's and father's farms to himself, his grandfathers and his love of the farm, oppress Eddie and Freek and other "Natives" or "Coloureds." The Karoo[63] cannot belong to both. John sacrifices his personal happiness upon the realization that "the two farms behind him, his mother's farm, his father's farm, and the stories of those farms. Through the farms he is rooted in the past; through the farms he has substance" (19) but also inherits the burden of shame and guilt. His love becomes watered down with "an edge of pain" (67). The way home is juxtaposed to the farm demonstrates guilt, white oppressive and self-reflexive in nature:

> He may visit the farm but he will never live there. The farm is not his home; he will never be more than a guest, an uneasy guest. Even now, day by day, the farm and he are travelling different roads, separating, growing not closer but further apart. One day the farm will be wholly gone, wholly lost; already he is grieving over that loss. (67)

Coetzee's eventual decision to leave South Africa, usually ascribed to his dislike of the African problem, racism, and lack of modernity, may be traced back to these lines. John sacrifices his favorite place in the world to remove the legacy of stories connecting him through his farms to his grandfather's theft of the African continent. John mourns the eventual loss of the farm as a premonition of times to come and "Freek's" eventual awakening. The sacrificial denial of the farm represents his ultimate sacrifice to return the land to the Coloreds, to the Natives, and undo the theft of his grandfathers.

Because the "Coloureds were fathered by the whites (52), such was their fate upon white intrusions that Colored people cannot possibly be dismissed in John's view. Coming to the end of this cyclical thought, John realizes actually language-wise the problem occurred when referring to the Colored peoples because he knows of the Boland People who have directly descended from the Hottentots and usually people referred to them as Colored – they "are not the great-great-grandchildren of Jan van Riebeeck or any other Dutchman" (52). Actually, "there is not a drop of white blood in them. They are Hottentots, pure and uncorrupted" (52). He comes to the conclusion that the land belongs to the Coloreds, because "[n]ot only do they come with the land, the land comes with them, is theirs, has always been" (52). A linguistic problem of double reference to two

[63] See David Attwell's *The Life of Writing* for descriptions of the Karoo and connections to Coetzee's life, pp. 40-55.

separate notions is resolved when John positions himself inside the African space, as this information might escape someone from the outside looking in.

"One cannot dismiss the Coloured people" (*Boyhood* 52), because one is responsible for their fate, we read between the lines. Even the Natives "are men without women, without children, who arrive from nowhere and can be made to disappear into nowhere" (52). The empty spaces of nowhere prove that they are as people native to the land, as opposed to the Coetzee's whose origin is clearly European and who could be made to disappear back into the old continent. John concludes that the only constant is the land, the wilderness, the Karoo, despite all of them transient peoples born into the land. He concludes that "in his secret heart he knows what the farm in its way knows too: that Voëlfontein belongs to no one. The farm is greater than any of them. The farm exists from eternity to eternity. When they are all dead, when even the farmhouse has fallen into ruin like the kraals on the hillside, the farm will still be here" (81). In history's eyes, the peoples and their struggles are too fleeting to matter.

By denying himself belonging to any place, John attempts to rewrite the history of violence and theft by offering his own tiny example. If he is able to relinquish a part of identity and belonging, then the parable goes more people could. He would lead by example in removing himself from Karoo-the-stolen-land. The boy John would deny himself the farm as a spoil of war, an unfair and unequal war and like the first Coetzee swallow, he would leave the Karoo, Freek's country, and his home (73) to the Coloreds despite the fact the veld and the farm remain only homes John himself has ever known. Carol Clarkson calls his mid-positioning of the self and the denial of belonging as a "dubious or doubting Afrikaner"

> In English, Coetzee's final response to what kind of Afrikaner he would choose to be is that he is a 'doubtful Afrikaner, perhaps' (trans. 557); yet in Afrikaans, 'n twyfelagtige Afrikaner' (594) could cover a much broader semantic range: a 'doubting,' 'uncertain,' even 'dubious' Afrikaner. ("A Review of J. M. Coetzee: 'n Geskryfde Lewe" 268)

The politics of place and space in Coetzee, the politics of hospitality and warmth denote all opposite – unbelonging, denial, and barren landscapes resting on the past theft. Coetzee-the-dubious Afrikaner shows the responsibility of inheriting history not merely as decorative spoils of war which allow us to pick and choose the spoils and forget the war, but a wholesome experience that if we choose to responsibly negate ourselves, we have to do so wholeheartedly and with sacrifice. I view John's lament over the farm as his denial of history in its entirety. In *Boyhood*, there is the child-like idealistic belief that home is a piece of land, geography of space rather than a feeling of belonging to a community, which he lives to correct in the sequels of *autre*-biography.

4.2.3.2 The Denial of Mother Tongue Proves Impossible

> When he speaks Afrikaans all the complications of life seem suddenly to fall away. Afrikaans is like a ghostly envelope that accompanies him everywhere, that he is free to slip into, becoming at once another person, simpler, gayer, lighter in his tread.
>
> (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 106)

John (or Coetzee) embraces the assumption that language allows one to don the identity that particular language denotes for the community. Therefore, young John adapts to his duality of a bilingual boy who speaks two dominant languages – Afrikaans and English almost equally well. These two languages indicate two tools for expressing his different identities and he chooses not to

deny himself either one of them, but control their usage depending on the circumstances. Young John's secret, family-of-origin identity is spoken only in English with his parents at home, so Afrikaans becomes John's "public identity" of belonging with his kinfolk and more broadly with the Afrikaner community.

Essentially, he begins to "slip into" his Afrikaans family identity in his paternal family's life at the farm when he speaks Afrikaans. The denial of Afrikaans language as an oppressive tool of imposing one's culture over others proves impossible for the young John. He learns his duality through language, as he appears to have two mother tongues – English and Afrikaans in equal measure. Both the languages also bring about the expression of two distinct identities for the young John – he uses English to prove his poshness and Afrikaans to belong to his community.

Initially Afrikaans represents a way to include and exclude John from the community of his wider kinfolk. Unable to speak the language, John is omitted from family conversations in Afrikaans because his cousins use it to deliver in-jokes he is not privy to. Language becomes an effective exclusion method for John's kin to firmly enlighten him that he does not belong on the farm. One day, nevertheless, after he has immersed himself in their talk long enough, John begins to speak the language. Only then does he become aware that language entails an assumed identity as well. John learns to incase himself in the protection of Afrikaans on demand. If he desires to become "at once another person, simpler, gayer, lighter in his tread" (*Boyhood* 106), all he has to do is speak the language and escape the formalities of English to become another person.

Most importantly to John, Afrikaans speaks of the *young self* he *becomes* on the farm. The vocabulary of the Karoo and many untranslatable words into English naturally suited for the life on the farm exude from Afrikaans. Since he was happiest on the farm, that identity is called upon because "[w]hen he speaks Afrikaans all the complications of life seem suddenly to fall away" (106). For this reason, despite the history of oppression it inevitably relates to, Afrikaans is the only element of oppression John is unable to renounce because it would be tantamount to renouncing his childhood on the farm and his identity when he was happiest.

As a student in England, John tries to relinquish Afrikaans because it does not coincide with his image of an English professor he tries to exude and climb the social ladder. On other occasions, as a child he also tries to use Afrikaans but not the variant learned at school or spoken by other boys who use dirty words as well. But despite John's initial denial of the Afrikaans language, and by extension the Afrikaner identity and culture of his extended family, he comes to learn that "Afrikaans is like a ghostly envelope that accompanies him everywhere" (106). It proves impossible for someone growing up in South Africa to forget the identity and vocabulary of Africa that cannot be translated into other words without losing meaning. Language represents the only facet of Afrikaner identity he is not able or willing to shed because he has acquired it along the way of discovering Africa as a child. Readers testify to the usage of both languages in John and Coetzee because Coetzee writes Afrikaans words extensively when that identity comes out depicting John. Afrikaans appears in both Coetzee's personal writing and novel-writing in the voices of Afrikaner characters as proof of his adaptation to this duality.

John's dual identity expressed in different languages – English and Afrikaans, dates back to John's dual family background and nonsensical heritage from his mother and father that inevitably arises from South African history.

> Though his surname is Afrikaans, though his father is more Afrikaans than English, though he himself speaks Afrikaans without an English accent, he could not pass for a moment as an Afrikaner. The range of Afrikaans he commands is thin and bodiless; there is whole dense world of slang and allusion commanded by real Afrikaans boys – of which obscenity is only a part – to which he has no access. (105)

He realizes the range of Afrikaans he commands is limited, forcing him to believe his mother tongue is English only to arrive at the conclusion that he is also not English enough to pass

for a native. Both his parents speak English at home, which is unusual for the climate of rising nationalism described in *Boyhood*. His mother's flawless English remains baffling because "though she is so stupid that she cannot help him with his Standard Four homework, her English is faultless, particularly when she writes" (*Boyhood* 89). Grappling with the idea his mother had actually had a life before him, a life he knows nothing about, a life that enabled her to acquire English grammar perfectly and be "at home in the language" stumps him. Since "[h]er father was Piet Wehmeyer, a flat Afrikaans name" (89) John deals with the idea that perhaps learning another language to its full extent despite Afrikaans heritage is possible.

It took years and extensive studies in linguistics to come to the conclusion that having been bilingual, he did not comprehend problems he encountered in language learning. As "a linguist in the Chomskyan line, my attitude was completely wrongheaded" (*Doubling the Point* 67) because any languages children get exposed to at a young age in equal measure represent their mother tongue(s). Or as he testifies to Attwell, "[t]he language that you internalize during your receptive early years is your mother tongue, and that is that" (67). Since he used two languages to understand the world around him, and especially because his close family members address him differently, he came to internalize worlds in two manners – English and Afrikaans and his identity by extension as well.

I conclude that John adopts language also as an assumed identity he would like to acquire, and since he respects his mother more, he prefers English because his father speaks Afrikaans better than English. His father remains less of a mystery because his English is far from perfect, and he still speaks Afrikaans with his family. John mocks his father's Afrikaner identity that peeks through language as "Afrikaners are afraid to say *you* to anyone older than themselves" (*Boyhood* 42). This facilitates some funny constructions that feel unnatural – "[h]e mocks his father's speech: '*Mammie moet 'n kombers oor Mammie se knieë trek anders word Mammie koud*' – Mommy must put a blanket over Mommy's knees, otherwise Mommy will get cold" (42). John sees this as a subservient identity of Afrikaners that comes out in language and "[h]e is relieved he is not Afrikaans and is saved from having to talk like that, like a whipped slave" (42). John's duality is further perpetuated by these comments that denote he believes, since he has the choices of two mother tongues, to be able to opt out of contractions of identity in one, and select them in another. In other words, he can pick and choose identity features from the two languages he resonates with, and refuse to sound like "a whipped slave" (42).

Correct in the notation that language delivers identity and that different facets of the self may be more or less permitted in various languages, John naively reviews one language from the perspective of another. Afrikaans from the perspective of English in no way provides a relevant image on pronoun use. Each language merits research on its own, if seen from the prism of another language it is criticized harshly with no linguistic merit whatsoever. Still, he concludes that Afrikaans has no finesse and denotes submissiveness towards the elderly, whereas English makes the person speaking sound distinguished.

What he loves about Afrikaans is the freedom of mixing languages and creating "a slapdash mixture of English and Afrikaans that is their common tongue when they get together" (69). The freedom of the mixture, together with the atmosphere of the farm his happiest place in the world denotes the usage of Afrikaans as "lighter, airier than the Afrikaans they study at school" (69). The school version of the language provides no freedom to mix vocabulary with English words and it is "weighed down with idioms that are supposed to come from the volksmond, the people's mouth, but seem to come only from the Great Trek, lumpish, nonsensical idioms about wagons and cattle and cattle-harness" (69). Oppositely, the combination of the atmosphere in John's paternal family unit when they are speaking their first language remains airy, full of jokes and a testimony to a pastiche of language "with its particles that slip here and there in the sentence (69) just like their identity. It reflects how the language must have come to be, in John's mind, and it remains like their settlers' self – mixed and full of freedom and discovery.

The reason John has no access to slang and allusion, aside from the fact his parents speak English at home, also mirrors the fact that "The Afrikaners of Worcester wield their language like a

club against their enemies" (*Boyhood* 105). His own family, his uncle Son, whom he would prefer as a father than his own father, "is careful always to speak English to him, even though he speaks Afrikaans back" (84). Whether it had started unwillingly, at this point John speaks Afrikaans but both of them remain in their separate aisles, one speaking English the other responding in Afrikaans as if saying John did not belong, and John defending his right of Afrikaner identity on his own terms. His accent in both English and Afrikaans lead him to the conclusion of "(un)belonging" (Lopez) again – that his identity remains on a hedge between the two, never terminating to perfect any of the languages (in pronunciation).

John refuses in Afrikaans, however, all that is denoted as "filthy" sexualized vocabulary as "the language of the Afrikaans boys is filthy beyond belief" (48). Squamish about the body in all of his oeuvre, or at least in the romantic and lovable of the body, it goes to character's development that the young John is also depicted as someone who relinquished or even forbade himself vocabulary connected to the animus. He is appalled at its usage by the younger boys and cannot believe it even exists some phrases have never seen the light of day in writing "[i]s *fok* spelled with a *v*, which would make it more venerable, or with an *f*, which would make it a truly wild word, primeval, without ancestry? The dictionary says nothing, the words are not there, none of them" (48-49). John's thought process about language learning and his methodology is revealed from a young age as he demands to know how words are written – "[u]ntil he can write them he has no way of taming them in his mind" (48). And words need origin in order to be tamed if not, they can be described as "truly wild" (49).

An interesting mixture of beliefs about the two languages develops as follows – Afrikaans uses too many sexualized words and English does not accept variety as a wealth of expression but criticizes the diversity of dialects from the colonies. The complex relationship Coetzee has with English and Afrikaans can be best summed in that he is an Afrikaner who writes in English, but thinks about Africa in Afrikaans. English, as opposed to Afrikaans that denominates his mother tongue of discovery of the world and his social background with friends and school, becomes his desired identity of intellectual achievement. Whenever he grows tired of simplistic Afrikaans boys and their dirty words, he ventures into the realm of English grammar. Becoming English means getting away from the shameful history he was born into, and aside from being Russian, which also attracts him, being English means being a writer, being posh, peaking without an accent of a mere migrant, and changing his home history.

His other mother tongue, the English language, affords John with the opportunity to prove his long-lasting belief that he is special. He feels that "[b]ecause they speak English at home, because he always comes first in English at school, he thinks of himself as English" (105). Narcissistic idea and coming from his mother in origin, it allows him to psychologically distinguish himself from the rest of Africa and in particular Afrikaner boys who have a manner "in common – a surliness, intransigence, and, not far behind it, a threat of physical force (he thinks of them as rhinoceroses, huge, lumbering, strong-sinewed, thudding against each other as they pass) – that he does not share and in fact shrinks from" (105).

His child-like logic provides a solution, since he differs from the Afrikaners, he must be English at his core. The proof of his exceptionality crumbles when he begins to study in England (narrated in *Youth*) and comes to see that by "textbook standards" he had working knowledge of English and "could speak, or at least write, the language better than most of the natives" (*Doubling the Point* 67) but he was still recognizable as the odd one out. Despite the fact that later on in his life, as a teacher, he learned that the mothertongue was simply the one your boyhood was colored in, despite how well you learned or badly, at this time he testifies to David Attwell that he became disillusioned that he was not English after all. Coetzee says that "as soon as I opened my mouth I betrayed myself as a foreigner, that is to say, someone who by definition could not know the language as well as the natives" (67). In his perfectionist attitude, it was unthinkable that if he defined himself as English, his English variant could be equally valuable as the one coming from the native people of England.

> I resolved this paradox by distinguishing between two kinds of knowledge. I told myself that I knew English in the same way that Erasmus knew Latin, out of books; whereas the people all around me knew the language "in their bones." It was their mother tongue as it was not mine; they had imbibed it with their mothers' milk, I had not. (*Doubling the Point* 67)

As a linguist later on in life, Coetzee shows the perspective of John-of-*Boyhood* as the defendant of variants and accents of English as equally valuable as the official language although that seems highly unlikely. Children rather tend to blend in and mimic accents than believe their language variant is correct and fight for it. Perhaps, Coetzee as a ventriloquist has John defend positions too mature and linguistic for his age. Because for the first time, in language, I note that John dismisses his unique brand of black-and-white thought in *Boyhood* and refuses to deny himself completely Afrikaans because of something he dislikes in it. A similar process occurs with English, John accepts part of his ideal English language identity and refuses only the English snobbery of allowing only proper English as the norm and blindly refusing the beauty of colonial varieties of English. He criticizes the English for their openly ignorant attitude towards the Afrikaans language:

> One thing about the English that disappoints him, that he will not imitate, is their contempt for Afrikaans. When they lift their eyebrows and superciliously mispronounce Afrikaans words, as if veld spoken with a v were the sign of a gentleman, he draws back from them: they are wrong, and, worse than wrong, comical. For his part, he makes no concessions, even among the English: he brings out the Afrikaans words as they ought to be brought out, with all their hard consonants and difficult vowels. (*Boyhood* 106)

I would go so far as to claim that John's adult opinions mirror those on languages and the self-expressed and reflected in them. He denies himself the Afrikaans of sexualized and animal-like consonants that grunt in spoken language to denote physical force, and he also denies the English posh conquistador animosity towards the Other, towards the different. John "finds himself unwilling to yield up the Afrikaans language to them" (106), or in other words adapt to the English image of the wild white South Afrikaner preconception and apologize for his language and identity by extension.

In this adult maneuver of language concepts and the identities they yield, and especially in his refusal to succumb to common misconceptions about these two languages, John reconciles his dual identities. The only acceptance of language as defining to himself and his childhood, can be seen in these scenes of reflections on what it means to be Afrikaans and English – and especially not enough one or the other. His sacrifice in admitting Afrikaans defines him is all the more poignant in that he becomes eventually a linguist with full consciousness that "[l]inked to this awareness of not quite belonging is the sense in which language operates as a marker of national identity" (Kossew, "Border Crossings" 68). Still, John is unable until the end of the confessional sagas to opt for one language or the other as markings of identity, fully aware of language's role in inspiring nationalism.

André Brink[64] develops the idea that "Afrikaans gradually became more the language of the bourgeoisie" and assumed the position of power as it became the language of apartheid:

> However, at the same time Afrikaans gradually became more the language of the bourgeoisie, until towards the end of the nineteenth century when it was appropriated by an increasingly nationalistic community in opposition to English and Dutch, and assumed a

[64] For more on the topic of language and guilt, read André Brink's article "Post-Apartheid Literature: A Personal View in *J. M. Coetzee in Context and Theory*. Ed. Elleke Boehmer, Robert Eaglestone and Katy Iddiols, pp. 11–19.

> new position of power within the colonial situation. It evolved into 'the language of apartheid'. In this way historiography became fully the property and the tool of the ruling white elite. But that 'other' Afrikaans, the language of the deprived and the oppressed, still lurked behind the new and monstrous Frankenstein. (Brink 15)

Knowing about Coetzee's stance on languages and his life's work on providing voices for the Other, it must have been difficult to face his role in the perpetuation of the language as a tool and his inability to shed. Yet he deliberately embraces it as a testimony to childhood and the formation of his identity. John represents it an as intricate part of his self, not as a powerful tool but as a means to finding the self and separating it from his English self. If we come to believe Brink that there was "that 'other' Afrikaans, the language of the deprived and the oppressed, still lurked behind the new and monstrous Frankenstein" (15), we can conclude that decent people also inhabited the same language space as the thirsty for power. Children such as John who simply had no other tongue to speak their mind in were torn by their choice and guilty for inheriting shame, but unable to change at that moment how their thought process occurred and how their mixed identity decided to present itself.

Since Coetzee's "attention to historical guilt is seldom direct" (Robinson 2), his oblique treatment of all topics in *autre*-biography can be viewed as both concealment and confession, both denial and admittance of authority and responsibility for the right of birth he has inherited. Language proves no different. In love with English, he assumes its shield of poshness to hide him from the dirt of Africa but denies its lack of acceptance of the "other" – in terms of dialect. The English language proves deaf and blind for difference and colonial beauty and Coetzee wants no part of that. Similarly, Afrikaans provides belonging in his extended family and by speaking the words he becomes transfixed and transported to his family farm and childhood memories of wealth as opposed to his meager living at home. At the moment Afrikaans becomes the language of filthy-mouthed boys at school or mandatory learning material that is too crude and unrelated to real life, he denies its sexual connotation and refuses to play the role of "that kind of an Afrikaner boy."

Coetzee writes extensively in *Here and Now* about ideal language and linguistic concepts Derrida had in mind when he wrote about mother tongue "that many writers and intellectuals have a removed or interrogative relation to the language they speak and write, in fact, that referring to the language one uses as one's mother tongue (langue maternelle) has become distinctly old-fashioned. So when Derrida writes that, though he loves the French language and is a stickler for correct French, it does not belong to him, is not "his," I am reminded of my own experience of English, particularly in childhood" (*Here and Now* 65-66).

He felt no proprietary sense towards English, it just represented a list of subjects at school he had and happened to be good at as opposed to "Geography" (66). Having become a professor of English, as he further testifies, "of all things" he did give it further thought and especially with regards to English as an academic subject in an English-speaking country in which it was a mother tongue. What he clarifies is that it had never dawned on him as a child that someone could be bad at a mother tongue, or that it was "his language" to begin with, that a language could belong to anyone let alone him – "[b]eing good at English was as inexplicable as being bad at geography. It was some quirk of character, of mental makeup" (66).

> Insofar as I can recover my childhood way of thinking, I thought of the English language as the property of the English, people who lived in England but who had also sent out members of their tribe to live in and, for a while, rule over South Africa. (66)

All in all, languages in *Boyhood* denote anything but simple notions, they are cloak and dagger at the same time, the hideout and the weapon of belonging. As Coetzee says in *Here and Now*, language provides a manner of inhabiting the "Other":

> As Derrida remarks, how can one ever conceive of a language as one's own? English may not after all be the property of the English of England, but it is certainly not my property. Language is always the language of the other. Wandering into language is always a trespass. And how much worse if you are good enough at English to hear in every phrase that falls from your pen echoes of earlier usages, reminders of who owned the phrase before you! (*Here and Now* 67)

The only power John never relinquishes is his white Afrikaner identity derived from childhood language learned to express his belonging on the farm. Eventually, he even disappears more or less from the farm, he leaves the Karoo to Freek, he even attempts to become English, American, and ultimately Australian, but he never forgets the Afrikaans language of boyhood. Language denotes his self in retrospect and Coetzee draws the line at mother tongue – the line that cannot be crossed without disintegrating the self is the mother tongue one used to symbolize and learn the world around him/herself. Without language, despite its connotation to the external world and history, we would not be ourselves – who we were and whom we have become alike.

4.2.4 *Boyhood* Conclusions

> The child is father to the man: we should not be too strict with our child selves, we should have the grace to forgive them for setting us on the paths that led us to become the people we are. Nevertheless, we can't just wallow in comfortable wonderment at our past. We must see what the child, still befuddled from his travels, still trailing his clouds of glory, could not see.
>
> (Coetzee, *Doubling the Point* 29)

Boyhood as Coetzee's first "intellectual autobiography"[65] ("A Life in Research" 253) in the series of three overall, deals with the positioning of the self-reflected in the author's alter ego – John. The positioning and repositioning of the self take place in front of the reader's eyes as Coetzee appears and hides his self as the author from the protagonist, trying to represent a boy's perspective to the best of his abilities. Since "the child is father to the man" (*Doubling the Point* 29) the first sequel discovers the world of South Africa at John's tender age of a young adult, especially in his family, and his Afrikaans culture he slowly becomes aware of as his boyhood turns into youth.

Notably, an older perspective creeps up from time to time, because Coetzee breaks the wonderment of the past with insights beyond a child's capabilities and obviously added post-facto. These insights of language and perspective testify to his presence and draw the attention to issues of race and family feuds proving he has tried to include "what the child, still befuddled from his travels, still trailing his clouds of glory, could not see" (29). Structurally, these insights from an older adult's perspective point to the larger issues of confession and *autre*-biography. We must take into consideration postmodern terms of self-reflexivity, metafiction, subversive tone, authorial theories, and concepts of the "self" as understood in autofiction to place Coetzee in any type of literary constraint. Namely, J. M. Coetzee, as a professor, critic, and novelist, uses all his innate feeling and lifelong learning to incorporate literary theory into a masterful representation of the "self" in *autre*-biography.

[65] The expression used here is taken from Attridge's article and he discusses *Doubling the Point* as Coetzee's first attempt at an intellectual autobiography. He sees it as a prelude to *Boyhood*. See Attridge's "A Life in Research" for elaboration on this idea, p. 253.

Coetzee as the author points to possible resolutions of what constitutes a good *autre*-biographical account of oneself by writing out his maturation in these practical studies of autobiographical discourse. Robinson develops the idea that Coetzee approaches the subject of self-narration in a "characteristically ambiguous" manner, "at once a revelation and a concealment, an elusive crossing of signals that seems to express both his compulsion to show himself and an answering resistance to compromising disclosure" (2). He resists the autobiographical compulsion while at the same time writing it out:

> What are we to make of this flagrant contradiction: a novelist who wants above all else to be left alone, but who nonetheless exposes himself in the most unflattering ways across the pages of one book after another? Once again, the need to conceal is discovered in potent tension with the need to reveal. That tension remains strong, it seems fair to say, because the revelations – which are the expression of an expanding appetite for self-abasement – are never complete or reliable enough to bring the process of confession to closure. (48)

The style of self-abasement further dissimilarities the normative style of autobiographies usually done in flattering voices aimed at maintenance of their future legacy. Pieter Vermeulen focuses on Coetzee's *autre*-biographies get described as occupants of something called the third space – autobiographies lacking the confessional need for forgiveness and manifesting themselves as prose (192). Despite being relentlessly unforgiving in some moments towards his interpretation of the boy John, as Attridge comes to show "Coetzee's biographers when they draw their connections between the life and the fiction, will have a mass of material to work with" ("J. M. Coetzee's *Boyhood*, Confession, and Truth" 78-79) because of *autre*-biographies' clear obsessions with his personal experiences.

However, taking Coetzee's word for it, *Boyhood* should still be read as the triumph of pseudo lives of the author and his projections of the self, rather than of the truth as a unique concept. In a series of published letters to Paul Auster, Coetzee discusses that: "If projects such as this flourish, then ultimately the pseudo selves that have been created for us, with their blessedly uncomplicated opinions, will come to reign in the public consciousness, while our "real" selves and our "true" (and tiresomely tangled) opinions will be known only to a few friends. The triumph of the simulacra" (*Here and Now* 143). *Boyhood* as the first section to the simulacra of the life of John Maxwell Coetzee is deservingly considered the best because of a unique mimicry showing the perspective of a young boy's journaling voice.

Further to this, the journalistic voice of a supposed child provides Coetzee with the "charity" (*Doubling the Point* 249) towards his subject. Coetzee believes that charity in the author is needed when he tries "not to lose sight of the reality that we are children (249) which helps both with the perspective of presumed naiveté in *autre*-biography and with forgiveness he bestows on himself in retrospect. In *Boyhood* more so than other parts of *Scenes from Provincial Life*, he teaches us as readers that in autobiographical discourse, not even children get a free pass and exemption from bad acts they have done or been privy to because Coetzee advocates being "treated with the charity that children have due to them (charity that doesn't preclude clear-sightedness)" (249). In other words, clear-sightedness leads to a good autobiography, forgiveness comes out of the process of writing so a charitable point of view for children or for the child self must not preclude a clear vision of the self in retrospect.

In Paul J. Eakin's words, identity or the creation of one's identity is loosely connected to the narrative of one's story through "inventing selfhood" and "clarification" ("Living Autobiographically" 49). Since "narration (oral and written) reelects the easiest way to reach this inner self" (49), in Coetzee's reinvention of his boyhood years, with grace and unflinchingness, we arrive at the story of the childhood self in denial of his inherited rights to family, culture, history, and language due to shameful inherited history of a white Afrikaner legacy.

Viewing himself as a "failed emigre, J. M. Coetzee is a white South African of Afrikaner rather than English origins who writes in English, rather than Afrikaans" (Janes 107). In just one sentence we encounter numerous reasons for self-loathing and attempts at forgiveness for the childhood self who participated unwittingly in the process of occupation. The identity that childhood bears out is inevitably conflicted about the role he is to have in society and the role he has to shed once he learns white privilege comes with responsibility as well, or once he grows older.

We encounter John, as Coetzee's boyhood alter ego, as a self-conscious child, equally full of anger and compassion towards injustice and almost too easily hurt for this world. His style of writing Janes describes poignantly as "the recurrence of loss stretched along and through the sentence, an attenuated aching, a wound that refuses either to close or suppurate sufficiently to impel amputation" (105). In response to this hurt of watching injustice in the form of Freek and his country being disposed of at white will, John overacts in denial of all he has a birthright to and loves but feels a shame to own such as his family (warmth, home, masculinity, oppression), the farm (stolen land, history of oppression, white privilege) and language (Afrikaans as domination over the consciousness of the Other).

In all these segments John (and by extension Coetzee) successfully denies himself comfort and privilege by rejecting varying identities and living marginally a lonesome life out of any kind of a pack. Only language escapes complete denial in that John's boyhood is colored by notions about the farm, his childhood, and nature in the wilderness of Karoo that he comes to learn cannot be expressed in English. Despite the fact that he ends up writing in English and denying himself Afrikaans for a while (he does come to write in Afrikaans later on but not extensively), still in *Boyhood* some games and memories about this family life creep up on him in Afrikaans as that part of his life possibly cannot be otherwise expressed.

I have attempted to point to the secluded parts of his identity that Coetzee is busy denying himself or hiding from himself such as his rejection of his inner family circle, his wider kinfolk, the farm as location, and inherited history as part of a broader narrative of his selfhood in *Boyhood.* As he mentions elsewhere – "I will not be able to put my finger on these occluded parts because 'I' am engaged in hiding them from 'myself'" (*The Good Story* 67-68), and for this reason, it cannot be emphasized enough how Coetzee acutely participates in the process of hiding and unveiling the self in *autre*-biography.

Like a magician, he simultaneously hides himself as the author behind the focalization of a child, and metafictionally comments on the procedure of "John's" thinking, which calls him out on the trickery. *Boyhood* in general embodies Coetzee's linguistic artistry of hiding and unveiling parts of his childhood identity.

4.3 *Youth* – John and The Becoming of J. M. C.

> That leaves London, where South Africans do not need to carry papers and where people speak English. London may be stony, labyrinthine, and cold, but behind its forbidding walls men and women are at work writing books, painting paintings, composing music.
>
> (Coetzee, *Youth* 177)

The critical reception of *Youth* (2002) was, almost unanimously, negative in comparison to *Boyhood* (1997) and *Disgrace* (1999).[66] *Youth* is pronounced as lacking a clear purpose (Dyer; Lee) and difficult in terms of discerning "the book's point" (Sheehan 21). The readers were informed by the publishers in the UK, at the time, that this was a novel, but in America, the publishers added the subtitle *Scenes from Provincial Life II* as "a deliberate pairing with *Boyhood*" (Lee 14). The interpretation of *Youth* played out according to the agenda of selling as many copies as possible. Later on, with the second print and increase of critical response to Coetzee, the previous editions were corrected to the trilogy of *autre*-biography, and not much speculation towards these works being novels remain. Finally, the edition I will be using throughout the *autre*-biography analysis was published in 2011, and it included all three parts of *autre*-biography under the umbrella of the subtitle placed first – *Scenes from Provincial Life: Boyhood, Youth, Summertime*. Unanimity lacks in the critical response only in terms of how much fiction should be allowed before *autre*-biography should be considered autobiographical fiction, and there is no agreement in sight. In Coetzee's words, the author decides what events constitute the story of one's life,[67] not critical acclaim, so we can assume he does not regret the "empty spaces" in the trilogy.

Despite the negative reviews of *Youth*, especially in comparison to *Boyhood*, I agree that scenes from youth unravel uninviting language and a worldview colored by the protagonist's lack of purpose, good fortune, and emotional connections. Even though some have ventured to call *Youth* misogynous and "'a tortuous exercise in intellectual introspection, and not much else'; 'as fiction it is so interior and cerebral, it fails to engage'; 'not wholly satisfactory as either novel or memoir'" (qtd. Lee 14), there is also an alternative reading provided. In his intent to discover the "Siberian wastes of himself" (Davidson), *Youth* is "tortuous because it reminds its readers of something that seems to go hand and hand with youth – the desire for glory, for greatness, for artistic achievement and admiration without the tedious work of application" (Ball). Instead of laughing at him, Lee suggests maybe "the cold, dysfunctional, misogynist central character, John" should not be taken too seriously (Lee 14). If alternatively, we interpret his views lightly as an earnest youth and laugh with Coetzee at himself, at John, the perspective changes, and we as readers become more predisposed "to mock this grim young man and the Conradian title that portentously frames his rite of passage" (14). It is his young pretentiousness that the older self is trying to castigate and mock, albeit too sternly at times.

Youth begins with "scenes from provincial life" describing John at nineteen, a mere student at the University of Cape Town. It is 1959 and he is filled with dignified aspirations of becoming a masterful poet, despite studying the unrelated subject of mathematics as a safety net (*Youth* 162). In

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[66] Coetzee began writing *Boyhood* in 1984, according to his papers in the "Harry Ransom Center" in Texas, but it was published much later in 1997. The only other publication that saw light of day between the trilogy at this time (1997-2002) was *Disgrace*, his most rewarded, controversial and popular novel. So, quite expectedly, praise failed for *Youth* after such an astonishing and critically-acclaimed book such as *Disgrace*, because the audience had expected much more and because *Youth* lacked details the readers knew had happened. Lack of events presented from Coetzee's private live in *Youth* raised questions of whether it was really an autobiography, fictional autobiography or a novel. There was a sense of a letdown at the time, especially with the grim overtones of the book and the unredeemable protagonist at the end.

[67] "I am tempted to try out the following definition of autobiography: that it is a kind of self-writing in which you are constrained to respect the facts of your history. But which facts? All the facts? No. All the facts are too many facts. You choose the facts insofar as they fall in with your evolving purpose." (Coetzee, *Doubling The Point* 18)

his young mind, desires that grand must be achieved in metropolitan areas of the world, which to a South Afrikaner leaves London.[68] In London, as opposed to other metropolis areas, South Africans do not need to "carry papers" and people speak English (*Youth* 177). Desperate to escape the political turmoil in South Africa among other things, he moves to London after graduation and takes up a job as a computer programmer in IBM. He also wins a scholarship in Cape Town and enrolls an M.A. degree in Literature focusing on the work of Ford Madox Ford. He confesses to avoiding his family at all costs, even while living in South Africa and seeking independence at the cost of convenience.

John spends most of his days direly lonely, mostly working, regretting his chosen subject for the M.A. thesis because Ford's work proves patchy, and roaming the streets of London in search of female companionship. The role of the female he is dreaming up should be that of a muse – she is to awaken the fire of his poetry by igniting love and desire, at least that is what he has read his favorite poets say. By the end of *Youth*, he struggles with misconceptions of love and the poetic purpose he had brought about on himself. An immigrant and exile, he feels a lack of belonging to any culture in particular that extends from his *Boyhood*, and struggles with being cold, at odds with the heartfelt nature a poet in hot pursuit of passions – "needs." At the end of *Youth*, at *the becoming* of a poet and entrance into adulthood, he ceases to tail a muse for inspiration and embraces his immigrant status and love of Africa as well as his cold disposition as inspiration. John comes full circle – to himself. As a sort of a *homecoming* to his true self, a return to his roots to Africa, he realizes writing eludes him because he had tried to avoid being himself. *Youth* ends in a bleak absence of home and purpose, as a description of a failed artist not yet begun, brimming with ineptness and hopelessness in self-exile from family, place, and life's purpose. In the same period, Coetzee misrepresents his unhappiness, unsuccessfulness, and family connections, all of which form a part in the negative critical reception of *Youth* because his motives for doing so were unclear.

To avoid overshadowing the mastery in Coetzee's trilogy for meager detection of biographical "empty spaces,"[69] let me immediately establish that *Youth* ignores a number of available biographical facts, most notably Coetzee's marriage to Philippa Jubber and "obtaining his master's degree from the University of Cape Town in 1963" (Kusek, "Writing Oneself, Writing the Other" 107). From Kannemeyer's official and Coetzee-approved biography, for which there was full cooperation, we learn that upon his return to Cape Town in 1963 to complete his M.A., Coetzee took up an apartment for a few months to write and rekindled his friendship with Philippa. Within a few months they were married (Kannemeyer 130).[70] She, "a beautiful brunette, slender" and with "delicate features" was a member of one of his English II tutorial group in 1959 while he was an assistant, another bit he misrepresents because *Youth* never mentions his extensive academic successes or his mischievous[71] nature (102-103).

As his new wife, Philippa naturally followed him to England. And while Coetzee depicts no female conquests in London in this period, neither does he describe the happiness and comradery both of them enjoyed with various friends they met in the period and shared their lives at the time

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[68] See Vold for more on Eurocentrism in Casanova's theory that the more central a literary place is, the more autonomous this place will be, and it will attract writers from "provincial" countries in the "periphery," pp. 36-37.

[69] "Empty spaces" refer to Coetzee's special brand of selective factual representation of a life in writing. Instead of blatantly lying, he rather simply omits events he prefers not to represent and claims everyone does the same, self-consciously or not – "The past, individual or collective, is always messier and more complicated than any account we can give of it. We make up an account of the past so that we can pack the past away and not be bothered by its messiness any more. Yet it seems to me a source of hope that historians take it as their calling to, every so many years, lift the accepted account off the shelf and scrutinise it again, checking it against the facts to see whether it still reads like a true account." (Coetzee, *The Good Story* 76)

[70] See Kannemeyer for more on biographical information regarding Coetzee's period in Cape Town and the "British Interlude," pp. 77-137.

[71] There is quite a telling episode of his character rendered by a friend, Daniel Hutchinson, about the period that features in *Youth* when Coetzee was left house sitting for his professor and mentor Howarth, but he makes no mention of the said parties or people involved, only the event of living there. But, Daniel describes how Coetzee had a sense of humor "experienced from an impasse," situational ironic humor, and that house proved to be the "scene of some pranks" like locking doors behind some engineering students, who took revenge and removed carpet pins from the staircase. This, unfortunately, led to professor Howarth breaking his leg after his return to the house (Kannemeyer 103).

(Kannemeyer 131-137). Quite oppositely, Coetzee leads the reader to believe he was living a single, lonesome life while renting a room from Major Arkwright, accompanied by only one friend Ganapathy, a fellow immigrant, whereas nothing could be further from the truth (*Youth* 262).[72]

Even if sketches of these personalities prove real, and Kannemeyer does mention a friend who could be embodied as Ganapathy in *Youth*, still Coetzee deliberately deceives the reader in the last section of this *autre*-biography.[73] The young John was often a "witty and humorous companion and a charming friend" (Kannemeyer 99). Numerous e-mail testimonies depict him as a good cook, whimsical companion, and a poet-apprentice with five longer poems published between 1958-1962, none of which he ever mentions in *Youth* (99-100). Also, despite declarations in *Youth* aimed at proving some kind of rapture with the ties of family, Kannemeyer explains "there was no clean break from his parents, especially his mother" (79) who visited London after Coetzee willed his brother David into becoming a journalist and moving out of Africa. Quite oppositely, the reader is left struggling with his image of a "colonial" unfinished student on a quest for work in England, who turned out to be Nobel-material later on in life.

I attribute these "empty spaces" to a writerly decision Coetzee made in line with the storylines he was willing to follow without self-censorship. In other words, instead of half-hewed storylines, his writerly decision is to exclude overall some characters instead of mentioning some events and not others. Following this ethics of privacy, Coetzee-the-author awards people closest to him, who are alive, exclusion from being immortalized and sketched just because of a close acquaintance with him. What this technique achieves, mainly, is to rattle the reader and raise copious questions, especially since Coetzee makes no attempt at explaining his writerly persona outside officially published essays and interviews. Lacking confirmation from Coetzee outside the text, the reader is invited to roam the pages unsure of the author's imaginary world every step of the way – who is speaking, why they are speaking, and what had actually happened if the author chooses the information s/he serves the reader to the benefit of some and detriment of others.

The question I raise in *Youth* points to the intention behind Coetzee's relentless attempts of representing himself as purposefully obnoxious in depictions of the body, sex, women, and his own personality. For what could be his end goal but test the limits of readerly affection towards the confessor? His point of view remains the only point of entry into the storyline (the text), and the only voice. The psychological gain of representing himself unmarried and a failure at a time he was happily in love and settled in a relatively satisfactory job, merits further investigation. As to why Coetzee would divulge himself to have had a homosexual episode (*Youth* 209) or a string of unsuccessful sexual relationships if he is confessing secularly, i.e. not asking for forgiveness according to his own theory, will be determined in the section on love as a catalyst for poetry. Little can be said for this technique, except that it provides the last word on the part of the author. Having the last say, be it as negative as possible, but his interpretation of his life's story seems most valid in his course of action. Coetzee's biography of the same period proves he had been academically well-established, with five poems published prior to coming to England, he also had friends both in Cape Town and London, a wife, his brother to England, and even had his mother visit twice. Viewing himself as a mere colonial on the one hand, but aspiring greatness on the other all the while failing at everything, seems an interesting choice for the protagonist of *Youth*, and it is quite provisional.[74]

Ultimately, *Youth* is mostly a moping search for one's self in the wrong places, until the self is accepted. The logic of being acknowledged as a famous poet, from the outside, which would lead

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[72] An acquaintance from the British Library, Lionel Knight, said he often joined Coetzee and Philippa on their walks when they were living in Bagshot, and Coetzee was working in ICL. Lionel describes him as playful, "he liked tricks and unusual questions" and putting people on the spot and then watching their reactions. "He struck me as leading compartmentalized lives" and he appeared to be cultivating "unflinching truth and accuracy in his speech, but Knight emphasizes "his kindness with Philippa" and his wife as well. (qtd. Kannemeyer 135-137)

[73] Lionel Knight calls him "the chap from Medras," p. 136. See Kannemeyer for more on biographical information regarding Coetzee's period in Cape Town and the "British Interlude," pp. 77-137.

[74] The "provisional" here stands as arbitrary, as a choice, as subjective, not to say Coetzee was blatantly lying. The fact of the matter is that while the author might have felt in this way, it was at odds with the real world and he chose to represent what no one else saw about him in very derogatory tones.

to the acceptance of the self by the self, from the inside, is erroneous from the beginning. *Youth* definitely represents a rite of passage of an "artist as a young man," but even further it reflects this rite of passage onto and into oneself, having failed to rework outside stimuli for inspiration in poetry. In *Inner Workings,* Coetzee stated that the "incubation of the writer's soul" can be extrapolated to the work of that author, because the writer may "invoke the trope of the artist as a being wounded by life whose wound becomes the source of his art" (on Philip Roth 236). If we apply these words to his own work in *Youth*, the trope of the wounded artist searching for a muse and love as poetic inspiration seems "striking" in "naivety and cliché-like character" (Kusek, "Writing Oneself, Writing the Other" 107).

I argue, instead, that despite being tempted to search for the wounded artist reflected in John's relationships with women, we should venture further and claim that it is his cold disposition and analytical nature, his lack of belonging, and his family affliction that represent the real sources of poetry in *Youth.* And having failed at invoking the muse, John finds the fire within himself the moment he accepts place, history, origin, family, and intimacy as rites of passage into his nature that may not be perfect, Keatsean or romantic, but authentic enough to create poetry.

With regards to the place, it is the process of coming full circle in the realization that *he is of* Africa, that Africa is his original wound and affliction as well as the source of his future poetry that sets John free from forcefully trying to belong anywhere but in Africa. A testimony to this reads in the epitaph of *Youth.* Coetzee the famous writer, has chosen for *Youth* in retrospect – "Wer den Dichter will verstehen / muß in Dichters Lande gehen" (*Youth* 142). In the publication by Chicago Press called *Goethe and His Publishers*, Unseld quotes these verses in English in the full, longer format: "Anyone who wishes to understand poetry/ Must go to the land of poetry /Anyone who wishes to understand the poet, / must go to the poet's country" (224).

Coetzee only uses the last two lines in the German quote – "Wer den Dichter will verstehen / muß in Dichters Lande gehen" ("Anyone who wishes to understand the poet, / must go to the poet's country"). These lines subvert the protagonist from a writerly perspective, they oppose the protagonist John who merely wishes to escape his predicaments in Africa and flee, flee his country of shameful origin in which he is the disgraceful white descendent of occupants to virgin land. Because he ignores place instead of acknowledging it, Coetzee in this postscript teaches the young John, or speaks to the reader ironically by commenting what he has learned on the journey – you cannot become a poet without history, place, origin, and family. History is not optional, says the verse in its entirety – "Anyone who wishes to understand the poet, / must go to the poet's country" (224), and by extension, the poet also must travel to it in his/her mind for inspiration. The verse unravels the perspective of another John, of the J. M. C.–the–poet, who came to this realization and his erroneous ways through attempting to become someone else.

Despite the fact that Coetzee does not mention the beginning of this section in Goethe's first edition of "Notes and Essays," it is clear that the verses remain essential for his exile to London because "Anyone who wishes to understand poetry/ Must go to the land of poetry" (224) was the initial premise of the young John. Had it not been for this play with the reader, as a comment from a wiser, successful author John, the beginning of this quote would have actually fit better with *Youth*'s main preoccupation reflected in traveling to London to become an artist. Instead of choosing the more logical section of the quote (the land of poetry), Coetzee presents the lesson learned, instead. Traveling to London and learning the way of life and poetry from the masters Elliot, Pound and Keats by mimicking their lifestyle was supposed to awake the artist in himself. Kusek, too, finds his attempts lacking "any reverence, profundity or originality" because he only desires to become a great poet "in the manner of his heroes" Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot ("Writing Oneself, Writing the Other" 107), but is unwilling to the work. At the very beginning of our quest he explains that despite what the protagonist says or does, mimicry does not produce originality. Authenticity and acceptance of origin provide the inner voice of the poet (the poet's country "of mind").

In light of the protagonist's main preoccupations in *Youth*, I will explore the issues of (un)belonging (Lopez 226) and self-exile through the renunciation of "history, family and place" (Sheehan 23). Somewhat separate from *Boyhood*, which depicted his sense of alienation and

renunciation of homeland due to guilt and casual racism John wants no part in, *Youth* unlocks explorations into what it feels to side with the "Other," to become other voluntarily. Young John's immigrant status and exile invite misconduct towards him and overall unacceptance of the foreigner, migrant, "Boer" poet-to-be. John's geography of exploration in search of homeland culminates in the realization that homeland remains within. His journey to various locations, like much in poststructuralist studies, was futile. You take homeland with you, wherever you (in)voluntarily seek exile. The "metropolitan fantasy" (Attwell, "Coetzee's Estrangements" 237) paradoxically highlights his provincialism, and in turn, the provincialist's views are uniquely interesting if they learn to accept their miscellaneous nature. John is ready to become a poet when his failure to "achieve permanent residence" and launch himself from the nest "led to his return to the place where he would practice his art" (237) – to Africa (after Texas).[75]

The second issue troubling young John refers to the question of agency and voice, which I will explore through the prism of legacy and control over the text. It is questionable why Coetzee makes confessions about love and his deplorable behavior towards some of his love exploits, who might never have spoken up or revealed any of "the secrets" otherwise. In other words, the gain he achieves through airing dirty laundry and confessing behavior of private treatment of love affairs for some sort of misguided utilitarian use (if he does not believe in absolution) remains unclear. The confessional nature of the said love affairs appears indeterminate because his psychological gain of leaving a legacy of himself as a rascal, scoundrel, and villain makes no sense unless we interpret it in light of text control.

I argue that Coetzee attempts to leave the legacy of doubt and counter-intuitive behavior in order to exert one last preemptive jerk of control over the text. If he has the last word on his own mischief, the horrible tone of self-chastising only provokes an equally strong defense on the part of the reader, as well as doubt into whether the event had really been as horrid as depicted. Almost as if Coetzee has the worst say about himself he leaves no option for someone else to put in a word about his misconducts if his words cannot possibly be more shocking and miserable about the events in question. In this way, he exerts power over the text and provides the last interpretation, after which the reader may only come to his defense. The reader defends the protagonist, otherwise, reading would be unbearable because the only provided voices remain those of the narrator and protagonist (very rarely do dialogues appear), seemingly the same person. This technique, despite being somewhat blurred, provides Coetzee almost absolute control over audience response.

The following sections will explore Coetzee's representation of his own "homecoming" and arrival at a poetic voice through the process of alienation, mimicry of the masters, and final acceptance of family, origin, place, and the self. The chapter on love and John's misconducts will explore love as the agent of poetic change, and its eventual rejection as poetic inspiration as it is presented in *Youth.*

4.3.1 Homecoming

"Homecoming" refers to the protagonist's expedition within, as well as to his exploration of Africa and the acceptance of Africa as home. This occurs only after John's perpetual escape from his geographical situation in *Youth* – from the origin, birth home, and "provincialism" of Africa. More broadly, homecoming also incorporates coming to terms with the self, with one's self, family, and origin, and denouncing ideals. The issue of becoming independent from birthplace, country, origin, family, and especially his mother to become a poet and ascend to his true self while escaping history, plights *Youth*. The protagonist first and foremost tries to outrun his mother's shadow, who threatens

[75] Attwell mentions this event because of Coetzee's unwilling return to Arica after his visa was denied in Texas. Namely, he had participated in protests, or more accurately been present at university at the time, which lead to him being denied citizenship. However, it is also the period he begins to write his first novels, whereas on his first return to Africa in 1963 to finish his M. A. thesis, he knew he was not staying and we cannot say it affected his sense of "homeland."

to engulf his true personality by mirroring herself in him. Most of that takes place in *Boyhood*. Having become his own person, *Youth* deals with financial independence from family as a way to alienate them, but most importantly the geopolitics of place that John attempts to extract himself from and become less provincial, and by extension more metropolitan like the great masters from European metropolises – Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot. Mimicking others, however, only provides a temporary fix until he adopts his provincialism to create poetry and arrives "home" within his creative powers.

Youth begins at the University of Cape Town with John's struggles between what is right and what is right for him. Having enrolled in mathematics as a safety net, the classes become too much to handle easily. He escapes the boredom of mathematics in classes of English, somewhat unusual for a mathematician, and enjoys "the philological side of English studies" which "has been a relief" compared to literary criticism (*Youth* 165). His scientific colleagues, to his mind, view him as "an outsider" because he disappears immediately after class, dabbles in mathematics, and escapes to literature every chance he gets. Under false pretenses, representing himself as a "Library Assistant" instead of as a "Student" (143), he was able to rent an apartment and venture out on his own at the age of nineteen proving he is "dependent on no one" (144). What sets the tone of *Youth* is his explanation that he was not lying: because he mans the library three times a week, the fact he misrepresented himself "is not a lie, not entirely" (143). Coetzee's ethics of truth in autobiography require that an event be represented if it fits with the intention of the storyline, so immediately on the first page, the reader is warned that the truth in *Youth*, which is "not entirely a lie," will be presented.

The scenes or sketches provided in *Youth* mainly outline John as living frugally and "adding the monies" (144) from a variety of jobs in order not to see his family. The protagonist escapes his family ties, not only his peers. That manifests itself in acquiring numerous jobs because "[h]e is proving something: that each man is an island; that you don't need parents" (144). "It was to escape the oppressiveness of family that he left home" (158), however, I would argue it was the oppressiveness of family history and legacy that he attempted to escape in search of a new home. Family ties represent belonging and roots. The self-exile was meant to remove his belonging to a white shameful history of plundering Africa.

Similarity to *Boyhood* is looming, because John still generates self-isolation from any crowd he is even likely to belong to if *Youth* is to be trusted. As "an alien in his own family, school, and country" (Lee 14), John continues playing to role of self-exile. This (un)belonging (Lopez 226) is further developed because other characters in the story – John's friend Paul, his lover Jacqueline, his IBM colleagues and bosses, his Indian neighbors, his later lovers and acquaintances Sarah, Caroline, Marianne, Astrid or his friend and colleague Ganapathy "are sketched only lightly" (Ball). The drafting of their characteristics takes place in "scenes" only or educative short-story episodes that serve the character's purpose.

Either as an illustration of his disinterest in them, or a representation of John's self-involvement, other characters in relation to him only bear one or two striking qualities with regard to the protagonist – teaching him a lesson. The rest of their lives and characteristics remain marginalized and unmentioned as if showing their ultimate irrelevance. Lacking further information about them, readers also get dragged into the protagonist's interpretation and point of view because of John's disinterest with their lives outside of him. Coetzee isolates the reader in this way from forming an independent opinion about them, and sketches merely episodes of their interactions, thus leaving the reader with no other option than to care about the perspective of the protagonist the most.

Lessons abound in another storyline – sexual encounters. John bounces from a sexual relationship to relationship, each one teaching him a lesson about himself he seems reluctant to take in, but eager to write down for posterity. The array of sexual exploits is used to defame John's character, and his take on the relationships by Coetzee in retrospect. The writerly gain he derives from these refers to retrieving power and control over the text, as will be discussed in the following chapter on love. What we can conclude, for now, refers to the fact that just like John is represented as emotionally withdrawn and inept, this technique leaves the reader feeling similarly because episodes with women are provided in outlines only and we never hear the women themselves, just his castigating ruminating voice.

Cape Town scenes, or "provincial scenes" end with him having had a relationship of sorts with an older woman, Jacqueline, having read Pound and "everything worth reading" so he would not arrive in London "a provincial bumpkin" (*Youth* 164). The truth of the matter is that in the corresponding period, despite the fact he might have felt as described in *Youth*, young John had published five poems of his own, had many acquaintances, and appears to have been an excellent student according to any standards, not just colonial. However, the image of provincialism and being lacking in some ways perseveres in the *autre*-biography.

In order to choose an adoptive home, the acceptance of the intricacies of the home he was born into had to take place. Numerous authors deal with Coetzee's geomodernist tendencies and self-exile (Sheehan 2011; Lopez 1999), but instead of pointing out the journey John takes from provincial to a metropolitan area, I would like to explore the journey from margin to center and back. *Youth* shows "the author, of his alter ego, in transit" (Sheehan 21), from Cape Town to Worchester and back in *Boyhood*, from Cape Town and London to the countryside in *Youth*. The move from his family home, the self-exile he imposes on the self proves successful to his mind. The extensive moving around until the eventual leave show John's attempts at becoming the Other, at siding with the margin. As a white South Afrikaner, he is the embodiment of oppression to all-black communities in South Africa. In resigning his claim on Africa and becoming English, John attempts to escape history and become the margin in England.

Coetzee calls his history in South Africa names repetitively; it is "like an albatross around his neck" (*Youth* 228), "a "wound within him" (241). It both suffocates and bleeds. All he desires is the ability to say: "Once upon a time I used to live in South Africa but now I live in England" (241). Escaping shameful history would require him to discard the beautiful scenery, the beaches, and all happy memories of his home as well, but his sense of shame at being the occupant had prevented him from claiming Africa, from belonging anywhere. He extrapolates the African condition in his new hope upon meeting a black maid in a friend's house. All he wanted to say to a black maid in London, as if she had ever even visited Africa and would understand immediately what he was offering – "*Africa is yours*" (245).

But, upon the realization that no one would understand, Coetzee has John reflect on the intricacies of extrapolating the rules of living in one country, to another without context:

> What had seemed perfectly natural while he still called that continent his home seems more and more preposterous from the perspective of Europe: that a handful of Hollanders should have waded ashore on Woodstock beach and claimed ownership of foreign territory they had never laid eyes on before; that their descendants should now regard that territory as theirs by birthright. Doubly absurd, given that the first landing-party misunderstood its orders, or chose to misunderstand them. Its orders were to dig a garden and grow spinach and onions for the East India fleet. Two acres, three acres, five acres at most: that was all that was needed. It was never intended that they should steal the best part of Africa. (245-246, emphasis his)

And yet, the move from provincial to center disagrees with John, and he ends up miserable after achieving his goal:

> He is in England, in London; he has a job, a proper job, better than mere teaching, for which he is being paid a salary. He has escaped South Africa. Everything is going well, he has attained his first goal, he ought to be happy. In fact, as the weeks pass, he finds himself more and more miserable. He has attacks of panic, which he beats off with difficulty. (182)

Having always been provincial, margin to the London center, he had failed to realize his stay in the metropolitan area would be against his nature. Assimilation of one's character in terms of customs, lifestyle, and identity could succeed if the "object" of change truly believed it for the better,

but even then perhaps not fully. Especially because being English represented a desire on his part, an ideal, rather than any genetic predilection. In his house, English was spoken, but none of his parents had any roots in England. That amounts to how English he actually was. So John quickly realizes "[h]e cannot do it: it would be like giving himself up to a charade, an act" (*Youth* 203). His whole body refutes the central identity of Englishmen that it finds foreign – [t]he sensible thing would be to buy himself an outfit like theirs and wear it at weekends," but even clothes seem "not only alien to his character but Latin rather than English, he feels his resistance stiffening" (203).

In overwhelmingly different surroundings that attack all the senses and beliefs of a foreigner, it is more common for the identity of origin to rear its "ugly" head, than complete assimilation to take place. Perhaps, John's surprise at this event lies in the fact he originally thought he hated Africa, but faced with his "Africanness" at the brink of extinction, he defends his home of origin and the identity that ensued from his upbringing. He characteristically chastises himself for "having not been strong enough to bear London" (203) and beating "a strategic retreat" into the countryside (281). I argue that geopolitics of place proves the protagonist's understanding of childhood misconceptions and when he himself comes to this realization he begins to create and write. His "homecoming" is both literal and metaphorical – when John recognizes he prefers the country to the city, that provincialism is what he knows best to write about, and that we carry homeland with us so it is not escapable by a mere change of place, he begins to write originally and about Africa instead of mimicking the masters. Before he embraces his own provincialism and his place of origin, writing does not follow.

Originally, he only begins to read about Africa in London because he feels homesick.[76] In the days he grows bored of writing, he "allows himself the luxury of dipping into books about the South Africa of the old days" (258) – a luxury he bestows on himself because these books are available only if the margin moved center stage. "South Africa imposes itself on him when he is writing" (Vold 39) as he is unable to write prose that is set elsewhere than South Africa. These books are "to be found only in great libraries" and in *Burchell's Travels,* he pours over the streets of his boyhood "along which he alone, of all the people around him with their heads buried in their books, has walked" (*Youth* 258). He wonders if it is patriotism that "gives him an eerie feeling to sit in London reading about streets – Waalstraat, Buitengracht, Buitencingel" (258), since he had not experienced the sensation before.

In the Reading Room of the British Museum, he read *Burchell's Travels* and understood that the perspective of writing about Africa has been from the center, not from the margin – from another colonizing perspective of the English people who were not even living in Africa. The awareness that everyone is someone's margin or center sets him free to embrace the Africa he knows better than the English. "The protagonist's understanding that his literary career implies discarding all attachment to his homeland" (Lopez, "(Un)belonging" 226) was present at the beginning and then it is shed like old skin. John feels that on his way towards becoming more English it is far more beneficial to embrace Africa because that is where his true power resides – in the ambivalent position of center to someone and margin to others. The process this realization comes about is painstakingly slow, and I would venture it actually represents his rite of passage – the struggle to escape Africa only to find it in himself, is a "homecoming" of sorts and the poetic center for John.

He becomes inspired to write "with the aura of truth" (*Youth* 259) and vividly like Burchell but from the inside of Africa out, not like a visitor but a native. The realization he is native to Africa occurs here in London because he comes to grasp Burchell's limitations to writing – "despite his energy and intelligence and curiosity and sangfroid" still "he was an Englishman in a foreign country, his mind half occupied with Pembrokeshire and the sisters he had left behind." Burchell was not writing about "the country of his heart" (258), like John would be.

[76] Kannemeyer makes a note that Coetzee asks his mother to send him *Tristia* by an African poet Van Wyk Louw (134). At this time, his biographer argues that John cannot have found Africa as repugnant as he claims in *Youth*, because amongst other acquaintances like Lionel Knight, he spends time with Africans as well (Sydney Clouts). He enjoys the company of Cambridge researchers while living with his wife in Bagshot (135). They together socialize and take walks with Knight, whose mother welcomes Coetzee's mother to her house, as a guest, while Vera is visiting England (136).

Reconciliation with his parents' legacy arrives in *Summertime*, in the meantime, *Youth* delivers closure to issues of the home. After his failure to become English and American, Coetzee's quest for a home ended in Australia in 2002 when he finally became "Citizen Coetzee" (Debelle). Having searched for the right adoptive country since the age of nineteen, in Penelope Debelle's words he "consummated the relationship" and arrived home at the age of sixty-two. What changed from *Youth* into adulthood was his acceptance of loci and space, the geography of origin if you will, because he was quoted to have said that "I didn't so much leave South Africa" — a country with which I retain strong emotional ties – as come to Australia" (Debelle). *Youth*'s protagonist disagrees with this mature Coetzee; he tries to escape the South African burden of white oppression by searching for new geographies only to find he had not expected home landscapes were so hard to erase.

4.3.2 Poetry as Salvation of the Self

Becoming a great poet is John's ultimate goal and his path towards overcoming Africa as his initial wound. If only he can become someone, someone important like his poetic role models, the intricacies of home and history would be overcome. In *Youth*, *becoming* someone else, the poetic self in John's case, represents his rite of passage into adulthood. Poetry as the ultimate goal should be achieved by the denunciation of family, place, and history, followed by mimicking the masters and using sex as an entrance into an ecstatic phase of creation. Just like home proved futile in escaping, so did mere mimicry of the masters.

John-the-want-to-be artist begins with mimicry of the modernists in his rite of passage. He bases his poetry on the mere following of the modernists' creed in order to awaken the passion and replicate their beliefs. The "trajectory" *Youth* describes is "counter-diaspora," writing from the position of self-exile (Sheehan 22). But instead of focusing on the craft, the hate of homeland and making contact with an "imaginary origin of essence come to the fore" (22). Viewed as a parricide of sorts (22), John's denial of the self in Africa and the denial of his family heritage for becoming English leads to idolatry of other men. "He is not going to be like his father" (*Youth* 258), so as a replacement John adopts High Modernists as fathers of his craft. But just like he is absolute towards his own father at this time, in the opposite spectrum he is absolute towards his unquestioning love of the Modernists.

The role of Pound was mostly that of John's first literary father, whose opinion trumps all others and his recommendation of Ford Madox Ford is taken without questioning.[77] Unfortunately, John learns too late that he is stuck in his thesis with Ford whose work is nowhere near consistent, because of this indiscriminate acceptance of Pound's opinions. Aside from being too trusting, the confessions on his role models teach us about John's ironic self-representation in youth. He naively identifies with Pound in that they were both exiles – "Pound has suffered persecution most of his life: driven into exile, then imprisoned, then expelled from his homeland a second time" and pronounced a madman (159). But while John was a willing exile siding with the underdog, the Other, Pound had a dark history with fascism.

Engrossed in Ezra Pound's *Letters* and *The Cantos,* John concludes that "[o]beying his daemon, Pound has sacrificed his life to his art" (159). In the idolatry only youth can bring, he dismisses any personal responsibility of Pound's for his persecution and equates art to the man: if the art is that grand, the man must be as well. So John's journey towards becoming an artist becomes a pledge of endurance because "[l]ike Pound and Eliot, he must be prepared to endure all that life has stored up for him, even if that means exile, obscure labour, and obloquy" (*Youth* 160). The martyrdom he prepares himself for has the overtones of adolescence and exalting ideas above all else.

[77] See Kannemeyer for more on his original consideration to write about Pound and eventual settling for Ford Madox Ford, p. 121. Ford's early work proved disappointing and he grew to regret his choice, however, once into the project Coetzee is always reluctant to quit anything.

The opposite spectrum, failure, or even a lack of talent, Coetzee paints as inconceivable to John. However, the Coetzee in conversations with Paul Auster says he is "reminded of Ezra Pound, whose unhingement began during the depression of the 1930s when he convinced himself he was seeing things about how the economy worked that other people, wrapped up in fictions, were too blind to see: in short order, he turned himself into what Gertrude Stein called "a village explainer" (*Here and Now* 30).

I believe this proves that a play of voices provides a necessary distance between Coetzee and John as a stylistic choice because the real Coetzee remains aware of Pound's misgivings while inundating young John's worldview with insensible and indiscriminating thoughts about Pound. This creates an image of narcissism, unbelievable self-awareness, or perhaps, a post-script addendum an already successful author might have of himself. Although the young John prepares himself for the eventuality of not having the gift because "[m]any are called, few are chosen" (*Youth* 160), still the very idea of comparing himself, who had never written anything, to the worldly greats without even excelling in English[78] or having any literary competitions under his belt, provides a valuable insight into his naiveté that if viewed from the perspective that it was vindicated appears not so grand. But viewed from the perspective of a young white South-Afrikaner, best only in his tiny class and told of excellence by his mother, provides an image of inner fire and zest for success, not poetry.

Following Pound's "recommendations," he is taken on a journey through the language and ideas of Flaubert, and "[o]ut of Flaubert come first Henry James, then Conrad and Ford Madox Ford" with mandatory evasion of Victor Hugo because he is "a windbag" said Pound (163). Coetzee's ironic treatment of John's idealism is visible also when John falls madly in love with characters in books and actresses in the cinema, but worries about Pound:

> He would like to go to bed with Emma, hear the famous belt whistle like a snake as she undresses. But would Pound approve? He is not sure that itching to meet Emma is a good enough reason for admiring Flaubert. In his sensibility there is still, he suspects, something rotten, something Keatsian. (164)

Romantic poets, such as Keats, remain incomparably inferior to Pound, because of their purely romantic views. From the comment on Chaucer, who "keeps a nice ironic distance from his authorities," we learn what might have pawed his way in referring to himself in the third person in autre-biography, i.e. that distance from the self is important (161). And, another quality John admires in him is that "unlike Shakespeare, Chaucer he does not get into a froth about things and start ranting" (161) meaning too much emotional gusto is to be avoided in poetry. He keeps coming back to Pound who "has taught him to smell out the easy sentiment in which the Romantics and Victorians wallow" (161):

> How he could once have been so infatuated with Keats as to write Keatsian sonnets he cannot comprehend. Keats is like watermelon, soft and sweet and crimson, whereas poetry should be hard and clear like a flame. Reading half a dozen pages of Keats is like yielding to seduction. (161)

Unfortunately, the only obstacle he regrets having, which prevents his deeper "discipleship to Pound" (*Youth* 161) refers to his inability to speak and learn French. "So he must take it on trust from Pound and Eliot that Baudelaire and Nerval, Corbière and Laforgue, point the way he must follow" (161). Other influences on young John in this epoch include an array of famous artists, but their one

[78] Coetzee purposefully enunciates his failures, like never getting an A in English with one professor or struggling to get honors in a subject. In real life, he was an excellent student who also held down various jobs, so the analysis here takes only his text *Youth* into account.

main quality in common reflects they created great art, rose "above mere nationality" (197) and place. John appreciates Chaucer, Henry James, but has no particular liking towards James Joyce, one of the most revered authors of the time because he lacks this quality of rising above mere nationality. Upon realization that despite his best efforts, poetry eludes him at least that in the style of Pound and Eliot, he believes he would be best off becoming a Jamesian (197). The character's train of thought is as follows: if he must depict anything but poetry, then Henry James is the one to mimic especially because it is difficult to determine the location of his novels, his writing transcends place. If unable to escape the place and location of Africa, at least he would deny everyone the opportunity to deem himself as African only.

A common denominator in all the master poets and artists he admires at the time, T.S. Eliot, Pound, Chaucer (bear in mind all prior to the discovery of Beckett), appears to be an array of "mistresses" as "a part of an artist's life" (151). His preoccupation becomes "the fact" that artists bed everyone in aspiration for a Muse. And if even the lowlier lever artists had many mistresses, his main concern remained how he would measure – "If women threw themselves at Henry Miller, then, *mutatis mutandis*, they must have thrown themselves at Ezra Pound and Ford Madox Ford and Ernest Hemingway and all the other great artists who lived in Paris in those years, to say nothing of Pablo Picasso. What is *he* going to do once he is in Paris or London?" (167-168, emphasis his).

Meanwhile, until fame strikes, John is mesmerized with imaginary women he encounters as characters in books and roles in movie theatres. Despite the fact they might not have been true embodiments of one single person, he argues they must have been based on something from real life to inspire his interest. This provides insight into Coetzee's creation of characters, if *Youth* is to be trusted, even with regards to the character of John, because these purposeful allusions represent breadcrumbs of the only Coetzee's presence we can follow as the author of *autre*-biography. John believes that they must have come out of some sort of "flesh and blood" experience the author initially had and then placed it under the "transfiguring fire of art" (164):

> Of course Emma Bovary is a fictional creation, he will never run into her in the street. But Emma was not created out of nothing: she had her origin in the flesh and blood experiences of her author, experiences that were then subjected to the transfiguring fire of art. If Emma had an original, or several originals, then it follows that women like Emma and Emma's original should exist in the real world. And even if this is not so, even if no woman in the real world is quite like Emma, there must be many women so deeply affected by their reading of *Madame Bovary* that they fall under Emma's spell and are transformed into versions of her. They may not be the real Emma but in a sense they have become her living embodiment. (164)

Child-like interpretation of being transformed by following someone else's tastes in literature, as if somehow taste is contagious, does not prevent John from birthing valuable observations into character creation. Despite the fact that "[h]is ambition is to read everything worth reading before he goes overseas, so that he will not arrive in Europe a provincial Bumpkin" (164) is provincial in itself because it lacks shrewdness, his views on character creation ascertain experience and we catch Coetzee on the pages of John's confession on Modernists'. Namely, characters may be collages of "several originals," of countervoices who had an origin in the flesh and blood world and transfiguring experiences of the author (164). Someone who had said something as complex and original as this, cannot have been the same youth who "relies upon Eliot and Pound" for all his reading and dismisses on their authority "without a glance shelf after shelf of Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope, Meredith" (164) because they had disliked these authors.

In a collection of letters between Coetzee with Paul Auster, the discussion leads to literature fans and their incessant attempts at becoming characters in their books. Coetzee, already a master of his craft in 2011 when *Here and Now* was published, pronounces something quite similar to these ideas supposedly John has about his imaginary loves and the character of Emma Bovary. Coetzee explains that the woman who writes to him in journal-style elongated essays would be better off "if

she would send me a long, minutely detailed description of a typical day in her life" (*Here and Now* 187). Novelists become charmed with "some interesting, usable quirk or feature of her: the way the hair curls over her ear, the way she pronounces the word "Divine!," the way her toes turn in as she walks" rather than "fathoming the unique, individual essence of their model" (187). Revealing his process, he believes it is more honest to create a character from scratch (187), that characters of his creation feel more real if created out of the embodiment of experience rather than based on a particular person. Similarly, John most likely poses a mosaic project as well.

Since the predominant question of *Youth* remains to find one's purpose and a place in the world to call one's own, John's searches end up in the same place – exile from home into the arms of a loved one who should empower his words and give his life a poetic purpose. Reading the masters had definitely helped impregnate his spirit with techniques he would end up using, however, mimicry of their voices by following their path to a metropolis, their lifestyle by having multiple partners had not led to the creation of poetry. Be that as naïve as we like, all roads lead to love and bodily relation that should act as a catalyst of the spirit as the following step. Let us explore how these romantic ideas developed and how John comes to the realization that he would have to be his own poetic spirit.

4.3.3 The Love Agent

In each case, John searches for meaning and belonging outside of himself, in family, place, women, and art, he loses his way until settling with his true self. Love is no exception. In an interview in *Doubling the Point*, Coetzee addressed the topic of love as an agent, as a "*figure* of a relationship" rather than love per se; relationships for the sake of themselves have been trivialized in postmodernism and provided a service (62, emphasis his). Coetzee disagrees love is fully represented in postmodernism, yet that is exactly what he ends up doing in *Youth*. To Attwell, he says:

> But I think a more interesting avenue to explore would be to ask why, let us say, *love* in the postmodernist novel – since we are talking about love – is treated as the *figure* of a relationship (Roland Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse* is the *ars amatoria* of postmodern times) rather than as a relationship per se. It would be crude to say that the social preconditions for loving (delay, separation and so forth) no longer exist in the West, but it does seem that *love*, *falling in love* have been irrevocably historicized. (62, emphasis his)

The "irrevocably historicized" concepts of falling in love (62) also elude Coetzee's alter ego John, in spite of the real author's pining for the concept. *Youth*, in the face of the protagonist's age, is still embodied as nothing but utilitarian. Love and emotional aspects of relationships remain shadowed by the physical even though the protagonist is young and some idealism is expected. Mostly, throughout *Youth*, women are depicted as utilitarian sketches, rather than rounded characters with full lives. Females are allocated the purpose of inspiring poetry, and nothing outside of that quality is relevant about them.

The figure of a relationship as Coetzee relayed it for the reader is that "if he can meet her as an equal, her, the Destined One, then their lovemaking will be unexampled, that he is sure of, an ecstasy bordering on death" (*Youth* 222). The concepts of physical love as a "small death" have existed in poetry for centuries, Coetzee mimics and takes the idea further in *Youth*. Even if the real author, Coetzee in 2002, criticizes postmodernism for constraining love as utilitarian only, exactly that was provided for the readers in *Youth*. To what end?

Aside from forming a humorous effect, this style is also ironical and languid. Readers are invited to laugh at young John's grandiose ideas of lovemaking as a transformative experience because it delivers a childish idea of love without intimacy. Women as objects afford the role of a Muse to the poet and "he" because it must be a he – "returns to life afterwards" transformed "as a

new being" – the poet (*Youth* 222). As if becoming a poet empowers one person to treat another as an object, the reader understands John's burning ambition but is set up to disliking his mechanical lack of personhood.

Coetzee's cues at laughter remain subtle, in phrases such as "mating of twins," "the touching of opposite poles" and "slow rebirth" (222) post-lovemaking as if it were a job to be performed on the way to artistry. Not even a teenager, let alone someone as intelligent and well-read as John at nineteen could have imagined that love was one-sided, the female pleasure was irrelevant or that transformation came as a strike of lightning rather than hard work. Essentially, coined phrases of this kind invite the reader to laugh with the elderly Coetzee who simplifies John's eloquence and abilities of the time, and to whom his aspirations appear from a distance to have been banal. Because what else is one to do but laugh at the innocent John when he utters after all these grand ideas, like a school prep boy, a boy scout and nerd he was, that "[h]e must be ready for it" (this transformative sex). Readiness is all" (222)? The famous last words of a Casanova to be.

Fused with his other opinions on art and Africa, John delivers his interpretation of love centralizing on the imaginary character of his Muse, the Destined One. "What will cure him, if it were to arrive, will be love" because his affliction of never firmly belonging anywhere, and being average looking, would be transcended with "the Destined One" (222). She is rippled with numerous tasks, but the main one "[t]he beloved, the destined one, will see at once through the odd and even dull exterior he presents, to the fire that burns within" (145). To say the least, he expects that "transformative sex will allow him to emerge as a new being" (Kusek, "Writing Oneself, Writing the Other" 107). Since if taken literally, the expectation seems too juvenile, it must perform a kind of an authorial trickery played on John. It is the personality or the self of an older Coetzee, the author, that hides behind detailed, but automatic depictions of love. "If he had a beautiful, worldly-wise mistress who smoked with a cigarette-holder and spoke French, he would soon be transformed, even transfigured, he is sure" (*Youth* 145). The "he is sure" laughs at him, not with him, and unveils Coetzee.

Almost the same language applied to the Muse is allocated to poetry – the destined words he awaits would come to him if the right love affair precedes. The role of the transformative love affair enables artists to call "down the sacred fire" through "[s]uffering, madness, sex" (199), imagines John. This transformative love is utilitarian because "[s]ex and creativity go together, everyone says so, and he does not doubt it" (199). Poetry needs to come to him, he positions himself in readiness, just like with transformative love, but the words do not come – "[o]r rather, many words will come, but not the right words, the sentence he will recognize at once, from its weight, from its poise and balance, as the destined one" (281).

On the other hand, misogynist statements alienated the reader, which seems to be pointed. Coetzee-the-real-author appears to be walking a dangerous line with the reader in stating juvenile absolutist half-statements such as that "[t]he fire that burns in the artist is visible to women, by means of an instinctive faculty" (199) and they are almost programmed to place themselves as instruments of this fire and play the muse. As John reproaches himself for being passive – "[h]e is the man, the poet, the maker, the active principle, and the man is not supposed to wait for the woman's approach" (282), this to him proves him unworthy, not of love, of poetry, of a purpose. His language remains too objectifying to be taken seriously in phrases like: "[t]he woman is the one who sleeps until aroused by the prince's kiss," "woman who is supposed to wait for the man" and the woman is the bud that unfolds under the caress of the sun's rays" (282).

Women throughout *Youth* get sketched out in blurred misunderstood apt and convenient roles he places upon them. Not only borderline delusional but also incredibly myogenic, some of these views may be attributed to a play Coetzee imposes on the reader testing the boundaries of how far he can go without alienating the reader, others just plainly impose the question of intention and why he purposefully leaves the legacy of himself as obnoxious? For example, when Coetzee has the protagonist pronounce:

> The fire that burns in the artist is visible to women, by means of an instinctive faculty. Women themselves do not have the sacred fire (there are exceptions: Sappho, Emily Brontë). It is in quest of the fire they lack, the fire of love, that women pursue artists and give themselves to them. In their lovemaking artists and their mistresses experience briefly, tantalizingly, the life of gods. From such lovemaking the artist returns to his work enriched and strengthened, the woman to her life transfigured. (*Youth* 199)

Such lovemaking that leaves a woman's life "transfigured" eludes him, not only because it does not exist, or requires emotional investment on both parties, but also because he finds himself inadequate. Having placed women in the role of the object that brings about art, he remains surprised that his fire is not lit. Kannemeyer reviews this aspect of *Youth*, if reliable, as a constant reminder to John that poetry requires suffering and that failed relationships were mere purgatories he had to endure on his way to transfiguration (81-81). John's constant feeling of inadequacy in this period, the protagonist ascribes to not having met the right person, the one who would have "understanding of a writer's need for withdrawal and solitude" (80-81). To emerge "free from the contamination of family and the past" (80-81) in transformative love he first goes out and finds himself a love affair with an older Jacqueline, who teaches him about privacy and authorship rights, of all things.

Coetzee sketches lessons about writing and himself from sexual encounters. John begins this affair quite haphazardly because "[h]aving mistresses is part of an artist's life: even if he steers clear of the trap of marriage, as he has vowed to do, he is going to have to find a way of living with women" (*Youth* 151). Jaqueline proves utilitarian for his poetry because upon the discovery of his journal, and what he and written about their life together, she packs her bags (149). After the perfunctory "flare up in anger" because she had gone through his things, the protagonist says – "[y]ou are not going to stop me from writing" (150). Having never specifically asked him to stop writing, the interpretation of this statement establishes that poetic freedom is essential for writing to John's mind. But, in Coetzee's case, I believe there is sufficient evidence Jacqueline provided a lesson of privacy in the authorship of one's life, since following this episode he never wrote about living family members. Almost as if, in order not to reveal intimate moments, he rather left them out completely as "empty spaces."

The question of self-censorship arises from this episode because John lacks the literary technique of how to write about some feelings and not others. He addresses feeling sorry but only because his lover got hold of the journal, not because he had not filtered his emotions more. Being a censor to himself would be impossible if he is to become a writer (150). His motivation for writing in his journal what he was afraid to tell her in person – "resentment at having his flat invaded, or shame at his own failures as a lover," he wonders if he had purposefully written that so she would read it (150)? An intriguing question about privacy and the public persona who chooses what information is read and published, so Coetzee points to that in this episode.

Negative emotions should be published, he settles. The place for his "ignoble emotions," he concludes, is the journal because they should be transformed into poetry (150). If those remain hidden, the protagonist John knows no other way to become a poet – "if poetry is not to be the agency of his transfiguration from ignoble to noble, why bother with poetry at all?" (150). His ambition results more relevant than someone's feelings, but in reality, it was an illustrative lesson in authorship rights of people closest to him who must be entitled to their own lives and experiences outside art and artists, to their own truth.

Similar to his lifelong questions of storytelling in autobiography, Coetzee draws attention to the issue of truth in fiction, and fictional truth in writing. *Youth* relates the truth as the protagonist sees it which is that "[t]hings are rarely as they seem" (150).

> Who is to say that at each moment while the pen moves he is truly himself? At one moment he might truly be himself, at another he might simply be making things up. How can he know for sure? Why should he even want to know for sure? (150)

John himself struggles with the truth because his feelings towards Jacqueline change daily. "Some days he feels happy, even privileged, to be living with a beautiful woman," and on the other, she invades his space, has demanded, and isn't "liberal with her body" (150). Should their experience, their true experience together, then be represented as "happiness, the unhappiness, or the average of the two" (150)?

The authority, the trustworthiness of the author reassures the reader to entrust him/her with their time and reading experience. The responsibility imbued in the writer, in John's view in *Youth* is to at least self-consciously ask "who is to say that the feelings he writes in his diary are his true feelings" (150)? By drawing attention to the insecurity of the autobiographical procedure Coetzee removes the rug under the readers' feet in a postmodern-fashion, with self-aware comments his protagonist utters highlighting the readers' ultimate powerlessness at knowing the truth, not even the protagonist knows about himself, making it impossible relate to his partners by extension because:

> How could she believe that what she read in his diary was not the truth, the ignoble truth, about what was going on in the mind of her companion during those heavy evenings of silence and sighings but on the contrary a fiction, one of many possible fictions, true only in the sense that a work of art is true – true to itself, true to its own immanent aims – when the ignoble reading conformed so closely to her own suspicion that her companion did not love her, did not even like her? Jacqueline will not believe him, for the simple reason that he does not believe himself. He does not know what he believes. (150)

The most truthful thing about his self in *autre*-biography is that he does not know what he believes. It is in this interim, "[w]hile waiting fruitlessly for the muse to strike" that John becomes involved in a number of unsatisfactory relationships, attends arty films, writes a few bad poems, and takes on two programming jobs (Ball).[79] A string of relationships follows, teaching young John about himself, but not much about poetry. What they all eventually prove amounts to the futility of the task of arriving at poetry via sexual enterprise:

> There is only one shadow. A year has passed since he last wrote a line of poetry. What has happened to him? Is it true that art comes only out of misery? Must he become miserable again in order to write? Does there not also exist a poetry of ecstasy, even a poetry of lunchtime cricket as a form of ecstasy? Does it matter where poetry finds its impetus as long as it is poetry? (*Youth* 277)

His nature, intellect, and self-conscious alienation from identity-driven categories of place, origin, home, family, and the self – prevent John from being creative in the mimicking style of famous authors. Unknown to him at the time, "poetry of ecstasy" may be out of reach because of his analytical nature, however, self-conscious poetry of misery would become his forte. The depictions of himself in the relationships post-Jacqueline, if true, provide insight into the confessional technique of borderline disgust with oneself he adopted from Dostoevsky. In his essay "Confession and Double Thoughts," Coetzee establishes Dostoyevsky's characters confess either because they are allowed to expose themselves and "tell their own truth" (*Doubling the Point* 275), or as ways of becoming

[79] See Kannemeyer for more on the biographical interviews with Coetzee's friends at the time of the affairs, pp. 80-81. The names of the following girlfriends had to be changed because of possible lawsuits, but in emails and interviews from the period we discover that "[i]n these years he had his first sexual experiences: with a statuesque Sandy, a highly strung athletic Adrienne, a subtle transatlantic Joanne, and an enigmatic Mary" (80-81).

interesting, becoming the hero of the story.[80] The character of John in *Youth* bears resemblance to both, or rather to the second option, in which being interesting is a portal transcending the "oneself into the hero of a story for the modern age" (244).[81]

Another two divisions Coetzee mentions – "revelation of personality" and "the revelation of a shameful history" (275) from *Notes from Underground* also apply to *Youth* especially because of the book's self-conscious streak. Stavrogin's confessions to the monk Tihton in *The Possessed*, provide the most relevant insight into Coetzee's fascination with confession and I argue that in *Youth* he voluntarily likens himself to an openly guilty hero whose motives for publishing his quilt remain unclear (289). Coetzee claims that the game between confessor and confessee occurring simultaneously is that between deception and self-deception, allowing penance and representing oneself as worth penance or not (289). In his own words, "It is thus a game of deception and self-deception, a game of limited truth" (289).

In Coetzee's *autre*-biography, this game entails privacy and withholding information rather than lying. Just like young John, "[t]he identity Stavrogin is determined to assert is that of great sinner," but they are both not ready to discuss crime or repentance. In a "certain kernel of identity he wishes to claim for himself" (289), both Stavrogin and John alienate the readers who are left wondering about his motivation to reveal atrocities without penance? I believe Coetzee's analysis on Stavrogin and the following words apply to himself in *Youth* – "confession becomes a game whose essence is that certain limits will not be transgressed, though the contestants will pretend to each other and to themselves that there are no limits" (289). The transgression we are meant to turn a blind eye for is "empty spaces" in an autobiographical text, as well as lack of repentance which is meant to demarcate the protagonist's disbelief in God and Dostoevsky's grace as the savior of his soul. But ultimately it is meant to control the reader response by disabling further disparaging of the protagonist, whose image can only but go up after the squalor Coetzee puts him through.

The language and metaphorical images of cruel sadism, at times, represent John's confessions of his treatment of women in *Youth*. Coetzee says "[s]elf-forgiveness means the closing of the chapter, the end of the downward spiral of self-accusation" (290), for which reason he never allows his protagonist anything of the sort. John focuses on the bodily functions never done in his oeuvre, especially about himself, such as a "homosexual encounter" (*Youth* 210) perfumed in curiosity, the blood after he bedded a virgin (253), his ignominious behavior afterward, and an abortion (172). Again, the reader and critics struggle to define why the author, already famous and awarded like Coetzee, would shame himself to great lengths recounting events no one else had ever reported, events which would otherwise have remained secret? He leaves a legacy of poor behavior whereas autobiographies had always aimed to embellish or at least smudge the reality. In *Youth*, it is the body and pain that bear witness to events and he allows this to take place.

Ethics of body, as understood in Coetzee dictate the following: the end of autobiography is provided by the end of the body itself and bodily pain represents the ultimate reality and authority in the text. To Coetzee, the body cannot be denied. Philosophies and ideas aside, it is the body that bears proof of pain, ill-treatment, and power struggles. In the example of *Foe,* Coetzee explains:

> Friday is mute, but Friday does not disappear, because Friday is body. If I look back over my own fiction, I see a simple (simple-minded?) standard erected. That standard is the body. Whatever else, the body is not "that which is not," and the proof that it is is the pain it feels. The body with its pain becomes a counter to the endless trials of doubt. […] And let me again be unambiguous: it is not that one grants the authority of the suffering body: the suffering body takes this authority: that is its power. To use other words: its power is undeniable. (*Doubling the Point* 248)

[80] "Stavrogin, in *The Possessed*, does something similar but more radical by treating himself as an abandoned soul, a soul that can therefore be used as material for an experiment, as Frankenstein did with an abandoned body. Dostoevsky's ethical critique is that these are merely ways of making oneself into the hero of a story for the modern age – merely ways of being interesting." (Coetzee, *Doubling* 244)

[81] See Coetzee's "Confession and Double Thoughts: Tolstoy, Rousseau, Dostoevsky," *in Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*, for detailed information on truth, confession and traps of authorial trickery, pp. 251-295.

The mentioned authority of the suffering body can be encountered in *Youth,* when one of John's girlfriends, Sarah "gets pregnant, he abandons her and makes her arrange an illegal abortion all by herself" (Kusek, "Writing Oneself, Writing the Other" 107). Her matter-of-fact behavior has "put him to shame," he refers to himself, or Coetzee refers to him as a "useless" nurse, "a stupid and ineffectual penance," "ignominious," "fainthearted and, worse, incompetent" (*Youth* 171-173). Besides calling himself names, the whole procedure is stripped quite bare from a male perception, as John is described as worried about how he would perform (171), about the fact abortion is illegal and she has even paid for it herself (172). No love lost between Coetzee and John in the crude language going into the core of male ignorance on the subject:

> His thoughts keep going to what was destroyed inside her – that pod of flesh, that rubbery manikin. He sees the little creature flushed down the toilet at the Woodstock house, tumbled through the maze of sewers, tossed out at last into the shallows, blinking in the sudden sun, struggling against the waves that will carry it out into the bay. He did not want it to live and now he does not want it to die. Yet even if he were to run down to the beach, find it, save it from the sea, what would he do with it? Bring it home, keep it warm in cotton wool, try to get it to grow? How can he who is still a child bring up a child? (173)

Looking at other men in the streets, he wonders "[h]ow many of the other men he sees in the streets carry dead children with them like baby shoes slung around their necks?" (173). The remembrance of these events reads like a guilt-ridden narrative of confession, but a confession that requires no absolution. In secular confessions, the impasse of finding an alternative in the postmodern world for the sacrament of confession is the only road to self-truth (*Doubling the Point* 291). John confesses only negative behavior on his part in *Youth*, which leads us to believe that Coetzee's particular brand of confession includes a castigating voice of the self, enumerating all the ways how one has wronged the self and others.

Negative statements of gloom and doom doo not lead to creation of poetry in *Youth*, so John concludes "[a]rt cannot be fed on deprivation alone, on longing, loneliness. There must be intimacy, passion, love" (*Youth* 151). His hops of standing out from a crowd via a utilitarian love and a woman who would "embrace him, again, on the stroke of midnight, vanish, and so forth, thereby transforming his life and releasing a torrent of pent-up verse on the pattern of Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*" (186) prove unlikely. His preoccupation "with discovering 'the real thing' – in love, in writing, in national identity, in the self" (Lee 14) encounter self-reliance in real life, whereas the tone of *Youth* ends bleakly. His last insertion about women is his admission he is afraid of women" (*Youth* 282). He is afraid of writing and his is afraid of women (282), something he had previously admitted related to Lawrence's female characters:

> The women in Lawrence's books made him uneasy; he imagined them as remorseless female insects, spiders or mantises. Under the gaze of the pale, black-clad, intent-eyed priestesses of the cult at the university he felt like a nervous, scurrying little bachelor insect. With some of them he would have liked to go to bed, that he could not deny – only by bringing a woman to her own dark core, after all, could a man reach his own dark core – but he was too scared. Their ecstasies would be volcanic; he would be too puny to survive them. (*Youth* 200)

The only solution to this fear of life, appears to be acceptance of one's self and his purpose of writing as a cold and frozen individual (283). His disappointment in himself is where he will derive his poetic gusto – "poetry is not written out of warmth anyway" (283). He could have found life, love

and poetry easier if only "he were a warmer person" (283), but since it is not in the cards, all he can aspire to is a doggedness "as lover, as writer, together with a readiness to fail and fail again" (283).

4.3.4 Conclusion

In the conclusion of his exposé, and at the end of *Youth* itself, the protagonist finally admits to himself, what the reader had inferred all along – that place, women, and art were curiously linked to one another, but wrongfully so. Having expected destiny (poetry) "would come (come like a bride!) only in London or Paris or perhaps Vienna, because only in the great cities of Europe does destiny reside" (*Youth* 281), John finally takes hold of his life and acknowledges that he had always known poetry would have to come from the inside, from the heart "he knows destiny will not visit him unless he makes her do so" (281). The blank paper, unresponsive and more daunting with years brought "many words," but ultimately "not the right words" (281). Failed by locus and its ability to invoke in him the master, failed by women's ability to ignite the poetry and most of all failed by his naïve awaiting in "readiness," scrupulously wiping off tables, positioning the lamp – he recognizes "[h]e has to sit down and write, that is the only way" (281).

The way his destined place had failed to inspire him is reflected in his voyage to the "land of poetry" but while he "waited and suffered in London, and destiny stayed away" (281). Africa proved unsuitable for poetry, he told himself – "Destiny would not come to him in South Africa" (281), but Europe represented the land of masters and he had pilgrimage to destiny's residence in London, Paris, or Vienna. Having made his journey and life possible in London, he still was unsuccessful – "he waited and suffered in London, and destiny stayed away" (281). His inevitable "strategic retreat" into the countryside still proved futile in filling his pages because whether "destiny pays visits to the countryside is not certain," Coetzee notes ironically (281).

John embraced his love of Cambridge, the countryside, and landscapes although he was never happy in England. The childhood dreams of changing oneself through changing places and geographies completely disregarded landscapes of the mind and habitual, inbred sceneries of childhood. Not until he accepted this, could he begin writing but persevered in a state of limbo, as Vold explains, "he novel's somewhat awkward narrative motor is *a writer's block* or a budding writer's *reflections* on his writer's block" (35, emphasis hers). The state of writer's block eventually proves useful because he had read extensively in the period and met *Watt*, Beckett's book that would become his outline for writing. It was in African he discovered the topic, and in *Watt* he discovered inklings of his future style – "no clash, no conflict, just the flow of a voice telling a story, a flow continually checked by doubts and scruples, its pace fitted exactly to the pace of his own mind" (*Youth* 273), says Beckett-obsessed John, who unwittingly in this sentence discovered himself as a writer.

Aside from the failure of location as inspiration, John was also failed by his sexual encounters in the hunt for a Muse, so much so that he was unsure whether "a force that used to be called the Muse" (282) actually ever existed. His realization, or at least heartfelt admission, to himself, that he had failed in his initial premise that inspiration would come from a Destined woman liberates the frustration. His will is lacking, nothing outside of himself was ever wrong. But, "[j]ust as he cannot will himself to write but must wait for the aid of some force from outside" he cannot randomly approach women without a sign they are predestined for him (282).

Notwithstanding his dreams about the Destined one and destined words and igniting the fire by a source outside of himself, John concludes that "unless he wills himself to act, nothing will happen, in love or in art" (*Youth* 282). This turning point in his thinking demarcates a homecoming, a turn towards the self, readers had been expecting all along. Even at the end of *Youth*, a wiser John cannot shake the idea that "his failure as a writer and his failure as a lover are so closely parallel that they might as well be the same thing" (282). It is the impotence and the fear that brought them undeniably together. If confrontations with the weight of the blank page have taught him anything (282), it is that the fear never subdued him, only paralyzed him into expecting perfection, planning,

being ready for the arrival of the destined words. Failure to provide those words, oddly enough, sets him free to admit fear of these three elements – destined place, women, and words.

Lee calls *Youth* "a story of failed aspiration" (14), and I would disagree only in that inspiration for writing did arrive for John, but his story is one of frustrated efforts to force life to work one's way. He confesses that the empty page staring at him is like a "weight of despair that descends at the end of each fruitless session," so much so that he is beginning to avoid them (282). His frustrating efforts to have his way and write from the outside instead of from experience lead to dissatisfaction, but ultimately also to success because in the time he avoids writing, his extensive reading and experience accumulate. The conclusion of this "a nexus of eros and art" is that "the project to de-South Africanize himself" (Engle 36) was unsuccessful. But the process of decentralizing Euro-central positioning of literature was quite successful. In repositioning himself as Other, in a single stroke, John repositions "viewing and writing South Africa from Europe" which "confirms only European worldviews" (Vold 42). By being from South Africa, the texts about his country which were lacking in authority, are provided authority and an air of truth. Despite the fact that he is an Afrikaner, the realization that everyone is someone's margin or center, by changing places and writing from the position of Other, he regains authority and tell the truth.

And what constitutes John's truth in *Youth*? The opening page provides a glimpse, as his truth "is not a lie, not entirely" (*Youth* 143). As long as events remain true, some waywardness with the truth is to be expected in *autre*-biography. So the answer to truth in *Youth* comes about through an interview about Kafka and Michael K. that Coetzee provided in *Doubling the Point,* in which he says "[o]ne writes the books one wants to write" (208), and by extension John in *Youth* is the one Coetzee wanted to provide:

> What, then, do I *want-to-write?* A question to prospect, to open up, perhaps, in the present dialogue, but not to mine, to exploit: too much of the fictional enterprise depends on it. Just as it is not productive to discover the answer to the question of why one desires: the answer threatens the end of desire, the end of the production of desire. (209)

Youth, then, represent the book Coetzee wanted to write, without focusing too much on the why behind it and that is exactly how it reads. It opens avenues of investigation but it does not close them completely or enter any cul-de-sac he would rather not investigate. His truth of the self is a half-truth with glimpses of morbid confessions which remain unexplained so as not to "end the production of desire" (209) or the yearning for writing.

In the invisible, deep structure of this book lies "negative theology" of denial and questioning as a method or arrival to one's true self (Foden). The only light at the end of this quest is the narrator's funny inversion of truth and laughing at the protagonist from an ironic distance:

> The irony derives from two sources: first, the ill fit between the grandeur of the youthful John's idea of the literary and his actual life and times as reported in the work's present tense narrative, and second, the inferred presence as author – writing however in a way that keeps is current opinions almost entirely to himself – of the 60-year-old J. M. Coetzee, a man with a fully-achieved literary life, who is exposing the youthful John's idea of the literary very thoroughly as potentially ludicrous but is also being extremely silent about his own attitudes toward it. (Engle 30)

Twofold irony provides some comic relief as the reader imagines the mature Coetzee exposing young John's arrival and the becoming of a literary great. "Nothing like redemption oscillates in the space cleared by ironical distance," says Foden, and I agree Coetzee writes unique confessions which do not ask, let alone beg, for forgiveness. All they do is penetrate and highlight. But "his is a funny

as well as doomy story" of laughing at, as well as with the protagonist in "the angst of youth, that embarrassing wall of darkness" (Foden).

4.4 *Summertime* – J. M. C. quasi post mortem

> I recently came across a posthumously published poem by A. R. Ammons: Getting old gets old, he says; even trying to find something new to say about getting old gets old. I don't feel that way at all, though I am nearly as old as Ammons was when he wrote the poem. Things keep being revealed to me, or at least coming into sharper focus. What I see, I see more clearly than when I was young. Am I deluded?
>
> (Coetzee, *Here and Now* 247)

Coetzee was unsure there was anything else he could do with *autre*-biography, or the official story of his life "after *Youth*" ("All Biography *Is Autre*-biography" 215). He wondered whether "anything more that can be made with [my] life, or is that life for practical purposes now exhausted?" (215). And in answer to Attwell's question in this interview in 2006, he says that there was nothing else he can do with his life as a storyline – "Will there be a third volume? My feeling at present is no, enough is enough" (216). Nevertheless, *Summertime* arrived as the third part of his flirtations with autobiography, and most elaborate at that. Luckily for his avid readers, he changed his mind, in line with the words he'll utter to Paul Auster in the opening quote a few years later[82] – "[t]hings keep being revealed to me" and "[w]hat I see, I see more clearly than when I was young" (*Here and Now* 247). With this in mind, it comes as no surprise that *Summertim*e saw the light of day in 2009, exactly three years after the mentioned interview with Attwell. Obviously, there was more work to be done, which Coetzee soon came to realize. What he decided to resolve in this volume is the legacy of autobiographical narratives after the death of the author.

Summertime represents scenes and snapshots from the life of John Coetzee, a published artist mid-book, after his return to South Africa. He as a character continues the string of doppelgangers to John Maxwell Coetzee, the real author, and just like I had referred to John of *Boyhood* and John of *Youth* versus Coetzee, now John of *Summertime* enters the scene and will be addressed accordingly to separate him as a character in *Summertime*, and "author" of *Dusklands* – from Coetzee the real author of *Summertime* and *Dusklands*.

The period examined corresponds loosely to the early and mid-1970s when John was struggling with his first novels. Kusak says that this "tripartite story" focuses on the years 1972-1977 and the years Coetzee was still finding his feet academically and as a writer ("Writing Oneself, Writing the Other" 109). The story reads like an overtly metafictional piece of writing, created pseudo-post-mortem of the great author John Maxwell Coetzee. It is organized as a collection of John Coetzee's supposed notebooks and diaries with quoted comments in italics, at the beginning – dated, and at the end of the book – undated.

Following the notebooks or the voice of the supposed author, five interviews take place by a made-up autobiographer Vincent in varied locations and styles. This concocted biographer is on a quest to write Coetzee's biography, and so he searches scrapes of his notebooks for the author's true voice, which he distrusts and prefers to replace with his own and those of the people around him. With this in mind, Vincent also pieces together interviews of the people who "knew him," John that is, or segments of him during his life to add credibility to the biography since the novels and "Coetzee notebooks" seem of no use to the biographer.

In *Summertime,* through the process of discussing and revealing the trickery behind the author, Coetzee directs the reader's attention to various manipulations to which the genres of autobiography and biography are exposed in order to achieve resemblance of truth. By naming the processes metanarratively, exposing the techniques, Coetzee achieves trustworthiness in self-reflexive analyses. This process is called anti-illusionism, and among other roles, it provides authority to the author.

[82] Letters between Paul Auster and John Coetzee went back and forth between the years 2008-2011, but were published in 2013 in a book *Here and Now: Letters 2008-2011*.

Table 3
Organization of chapters and imaginary interviews in *Summertime*

***Summertime* organized:**	1. Notebooks 1972-1975 – by John Coetzee the deceased
	2. Julia – former lover
	3. Margot – favorite cousin
	4. Adriana – an acquaintance
	5. Martin – a colleague
	6. Sophie – a colleague/ lover
	7. Notebooks – undated – by John Coetzee the deceased

According to Kusek, "polarized and discrepant" interviews allow the reader to comprehend multiplicities of Coetzee's identities and the "I" which is "multiply coded" ("Writing Oneself, Writing the Other" 102). These voices, along with Vincent's notes elaborating on the dates when interviews took place and their exact geographical locations, represent an ornate scheme the real J. M. C. uses in order to factualize fiction. The triple narrative situation is created in which the real author – J. M. C. writes about the character John Coetzee of the 1970s, but through his "original" notebooks, and interpretations of him in interviews between the made-up biographer and invented characters. Representative of interconnections between fact and fiction, *Summertime* is used as the soundboard against whether fiction can mimic factual representation in order to gain credibility in *autre*-biography. Almost an experiment proving that facts can equally easily be invented as jotted down, Coetzee starts this quest to create personal writing that represents his true self less than novels, apparently for no other reason than to test the limits of factual, autobiographical writing and its futility in postmodern society.

Whereas previously the process was oppositely organized, facts abounded with merely a few fictional details in *Boyhood* and *Youth*, *Summertime* is made up of fictional events with true voices of the true author circulated through various characters. The author of *Boyhood* and *Youth* prided himself on facts leading the narrative, with "empty spaces" and unintentional misrepresentation of fallible memories appearing occasionally. No longer the case, *Summertime* abounds in misrepresentations and even blatant lies that serve the purposes of advancing the storyline, while real-life events no longer enable the reader to prolong the quest for biographical data. Because of this, *Summertime* symbolizes more of a "(simulated) collection of oral stories obtained by interview and inter-view, an auto-affected auto-biography of sorts" (Macaskill 20) than the personal narrative.

Closest to the novel in its format, *Summertime* expands on the issue of being more truthful in novels than in autobiographies through a juxtaposition of these three works of autofiction. It is most obviously fictionalized and furthest away from *Boyhood* Coetzee has ventured because events do not correspond to reality, except lightly. Not only did John never actually live with his father, but also none of the interviewees can be positively matched to real-life personalities. Coetzee was also married in the period about which his made-up lovers get interviewed. An autobiographical discourse of this kind requires a detective search through the rubble of lies for true reflections of Coetzee and is more elaborate and difficult for the reader, but also more rewarding.

It begs the question of whether there is more John Coetzee in novels than in *autre*-biography because under the guise of a character in a different name the author does not need to worry about his/her legacy and can tell the truth no matter how outrageous. I believe all these varying facets of

the same selfhood, or the author's different doppelganger, pervade these works in different manners. So instead of viewing these works as either/or, we should approach them as and/and – so true Coetzee is the John of *Boyhood*, and *Youth*, and *Summertime*, and their true author. Not only an exercise in telling the truth in autobiographical discourse, but a poking-holes-in-self-narratives expedition as well, *Summertime* exercises the author's right to invert rules on the readers. It tests the theory that novels tell truths about authors and autobiographical discourse tells self-serving (involuntary) lies packed and presented as biographical interviews – dated, properly written, quoted, and marked but ultimately untrue and about non-existing personalities. At least, Coetzee manages to prove how easily the feat of packaging lies as truth could be achieved.

Another avenue to pursue in *Summertime*, unlike previous *autre*-biography pieces, is reflected in the juxtaposition of the interviewer Vincent as a literary device for exploring the authority of the biographers versus that of autobiographers and authors. The fight over whose voice matters ultimately permeates the text, especially after the death of the original author. Coetzee argues that despite the biographers' kidnapping of the authors' life, the text should have the ultimate say over interesting and sometimes contradictory life events of the author, even in self-narratives. He also begs the question that very often the text loses this battle because of public interest in sordid details of authors' private lives more than their creations.

Even when autobiographers' lives make up the storyline and backdrop to their creations, Coetzee argues the text, or what they chose to say, should still take precedence over what they chose not to reveal because the text is their only legacy. The worlds of fact and fiction collide in all self-narratives, but especially *autre*-biography and the common denominator of these in *Summertime* may be encountered in the character of Vincent. The biographer Vincent suspiciously resembles two famous writer/biographers Coetzee was dealing with in real life at the time *Summertime* was being created. Not that the resemblance can be drawn according to likeness, but more along the lines of Coetzee's preoccupations over his authority, agency, and ownership of the text that spilled over in the *autre*-biography while he was cooperating on his first-ever biography.

It is in no way possible to prove that the "events" of the book had anything to do with Kannemeyer (his official biographer) and the numerous interviews with people closest to Coetzee quoted in the resulting biography – *J. M. Coetzee: A Life in Writing* (2011), and I believe Attwell was just as likely inspiration for Vincent. Prior to his official biography, Coetzee had also had successful cooperation in a book of interviews with David Attwell who ended up writing a fictional biography of Coetzee a few years later called *Coetzee and the Life of Writing: Face to Face with Time* (2016). So while going through these experiences of being interviewed for a biography, Coetzee must have drawn inspiration for this *autre*-biography. It seems as if his preoccupations with the ethical aspects of creating someone's biography, trickled over into *Summertime* and he dealt with the worst-case scenario and what if the biographer represented an unscrupulous journalist or someone who wanted to make a name for themselves instead of deeply familiarize him/herself with the subject of the biography.

While I believe that these two biographers, Kannemeyer and Attwell, represent Coetzee's positive experience with interviews, in general, he was quite squeamish about relenting his grip on the text and letting others examine his privacy. Comparing Vincent to Attwell, Macaskill disagrees Vincent and Attwell represent one and the same:

> Unlike Vincent, Attwell is not of course a fiction (he has met Attwell "in the flesh" rather than on Facebook; he and Attwell have both met J.M. Coetzee "in the flesh"). Like Vincent, however, whose authority (for all its "autonomy" of choice, of transcript revision and arrangement) remains subject to J.M. Coetzee, verbal composer and musical performer, Attwell too is being played in *Doubling the Point*. (Macaskill 42)

What Macaskill tries to highlight here is the fact that authors draw inspiration from real-life intermittently – just like Attwell or Kannemeyer might have been the outlines for Vincent, equally

likely Vincent might have inspired Coetzee to authorize the biography about himself when Kannemeyer came calling. The world of reality and fiction in Coetzee and his protagonist John sporadically draw inspiration from real life or withdraw into fiction on demand. It is equally conceivable that Coetzee might have used cooperation with Kannemeyer as an encouragement to create "a villain" type of a biographer in the form of Vincent, someone who takes advantage of the author's death to expose his personal life and assert his own voice over the author's, which in the academic world of even minuscule correct quotation represents an ethical failure and even an attack on the legacy of the author.

We can agree that despite the origin of the creative spark, Coetzee uses Vincent to promote bigger ideas on writing. As opposed to Attwell and Kannemeyer, the imaginary biographer Vincent acts as their antipode to draw out questions of text tempering and insistence on the private life of subjects to the detriment of their work. Vincent is accused by some other characters (Martin, Sophie) to be on the fishing expedition for innuendo instead of trusting his subject's notebooks and data piled during his life, that is, instead of using direct resources he is accused of turning to interviews about him. All the characters, but Martin and Sophie most of all, draw out the discussion of questionable practices of new-age biographers who aim to have their own voices heard instead of the original text. Clearly, against this polyphony of voices instead of the polyphony of the author's original voices, Coetzee uses all characters as ventriloquists for the idea that postcolonial, poststructuralist and postmodern society relies on conflict and rewriting due to a pathological distrust of everything, even the voice of the original author.

To determine Coetzee's views on biographies versus autobiographical work in *Summertime*, as well as his reasoning behind its highly autofictional organization we must review his positions on authority, agency, text tempering, interviewing, and especially the novel implementation of the death of the author as centerpieces for the development of those issues in his last work of fictional memoirs. His ventriloquist characters echo these views, which he had previously expressed in other essays such as "He and His Man," *Doubling the Point,* and *The Good Story*. A miasma of the same views echoes through characters, essays in criticism, and his novels, meaning that if all of them get compared the truth as a middle voice could be established in *Summertime*.

4.4.1 The Author is Dead – Long Live the Biographer?

> What ties one to the real world is, finally, death. One can make up stories about oneself to one's heart's content, but one is not free to make up the ending. The ending has to be death: it is the only ending one can seriously believe in. What an irony then that to anchor oneself in a sea of fictions one should have to rely on death!
>
> (Coetzee, *The Good Story* 69)

Summertime resolves Coetzee's ancient struggle with how to end autobiographies, as the natural ending of a biography would involve the death of the author. Since that ending is unavailable to an autobiographer, what Coetzee does have at his disposal in *autre*-biography, biography of his other self, of a *he* if you will – is autofictional imagination. The imagery and imagination of what would happen after the flesh-and-blood author's death is completely fair game in autofiction. Coetzee previously connected the death of the author to the death of the author's authority to decide his/her own legacy. And that question is pondered at length in the relationship of the biographer Vincent to his craft, and his treatment of the legacy of his subject, John Coetzee. Coetzee uses this power struggle between the two authors to establish the metafictional issues of writing and rewriting someone's history after death, by which the biographer (unwittingly) participates in the process of silencing the author's voice and struggle. If poorly managed, the biographer takes advantage of the death of the author to highlight his/her own voice, rather than to echo the authority of the original author. In

S*ummertime*, Coetzee essentially decides to once again raise the question of what happens after the death of the author and whose legacy perseveres – still the author's or the biographer's?

The limitation to autobiographical discourse perseveres in choosing the appropriate ending. Whereas a biographer ends the biography by representing the death of the author, the autobiographer is left to his/her own devices trying to determine the "end of scene." To Coetzee, the body portrays the ultimate truth because "one is not free to make up the ending" (*The Good Story* 69). By inventing one's demise as a ploy, the author opens up avenues of conversation after the quasi-death in *autre*-biography at least in order to encounter its limitations. Coetzee ironically notes that one is never free enough to make one's own ending (69), and that embodies the ultimate limitation in autobiographical discourse. He who sees himself as the weaver of dreams, creator of fictions, and architect of stories about the self – claims the only truth trustworthy about one's life, the only reliable fact in one's history is death. "What an irony then that to anchor oneself in a sea of fictions one should have to rely on death" (69) as the ultimate truth, the ultimate ending of the story, and the end of fiction of the self is the old physical death.

Coetzee attempts to rewrite history once again, tackling his imminent death in *autre*-biography before it has emanated. If one can make up stories about oneself all up to death, then to a construer of worlds, to a literary boundary-breaker and maker of worlds such as Coetzee it must have represented an enormous challenge to remain at death's door and politely refuse to write about his own death and legacy just because that represented proper decorum in autobiographical discourse. If what ties all of us to the real world is death, then his challenge of breaking the bonds of reality and history to venture into the realm of the unknown quasi-death, and govern gnawing questions of power, agency, and legacy after the inevitable has happened posits the task of *Summertime*. Do authors get special treatment after death in the physical or literary world?

Prior to discovering Coetzee's input on the subject, it is important to note that the quasi death of the author has, of course, been done before in literature, whether as the death of a character/author, a historical figure, or deathbed confession. The idea to write about the world post, or just before one's death, is in no way innovative. Coetzee had studied it in both Dostoyevsky and Beckett, which he has disclosed. In numerous essays on Dostoyevsky, he confronts Dostoyevsky's choice to have characters pronounce death-bed confessions as a symbol of absolute truthfulness as a great technique, but ultimately proving nothing. The person making a confession can just as easily be lying to him/herself. Since the confession used to be viewed as the embodiment of forgiveness to the soul after one last, true repentance, Coetzee provides contrast by claiming that in the secular world confessions are performed for the sole purpose of making statements that mislead oneself and others and with no end purpose of achieving grace in Dostoevskian terms. In *Doubling the Point*, he reflects on death as a tool for truth-mining expeditions and provides the conclusion that Dostoyevsky was erroneous to think death, or deathbed confessions, guaranteed the truth (288). Yet, the notion that people tell the ultimate truth about themselves perseveres in literature to Coetzee's full awareness, despite his disbelief that death-bed confessions remain even remotely less self-serving than regular confessions.

From Beckett, whom he names "a clear influence" (25), Coetzee extensively studied the treatment of trilogy, style, the protagonist as the supposed author of previous novels, the removal of place and intricate plot, and authorship post-mortem. Coetzee admits to having mimicked his style in order to understand Beckett's secret at the beginning of his craft:

> The essays I wrote on Beckett's style aren't only academic exercises, in the colloquial sense of that word. They are also attempts to get closer to a secret, a secret of Beckett's that I wanted to make my own. And discard, eventually, as it is with influences. (25)

Having written a doctoral thesis on Beckett's style – "The English Fiction of Samuel Beckett: An Essay in Stylistic Analysis" – calling him an influence is the least I can do, a more correct terminology would be a literary mentor. But influences exist in order to be discarded, and with that in mind, we should recall the quasi death in *The Beckett's Trilogy – Molloy* (1955), *Malone Dies*

(1956), and *The Unnamable* (1953),[83] in which the protagonist claims authorship of previous novels such as *Watt*, one of Coetzee's favorites and repetitively mentioned in *Youth*. The protagonist, similarly to Coetzee's John in his trilogies, appears to have died but his voice remains. About this, Coetzee mentions disembodied and embodied voices, which sound like a comparison of realistic, lively representations versus too generic and unrealistic voices (of dead authors):

> I should add that Beckett's later short fictions have never really held my attention. They are, quite literally, disembodied. *Molloy* was still a very embodied work. Beckett's first after-death book was *The Unnamable*. But the after-death voice there still has body, and in that sense was only halfway to what he must have been feeling his way toward. The late pieces speak in post-mortem voices. I am not there yet. I am still interested in how the voice moves the body, moves in the body. (*Doubling the Point* 23)

We encounter in this quote, however, a post-facto explanation of what Beckett's novels had taught him regarding the body. Initially, Coetzee had no interest in disembodies voices, or post-mortem characters, but wanted the wholesome experience of conceiving a character whose body moved, who had sex, and bodily functions, not merely opinions, voice, and legacy. His interest appears to have changed. Disembodied voices speak in "post-mortem voices" (23), but Coetzee, nevertheless, changes and grows into the disembodied voice in *Summertime*, years after the publication of these written interviews (2002) because he finds a way to fill the body – by providing a multiplicity of voices.

After the death of the author, the voice from his/her books – their public voice, gets hijacked by the biographer and substituted – instead of added – to his/her private voice. At least that possibility torments the Coetzee of *Summertime*. Following the death of the author, he reluctantly releases the story to the biographer but fights righteously that fate in *Summertime*. If the author is no longer alive to voice his/her authority, Coetzee pronounces the authority of the text above that of the biographer's interpretation and agenda. The words of Coetzee's final interviewee, Ms. Sophie Denoël, reflect the overall attitude best as she says

> but what if we are all fictioneers, as you call Coetzee? What if we are all continually making up the stories of our lives? Why should what I tell you about Coetzee be any more worthy of credence than what he writes in his own person? (*Summertime* 454)

Under no circumstances, *Summertime* seems to say, even in the eventuality of death, can the authority of the author be replaced by anybody other than the text of the author itself. If everyone is entitled to be the fictioneer of their own story, then no free ride on the back of the author's authority may be allowed to the biographer. In other words, having gained authority and authenticity during life, pillaging it after death, and writing about a famous author with no authority of your own, Coetzee believes should not be optional.

The proof of Coetzee's belief that we all use fiction in the story of the self, that we are all fictioneers by trade, can be encountered in numerous other essayistic interviews he has written, such as the written interviews with Arabella Kurtz, when he wrote as a critic. Quite a similar view arises in these places and for this reason, I believe it is his final judgment on the topic:

[83] All the novels were written in the 1940s in French originally, and published as such. Beckett went about translating them afterwards, but quite loosely to adapt to different cultures so it can be argued they represent different variations of the same works. As stated here, despite publication dates in English, the order of the sequels is placed correctly.

> By profession I have been a trader in fictions. From what I write it must be evident to you that I don't have much respect for reality. I think of myself as using rather than reflecting reality in my fiction. If the world of my fictions is a recognisable world, that is because (I say to myself) it is easier to use the world at hand than to make up a new one. (*The Good Story* 69)

I encounter two essential views for *Summertime*, and *autre*-biography in general in this quote. The first one refers to Coetzee being "a trader in fictions" (69), reverberating the idea that novels, as well as any autobiographical discourse writing, share the feature that the author is a fictioneer no matter how much s/he tries to avoid that eventuality. The subjective view remains unavoidable for the story of the self, but more importantly, Coetzee equates novel writing to life writing, which is innovative ("a trader in fictions" no matter what he writes). The second conclusion I draw from here denotes that he *uses* not *reflects* reality (69, emphasis mine), which would explain personal writing, and by extension *Summertime* as following facts to a T, but using the event to tell the story of the self rather than reflecting each and every event in detail. To a fictioneer, then, "it is easier to use the world at hand than to make up a new one" (69), and I conclude Coetzee must have learned this from the stories based on the actual events but retold to the Truth Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in as many varieties as there were people testifying.

The overall hunt for individual stories and personal truths has mainly been connected to the role that the TRC has played in African history. The TRC was founded in 1995 as an attempt to reconcile stories in the apartheid and provide space for lost voices of the black South Africans never before heard. Generally, this decision was contradictory as fear existed the practice would provide also a voice for white South Africans' excuses for their inglorious and unforgivable practices. What this did for Coetzee was afford the "window" of African history to be conceived "on the basis of personal stories" (Heaming 173). Conscious of the TRC's failures and successes, but mainly of its ability to bring personal truths as personal stories to the fore, Coetzee has been investigating from the beginning of his career how retelling or even making up stories of our lives becomes a personal quest for truth, meaning and authenticity and ultimately reconciliation.

Bringing all this back to questions of the death of the author, and the author as the fictioneer of his/her own story who has already left the legacy of the text to defend him/her from extinction – so how to reconcile the biographer's late arrival and snatching his/her personal story? Appropriation of this kind brings about other ethical issues such as responsibility towards the audience and towards history. Coetzee enjoys extrapolating the problem of history as a story, and the biographer as a type of an author who pretends to represent history, whereas ultimately Coetzee claims him/her to be just another fictioneer.

The ultimate fictioneer, above everyone else and above our ontological understanding of two worlds – remains the real author John Maxwell Coetzee (J.M.C.) in *Summertime*. The other surrogates to the author, John of *Boyhood*, John of *Youth,* and John of *Summertime*, represent authorial surrogates and ultimately characters that mirror the real J.M.C. no more or less than other authorial personae Coetzee has brought to life such as Elizabeth Curren, Elizabeth Costello, Susan Barton, etc. The only other equally important fictioneers in *autre*-biography remain – the readers. *Autre*-biography requires the usage of readers whose sole purpose is reflected in their job – to finish the story in a detective-like manner. Like biographers, who provide a history in their own making and let the readers decide the truth, Coetzee also embraces the reader as the supreme fictioneer who should pronounce the ultimate ruling on the author. Readers, perhaps, even outweigh the authors because their subjective understanding remains the last judgment on the text despite the meaning the author had originally intended.

In order to achieve this position for the reader, Coetzee makes use of metalepsis.[84] This feat of modern literature, metalepsis, essentially succeeds in merging the literary to the real world, leaving the reader with critical breadcrumbs to navigate between them. The two different ontological levels of perception presuppose that the author exists in the real world, extratextual, and the character (even of the author) in the story world – intratextual (Effe, *Narrative Transgression* 25). Coetzee takes advantage of this by having his characters inhabit both worlds and transgress from one to the other through plot constructions, authorial surrogates, protagonist surrogates, serial protagonists in multiple sequels who also authored some works (John), records and index-simulations that quasi represent historical facts about the author. These techniques of representation cross-reference the border tropes[85] (Kossew, "Border Crossings" 62).

An example of metalepsis can be drawn from most of Coetzee's fiction, but let us take his famous Nobel-prize acceptance speech as the accumulation of his efforts. In the speech, he refers to Daniel Defoe, the deceased author of Robison Crusoe's traveling escapades, and his characters Foe and Susan, who cohabit ontologically his literary world as characters on par with Coetzee himself:

> Will this man, in the course of his travels, ever come to Bristol? He yearns to meet the fellow in the flesh, shake his hand, take a stroll with him along the quayside and hearken as he tells of his visit to the dark north of the island, or of his adventures in the writing business. But he fears there will be no meeting, not in this life. If he must settle on a likeness for the pair of them, his man and he, he would write that they are like two ships sailing in contrary directions, one west, the other east. Or better, that they are deckhands toiling in the rigging, the one on a ship sailing west, the other on a ship sailing east. Their ships pass close, close enough to hail. But the seas are rough, the weather is stormy: their eyes lashed by the spray, their hands burned by the cordage, they pass each other by, too busy even to wave. ("He and His Man" 8)

Taken as a beautiful metaphor of an author and character, from whichever world they come from, they both inhabit the same ontological space of the book at hand, without ever meeting in the flesh. "He" and "his man" sail in opposite directions, especially after the book has been written. Most of these techniques undertake the process Effe calls "sites of negotiation between author and reader," or in other words, the existence of the readers' assumptions from the real world such as that autobiographical texts tell the truth or that the author is, in fact, alive while writing about his death just like the plot of *Summertime*. In the case of the previous quote, the presumption based on which I concluded that "he and his man" could refer to Coetzee and Foe (Daniel Defoe or Friday), or Susan Barton and her character Friday, or Daniel Defoe and Robinson Crusoe, all remain possible because of intertextual reading and my postulation that Coetzee was talking about the process of writing and the relationship of authors with their characters. Without that particular presumption, no reading would reveal itself, at least not in the direction I was heading.

So, the readers' assumptions and knowledge from the real world are invaluable for the process of metalepsis – in *autre*-biography just like any other genre. *Summertime* allows Coetzee to juxtapose the idea of the fictional representation of one's own death, of the death of the author, meanwhile communicating with the reader who remains well-aware that the real author is alive and well, that the supposed author and character – John Coetzee of *Summertime* is the one deceased.

Because of this metalepsis, *autre*-biography is both born and buried in this last sequel of the trilogy. It is born out of multiple I's that converse amongst themselves as reflections of various John Coetzees, but is buried because the resemblance to a novel is too great for ease. The "I"s that fight in

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[84] See Effe's J. M. *Coetzee and the Ethics of Narrative Transgression* provides information on metalapsis (1-23). Essentially, metalapsis in her view, "works to distinguish between texts that reflect on language in general and those that transgress and ontological boundary by reflecting on their own practice" (1). Metalapsis in this ethics marks the site dialogue takes place between the reader, the writer and the text (23).

[85] See Sue Kossew's "Border Crossings: Self and Text" for detailed ideas on imaginary boundaries in *Dusklands* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*, but the same ideas apply in all Coetzee's work (62).

a dialogical power-play ostensibly represent a "dialogue between two persons" (*Doubling the Point* 392), a dialogue determining whether truth in autobiography can ever be achieved. "One is a person I desired to be and was feeling my way toward. The other is more shadowy: let us call him the person I then was, though he may be the person I still am," says Coetzee (392) in the "Retrospect" of these interviews with Attwell. For in all likelihood, the story of one's self dies with the death of the author, or as Coetzee says in the initial quote – "[t]he ending has to be death" (69). Too many questions surround autre-biography *Summertime*, especially because it ventures too much into novel-writing, crossing all boundaries of seeking the truth about the self because the death of the author inevitably leads to the conclusion that *Summertime* remains too questionable as autobiographical discourse.

The moment that the ending of the author does not, perhaps, equal the ending of his/her story, readers are inundated with an even bigger role to play than deciphering genres. The end of the story is in the mind of the reader who navigates the textual crumbs left by the original author. In the sea of signifiers left for the readers' liking after the death of the author, to Coetzee, the biographer does not get to carry the torch, steal signifiers and turn them into signifieds demarking his/her personal interpretation. It is the text and the readers that represent the ultimate fictioneers to the author's life in retrospect.

There remains one question – "Does he, the other one, that man of his, find the writing business easier? ("He and His Man" 8) – if we read it as a discussion between the world of autobiographers and biographers, instead of authors and their respective characters. Even if all fictioneers have it equally difficult, Coetzee closes the open season to the author's work after death with a final judgment – the end of the story of the self is the end of humanity, as many interpretations as there can be, they all demark readers as fictioneers of the world after the death of the author. Biographers get a cursory second lease on life, but Coetzee scrutinizes them nevertheless and curbs their power of interpretation with the text. We write stories we wanted to write, and biographers do not get the chance of changing them after the fact in Coetzee.

The only ones who leave unscathed seem to be the readers and their interpretation and fiction of the text. This world Coetzee chooses not to limit with his own views, which is why he refuses to interpret his oeuvre, and do interviews in the first place. The reader's fiction of the texts represents the goal of reading intelligently. According to Coetzee, no intermediaries and their independent definitions are meant to get between the text and the reader's (biased) ultimate judgment, least of all the biographer.

Despite the fact that metatextuality disrupts the authority of the single author, paradoxically by providing too many prolific voices (like in the case of interviews), it eventually points the reader to the original author for guidance. In the interview "Voice and Trajectory," Coetzee discusses the concept of Bakhtin's dialogism, or the multiplicity of voices both outwardly and within the self. A concept interesting for us arises from this conversation:

> bear in mind that monologue is not necessarily monological, if I understand Bakhtin. Nor is dialogue dialogical. There's a certain kind of monologue in which voices are evoked and contested and played with that is part of the dialogical. So if I'm interested in monologue, it's not just at a formal level. (89)

Interviews qualify as just such voices, monologues that not necessarily depict only monologues but also text tempering and changes introduced by the second author – the interviewer. What this process affects is the readers' realization of the manipulations and the intrinsic need to go back to the original text for safety, thus bringing more authority to the original author in a roundabout manner.

4.4.2 Imaginary Interviewees as Devices to Advance the Storyline

> An interview is not just, as you call it, an "exchange": it is, nine times out of ten (this is the tenth case, thank God!), an exchange with a complete stranger, yet a stranger permitted by the conventions of the genre to cross the boundaries of what is proper in conversation between strangers. I don't regard myself as a public figure, a figure in the public domain. I dislike the violation of propriety, to say nothing of the violation of private space, that occurs in the typical interview.
>
> (Coetzee, *Doubling the Point* 64-65)

Summertime comprises five imaginary interviews that act as vessels for Coetzee's ideas on interviews, interviewers, biographers, and a string of other text-related issues such as public and private lives of authors, violation of privacy, text tempering, appropriation, etc. On no occasion is there mention that the characters interviewed could be reflecting real personalities, except for metafictional self-referencing by Coetzee that Susan Barton might have been construed on the vestiges of Adriana, and perhaps Martin might be a colleague from Cape Town who pronounced himself as this character.[86] The assumption remains all characters are fully made up to advance the storyline and the agenda of *Summertime*, as opposed to earlier sections of this tripartite *autre*-biography. *Boyhood* and *Youth* "spoke" to readers in the third person singular, autobiographically but once removed as has always been to Coetzee's liking. In *Summertime*, however, the voices of tempered texts, some oral, some changed beyond recognition and some kept in the style of dialogues reflect on John Coetzee from a retrospective, a memory-based retroactive position of people who "knew" him. The fragmented voices of interviewees, all characters serving a certain narrative purpose, together with the biographer's input paint the picture of John Coetzee's legacy. Paradoxically enough, no major reference to his works takes place, but the emphasis sojourns into his private life, or as he mentions in the previous quote "crossing the boundaries" of propriety into personal space (64-65).

On numerous occasions, it was documented that Coetzee despised live interviews, and preferred having a conversation via writing letters and emails back and forth. In this manner most of his interviews/discussions/debates with famous critics and academics came to form books – *Here and Now* with Paul Auster, *The Good Story* with Arabella Kurtz, and *Doubling the Point* with David Atwell, to mention but a few. What he mostly opposes is reflected in the abnormality of the situation in which the interviewer is allowed to cross boundaries of asking personal questions to, how Coetzee puts it, a stranger (64-65). And, if the author like himself, does not regard he owes explanations because he represents no "figure in the public domain," then his private space is heavily violated by the awkwardness of the societally imposed situation. Coetzee goes so far as to claim he should not have had anything to do with journalists in the first place, but now "the word is out, passed from one journalist to another, at least in this country, that I am an evasive, arrogant, generally unpleasant customer" (65).

Almost as if the texts are supposed to stand on their own merits or not stand at all, his backbreaking attempts to avoid interpreting himself and his intentions in novels and other writing expeditions remain urban legends and retold anecdotal experiences of hide-and-seek. Coetzee hiding, and interviewers, sometimes even good friends – seeking interpretations of his agenda in novels. Nothing short of a miracle occurred when his cooperation with several interviewers took place over the years, some extremely fruitful like David Attwell, J. C. Kannemeyer, and Arabella Kurtz, and some less famous and cooperative on his part like Richard Begam. In these written interviews and others, depending on how accommodating and friendly he chose to present himself, or annoyed with the questions, Coetzee could be a truly intimidating figure.

[86] See Jonathan Crewe for more on this eventuality.

Summertime becomes a sort of revengeful device that highlights issues interviewees face on the other end, on the end of being questioned. Just like Vincent represents an antipode to a good, accomplished interviewer, his interviewees perform in varying levels of relevance as vessels for Coetzee's messages on biography versus personal writing, and interview versus the original text.

Dr. Julia Frankl, John's lover, and a future therapist provides insights into the subjective narrative in her interpretation of the John she was acquainted with. His cousin Margot Jonker's interview provides a connective streak of metalepsis to John of *Boyhood* and insights into text tempering. Following that, the interview with Adriana Nascimento depicts the subjective view that we are all protagonists in the stories of our lives. Martin and Sophie Denoël's interviews, as fellow academics, are used for voicing questions of agency, authority, and choice of interviewees based on the type of biography one is writing. The more personal the better because that sells, but the two of them disagree on the ethics of such a choice thrust upon the deceased author's legacy.

4.4.2.1 VINCENT

The character Vincent, the biographer, demonstrates Coetzee's ethics regarding the subject of the biography, as well as the interviewee, and ultimately the interviewer. His position epitomizes that just because ethics may not be followed in an interview, does not mean it should not. The deceased subject emphasizes this issue, because if the subject of the biography cannot defend him/herself, does that mean no one else would carry the torch? The power-play between the interviewer and interviewee (or the subject of biography if alive) takes place in the arena of ethical choices biographers and interviews negotiate both implicitly and explicitly. Coetzee's stance on the subject remains that the interviewer respects the profession by being prepared for the interview and focused on the work of the subject, not the private space, and in turn, the subject responds ethically by participating in the meta-narrative despite feeling invaded.

Before *Summertime*, Coetzee discusses at length that interviewers often humiliate the interviewee and the profession by being ill-prepared and on the hunt for sensationalism at all costs. The "interview is a politer version of courtroom interrogation," which provides a legal setting for the groundwork of a public trial in his, admittedly, exaggerated view (*Doubling the Point* 65). The public trial gets slanted if the interview takes a turn to the private sphere instead of the text.

Another aspect of the journalistic interview essential for Coetzee is the implicit expectation, the traditional embedded view in the public that interviews draw out the truth from unwilling subjects. The importance of this understanding is reflected in that there is an expectation of sensationalism from the journalist as a publicly appointed judge and executioner in search of the truth. Coetzee believes traditionally this stems from the hunt for the truth in psychotherapy and Rousseau's confessions, and he blames this on "the ancient strain of religious enthusiasm as well as on the practice of psychotherapy" (65). These have led the public to expect sensationalist questions and judgment of the subject to the disregard of ethics and decorum. The main aspect of an interview, then, converges in the anticipation of "unrehearsed speech" that leads to "the subject" uttering "truths unknown to his waking self" (65). It is the journalist who takes on the role of "the priest or *iatros*, drawing out this truth-speech" (65, emphasis his), but unwillingly, which in the public's view provides an excuse for these sensationalist questions in the first place. So, essentially, Coetzee stands against this ethics of implied unrehearsed speech used as weapons in journalistic interviews.

With this in mind, his Vincent epitomizes just such an interviewer who aims to discover the private life of the quasi deceased John of *Summertime*, taking advantage of his death to silence his work. The underlying issue of that type of interview remains that John's intentions in his work get scrutinized by the interviewees who knew him privately. Ethical issues at hand take into consideration the role of the interviewees and their relevance in John Coetzee's life, instead of in his work. The biographer's true intentions get examined as well, trying to determine why exactly such a book interests him – unilateral storytelling that does not include the works of the deceased author bleakly

depicts that the biographer might be merely interested in the sales of his book, and not in the truth and roundedness of his subject's legacy.

The only way to elicit truth, according to Coetzee, would require engagement in the interview in an actual way. Both the subject and the interviewer have to participate in a truthful and two-sided conversation, but that would require looking into oneself while remaining aware that the truth could be ultimately out of reach. Coetzee believes that sometimes the truth is of no interest to the parties involved, or it is out of reach because of psychological mechanisms impeding the process of self-reflection:

> If I don't want to look into myself, claiming that it isn't good for my novel-writing, what am I doing conducting this interview, and what sort of autobiographer am I? Let me say, then, specifically on the question of influence, that the interviewer may not get the whole truth because the subject may not know the whole truth, and the subject may not know the whole truth because the resistances and repressions involved are too strong. (*Doubling the Point* 105)

Getting to know oneself, even in the process of personal writing, represents a doomed task because the subject lack self-knowledge. In interviews with Arabella Kurtz, Coetzee closely explains the notions of repression and resistance, mainly Freudian in nature, but besides ideas of the attainability of truth about the self, which is fraught with obstacles, he also addresses the possibility of interviews as conversations that flow among equals, and in that case, the interview proves an invaluable reflection tool, shedding light on topics previously unarticulated (*The Good Story* 26). Such a feat, such an interview, requires an understanding between the journalist and the interviewee, or what he calls "the current" in letters with Paul Auster (*Here and Now* 110):

> […] I have often felt oppressive boredom as I listen to myself mouthing off to interviewers. To my way of thinking, real talk only occurs when there is some kind of current running between the interlocutors. And such a current rarely runs during interviews. (110)

These views of antagonistic nature between interlocutors in an interview, an either-or attitude, hunt *Summertime*. What we encounter here depicts more of Coetzee's view on the monologue, rehearsed one-sided mouthing off to someone "just" doing their job, and an attack on interviewers to come up with better, more enticing questions. The necessity of such questions appears to be quite selfish in Coetzee and reflects his ideas on the dangers of retelling the same life story over and over again. If one repeats the story of one's life in the same way too many times, the interpretation might take over the role of history and they may never be able to regain and repossess the original memory:

> Just recently I read an article by Jonathan Franzen in which he says that, after submitting to one promotional interview after another for his new book, he felt he had to break free or else he would begin to believe in the life-narrative that he had been spouting in the interviews. I interpret him as saying, not that he had been telling untruths in the interviews, but that the repetitions of a single account of his own life were scouring so deep a trace that he would soon lose his freedom to interpret (remember) his life otherwise. (*The Good Story* 12)

Since personal narratives get repeated even in ego strengthening coffee-time retellings such as "'I said to her ... She said to me ... I said to her ... '" (12), Coetzee believes the same retelling, to an author, might be dangerous because it strengthens unanimity of a single story and silences the countervoices. "The strange thing is how many of us want to fix our life-story, by repeating over and over, to ourselves and others, one or other preferred interpretation of it" (12). Therein lies the danger

of a single story, in the repetition of one's view to the detriment of history, or as Coetzee says the freedom to interpret one's life as we change is taken away (*The Good Story* 12) by the incessant interviewing, which is quite usual for public persons. Remembering one's life "otherwise" will have disappeared if re-interviewed to no end on the same topics, and therein lies Coetzee's main dislike of interviews.

Aside from the aversion to interviews that render no conversation, no flow or current, another Coetzee's dislike gets transferred in the character of Vincent – his abhorrence of private particulars and dirty laundry presiding over the text and writers' legacy. To Coetzee, seeing the story of the self, "the story of one's past" as immutable represents an obstacle (12) for the advancement of the self. With that in mind, "Mr Biographer" is tasked with the difficulty of scoring the right tone with Coetzee between the private and the public self. Since his views on the topic rigidly toe no lines but remain fixed on no private information is the right amount of information, Vincent is set up to fail from the very start.

Coetzee metafictionally juxtaposes the process of interviewing from two opposing agendas in *Summertime* – that of the interviewer and that of the interviewee. He perpetuates and highlights the interview as a battleground to show his disagreement with the tradition. In the old tradition previously described implicitly, the interviewee is expected to provide something in the free speech form, to blunder something personal against their better judgment, and the interviewer is supposed to preside over the process of extricating that personal (and shameful) information. *Summertime* metafictionally reveals this process through questioning the intention of the biographer and revealing the magician's bag of tricks to the reader. Vincent reveals his intentions clearly, the biography he aims to produce toes the line between narrative and facts from people who knew John. He wishes "*to strike a balance between narrative and opinion*" because he wants "*to bring a life-story to life*" (*Summertime* 447, emphasis his). In no way does he have an agenda to promote John's work. Vincent takes pride in that the story about John would represent an episode instead of an encompassing, well-rounded, and historical overview of him and his work, or as he puts it "*a final judgement on Coetzee*," which he leaves to "*history*" (448, emphasis his).

> *What I am doing is telling the story of a stage in his life, or if we can't arrive at a single story then several stories from different perspectives.* (448, emphasis his)

By raising questions into this practice, Coetzee demonstrates his disagreement and questions Vincent at every turn through interviewees as characters. Technically speaking, Vincent never gets interviewed per se, but he is included in a chapter of his own here because he provides numerous opinions in answer to other characters' poking of his interview practices. His views are presented in the italics originally to separate his speech flow from that of the interviews I presume, and his character drives home Coetzee's varied ideas on interviews the most. By having Vincent change interviewees' speech patterns and flow from conversations into either monologues or typed-out texts without questions, Coetzee further develops issues of text tempering. Just like Vincent silences the subject of the biography by ignoring the "Coetzee papers," he continues the malevolent practice by altering and silencing the voices of the interviewees. We, as readers, never learn whether the changes demanded by interviewees ever get incorporated, or whether he completes the process of adaptation to suit his agenda. Since the interviews available, supposedly printed as the biography, only note the objections the interviewees made repetitively about the changes to the original spoken and written interviews, we are left with the hope that Vincent chooses to essentially implement what the interviewees ask. As only objections make it to the version we are reading, not the corrections, we are left hoping Mr. Vincent would stop exerting his power of making everyone speak in his voice (Teimouri 115), and allow tempering and distortion to be downgraded to a minimum.

Coetzee also uses Vincent as a vessel for the exploration of issues of appropriation, in this case, the forceful appropriation of John Coetzee's life post-mortem and more importantly the appropriation of his legacy for the benefit of Vincent's biography. I argue something unique takes

place in that usually Coetzee fights very stand-offishly and from the sidelines for the Other simply because he encounters difficulties embodying a female voice like in the case of Lucy from *Disgrace* or leaves the Other mute (Friday in *Foe*) so as not to trespass and erroneously conclude something out of turn as a white South African man. In Teimouri's words, "[w]hat distinguishes *Summertime* from Coetzee's former works is its emphasis on the total elimination of this authorial privilege" (118).

> By drawing attention to the fact that there are always multiple versions of a story, *Summertime* strips authority from each of the narrative voices. In consequence, the autobiographical narrative is negotiated within the text but also metaleptically across its boundaries. (Effe, "Coetzee's *Summertime*" 268)

For the first time in his oeuvre, the reader is posited center-stage as something very personal unfolds in Coetzee, although it might sound high and mighty or too academic, he is in fact deeply affected by possibilities of appropriation, loss of authority, and his voice being taken away after the bodily demise. Not only affected himself, but a multiplicity of stories skews everyone's belief into a single perspective or ultimate truth because even the testimonies of individual narrators or interviewees demonstrate the unverifiable fact, thus also losing authority.

This technique of having himself voiced into existence, or being "embodied through the narratives of others" (118) allows another step of removal from the self that he had not explored in autre-biography prior to *Summertime.* The he of *Summertime* appears to reflect really a he, unless we come to think metafictionally that the real author, J. M. C. is the one twice removed behind the language. The hollowed-out character John represents a new leaf of a book, endless with possibilities of being voiced over.

Due to his opposite polarity to Coetzee, Vincent plays out his fears and acts as a destabilizer advancing the storyline by being annoying to characters, or to Coetzee's shadow selves. The point of the enterprise is set to prove that biography is no truer than autobiography.

Vincent as a character, aside from introductory notes here, will be viewed in conversations with other characters, as his retorts make little sense if taken out of context. In conversations with other characters, his statements prove more revealing for himself, Coetzee's agenda, and other characters' purpose as well.

4.4.2.2 JULIA

Julia's interview sheds light on the repetitive notions in Coetzee's oeuvre such as the power of intertextuality, authorship, and subjective narrative in *autre*-biography that require further discussion. The first important intertextual conversation takes place when Julia says to the biographer in two separate turns – "It was of course your man, John Coetzee" (*Summertime* 300). "Your man" because she did not know his name at the time (308) outwardly clarifies the reference, but the phrase inevitably acts as a hook connecting Coetzee's famous acceptance speech for the Nobel prize – "He and His Man" (2003) to *Summertime* (2009).

This famous speech was long-held to be an allegory on the power-play between the author and character, but also the character who begins to write his own story. This reference allows Coetzee the use of Daniel Defoe and Friday as illustrations of this relationship. Friday is represented as a character in Daniel Defoe's story *Robison Crusoe*, who starts writing at one point, and as an extension the lecture could be extrapolated to Coetzee who is the real author writing both of them into existence in his other book – *Foe.* So when Coetzee writes the words "writes his man" ("He and His Man" 1) and "He (not his man now but he)" (2), the readers become engaged in an *intratextual* conversation between Coetzee and Defoe, between Friday and John-of-*Summertime* and between centuries passed. Centuries between Coetzee and Daniel Defoe get erased by implanting these two words into the

textual and ontological space of the modern reader. It becomes just as likely "now he" could refer to Coetzee or Defoe because they can coexist in the minds of readers. Just like their books could be read one after the other in *the now,* they cross boundaries of text and coexist in readers.

As authors, characters and protagonists, they share the reference *his man* as authorial belonging to the persona with whom power resides to create imaginary worlds or even images of real personalities after death, as it is the case of Vincent as an imaginary author.

Table 4
Intertextuality between *Foe* and *Summertime*

Summertime	Real author J. M. Coetzee
	Imaginary author Vincent
	Protagonist John Coetzee of Summertime
	Character Julia calls protagonist John – "his man"
"He and His Man"	Real author J. M. Coetzee
	Imaginary author Daniel Defoe mentioned as the author of Foe (he is, in reality, the author of Robinson Crusoe)
Foe	Real author J. M. Coetzee
	Character Daniel Defoe appears as the character/author

Not only does the author give life to the character, but also the character reflects a mirroring image of the author because if the author had not known about something s/he could not have created a character in the likeness of that phenomenon or characteristic in him/herself. Coetzee's worlds collide between real life, *autre*-biography, and his varied characters' imaginary worlds on purpose. The way Coetzee wants readers to understand the relationship between authors and characters, be those the imagined and construed ones, or protagonists based on reality like in the case of *Summertime* John is as follows:

> If he must settle on a likeness for the pair of them, his man and he, he would write that they are like two ships sailing in contrary directions, one west, the other east. Or better, that they are deckhands toiling in the rigging, the one on a ship sailing west, the other on a ship sailing east. Their ships pass close, close enough to hail. But the seas are rough, the weather is stormy: their eyes lashed by the spray, their hands burned by the cordage, they pass each other by, too busy even to wave. ("He and His Man" 8)

"Too busy to wave" ("He and His Man" 8) as they pass each other by, Coetzee and John then inhabit the same world, at different times and with varied powers. One is the ultimate creator of life for the other, but had it not been for the work and the life of the character John, Coetzee would not have anything to write about. It is his life, his thoughts, his actions that have provided material for the artist Coetzee to play with. The quote lends itself for the reading of exchange of power between character and author, not for unilateral power of one. "If he must settle on a likeness for the pair of them, his man and he" (8), it is that they have shared a life, influenced each other, and everything but met in the same reality. But had it not been for one, there would never have been for the other. Their world together is that of intertextuality.

Dr. Julia Frankl's interview, secondly, takes critical note on "Mr Biographer" (*Summertime* 324) and his honest belief that it is he who holds the power to retell Coetzee's story after the death of the author. She provides a venue for the discussion that biographers possess more authorship to redo the author's life story better than the author him/herself because the authority has died with the author. Julia provokes these ideas out of the biographer by standing up to him in an attempt to clarify as Coetzee's messenger of sorts, that authorship of great authors perseveres in their work after death. Ultimately, the authorship is Coetzee's, as the true author, and the protagonist of *Summertime*, while his character Vincent only attempts to claim the power of Coetzee's life story after his death. Even if willing to relent authorship to someone, Coetzee would leave it to the reader and the text as the ultimate interpretative tools, rather than to biographers.

Highlighting the fact that critics often believe themselves more powerful than the work, like the example of the ignored "Notebooks" in *Summertime* proves (453-454), Coetzee has Julia repetitively ask about why the biographer chooses to believe anyone but Coetzee's journals. Vincent opts for redoing John's story in lieu of the author's death and inability to respond. The joke is on him, of course, because Julia is used as a vessel driving the message forward that biographers not only prefer second-hand resources such as interviews to the subject's journals as direct resources but also they may take advantage of the author's death to redo their life's legacy and storyline despite the fact those same biographers had never met the subject first hand. This predatory disinterest in the actual person and subject of their writing overtaken by the desire to redo someone's story and cancel their legacy is highlighted in Julia's words – "Your book is going to be about him yet you chose not to meet him. Your book is not going to be about me yet you asked to meet me. How do you explain that?" (310). In his aspiration to "*write what [he] wished*" (310, emphasis his), Vincent never sought out his subject because if John's imagination had been different from his intention, he would have needed to change his narrative agenda. Vincent sacrifices the truth for the illusion of power and Julia highlights this possible aspect in biographies.

Julia finally leads the conversation to the subjective narrative – what one reveals about oneself in personal narrative is their prerogative, calculated choice, and entitlement. She illustrates this idea by claiming herself more relevant than John in her own life story.

> You commit a grave error if you think to yourself that the difference between the two stories, the story you wanted to hear and the story you are getting from me, will be nothing more than a matter of perspective – that while from my point of view the story of John may have been just one episode among many in the long narrative of my marriage, nevertheless, by dint of a quick flip, a quick manipulation of perspective, followed by some clever editing, you can transform it into a story about John and one of the women who passed through his life. Not so. Not so. (317)

Two major points are made – for one, the story the biographer aims to hear deserves no editing expeditions despite perhaps highlighting something inconvenient. Another power-driven element of writing one's story is reflected in the exertion of influence over the reader's perception throughout decades after one's death. In Coetzee's writing against "condescending instrumentalization of Friday as colonized subject" (Cornwell 112), we encounter lessons of empowerment because everyone is the

main character in their own story. Julia remembers John only in how he fits in with her life narrative, and "My story, the story of me, began years before John arrived on the scene and went on for years after he made his exit. In the phase I am telling you about today, Mark and I were, properly speaking, the protagonists, John and the woman in Durban members of the supporting cast" (*Summertime* 317). It is pivotal for her to drive home the idea that subjective stories of one's life report on everyone else as the Other, even if the autobiographer is attempting to diverge the story towards what audiences might prefer, towards the famous person.

Aside from insisting on who was the minor and who the major player in the story of one's life, Julia is used to render the lesson of appropriation and text tempering on the part of the biographer.

> I warn you most earnestly: if you start playing around with your text, cutting out words here and adding in words there, the whole thing will turn to ash in your hands. I really was the main character. John really was a minor player. (317)

Possibly thinking about the ethics of biographical text and life appropriation at the time, preoccupied with the cooperation with his personal biographer Kannemeyer, Coetzee inundates these lessons onto the character, e. g. "if you start playing around with your text, cutting out words here and adding in words there, the whole thing will turn to ash in your hands" (317). If taken laterally, Coetzee provides the lesson that interviews should be kept in their originally intended meaning and that biographers better not take advantage of the death of the author for cheap blows to his/her immortality.

Metafiction, finally, allows for meta-narratives between characters from different works to take place, and for Coetzee to administer his ideas across worlds and books. A case in point – Julia posits the question about whether *Dusklands* is fictional, and John or Coetzee answers "sort of" (326). "Sort of" depicts all Coetzee's oeuvre along the lines of fact and fiction divide, be they novels or *autre*-biography. Just like there is fiction in autobiography, there is truth in his novels about himself and his life. In another metafictional twist, we learn that John-the-artist views *Dusklands* as a "bid for immortality" in the face of time rather than something that provides meaning to our lives (331). An alternative interpretation of what it means to be an author, as opposed to *Youth*, which illustrated John as someone mimicking the world for lack of other options, refers to his book as "a project in self-administered therapy" (329). Unlike self-help books per se, Coetzee's blend of semi-fictional works allows for made-up elements that advance the storyline, even welcomes them.

If it was not metafictional enough before when a character in a book (Julia) asked the author (John) about another book he had written (*Dusklands*), she also broaches the subject of his father – "how does your father feel about […] having false claims made about him, about being turned into a character in a book?" (327). In fact, Julia acts as a vessel for delivering messages about John and/or Coetzee's writing beliefs, albeit less discouragingly than other characters. Not only do the writing beliefs of the author/protagonist duo appear, but also disparaging lessons in self-imaging and character representation. "Julia" half-lovingly, half-jokingly defines John as a caricature of "principles" that "bump into reality" (332). Imagine the irony of an author who writes about himself in the past as someone who knew even then he was ridiculous and accepted it:

> I know he had a reputation for being dour, but John Coetzee was actually quite funny. A figure of comedy. Dour comedy. Which, in an obscure way, he knew, even accepted. (332-333)

Imagine the triple layer of metafictional juxtaposition in stating, through a character of your own creation, that the subject – the past you – knew very well about himself that his reputation as "dour" had nothing on his private self. A mish-mash of in-jokes J. M. C. bounces back off his intended

reader is the intentional play of these texts, but *Summertime* even more so than other works because it adds the layer of imaginary characters as you would encounter in novels.

Self-consciousness in the style of Coetzee also brings about a sense of wonder in all characters about the world and about their past selves that remain imagery of Coetzee's self and ultimately unrealistic of all people. So this unrealistic ability to dive into the self and pronounce one's biggest fears and desires such as Julia's references to fearing she would be made into a character followed by the conclusion she "never quite flowered within him, never quite came to life" (*Summertime* 311) because John never wrote her into his books. That kind of insight into the process of writing usually comes from pondering inside out, i. e. by authors themselves. Her tendency to overshare and demonstrate brutal honesty also defies rules of etiquette and adds to her being a character used by Coetzee for his own thoughts rather than a rounder, real person. In her common address to the biographer we encounter this phenomenon when she says "[d]on't smile" (309), or "I thought you would be some busybody, some academic newshound who had come upon a list of John's women, his conquests" (311). Naturally, that kind of honesty exists, but much more commonly people prefer to stay silent if they dislike someone rather than enter a one-sided attack with the biographer.

Julia's storyline is froth with attempts to disrupt the narrative because she often addresses Vincent directly regarding his views on her interview and very openly at that. Her style of direct unswerving head-on attack puts the interlocutor on the defensive, especially because of her strong views on belonging and having a mind of her own outside of the text. She utters lines such as "You must be getting worried, Mr Vincent. *What have I let myself in for?* you must be asking yourself" (308, emphasis his). The disrupted narrative occurs when she exposes the techniques used by writers to hide something such as lack of memory and thus inevitably invented instead of recalled conversations:

> *How can this woman pretend to have total recall of mundane conversations dating back three or four decades? And when is she going to get to the point?* So let me be candid. I am making up the words, the dialogue, as I go along. Which I presume is permitted, since we are talking about a writer. What I am telling you may not be true to the letter, but it is true to the spirit, be assured of that. (308, emphasis his)

This disruptive technique of providing the character a platform to call out the supposed narrator acts as inner monologue used to. Confessional in style, Julia's extrapolations on writing demonstrate insight she would have difficulty accumulating otherwise than in the process of being an author or a critic. It is in these interruptions I catch Coetzee's voice and agenda more than anywhere else in the text. So her words, not true to the letter but to the spirit (308) clarify both the biography Vincent is accumulating and the *autre*-biography Coetzee is writing.

4.4.2.3 MARGOT

The character of John's beloved cousin from *Boyhood*, Agnes, features in *Summertime* under a different name – Margot. Happily married close to his favorite place in the world – the farm Voëlfontein in the Karoo, Margot represents an antipode to John's solemn state who is "living with his father in a shabby house, engaged in part-time, low-level teaching, and unable to have meaningful relationships with women" (Lopez, "(Un)belonging" 219). If once they had been birds of a feather, *Summertime* engages in their differences on the one hand, and it structurally acts as an adhesive to metaleptic binding between the two worlds – that of *Boyhood* and *Summertime* through the continuation of John's cousin's life story and her developing view of him on the other.

In *Boyhood*, John's cousin Agnes (now Margot) epitomized love and belonging to the young boy who belonged nowhere except on the farm in the Karoo. Closed off and solitary, the John of *Boyhood* encountered love for the first time in the conversations with his cousin. She provided him

with a soundboard for his ideas and gave him the benefit of the doubt as "he told her everything, everything he did, everything he knew, everything he hoped for" (*Boyhood* 79). Her lack of judgment for his difference meant the world to the boy who never fitted in previously and "the day was special because of her" (79).

What he assumed, at the time, was an unbreakable parallel between Agnes and the farm so that the binding contract between them read that he finally would "*belong*" (80, emphasis his). Of their first encounter John of *Boyhood* concludes:

> What he said to Agnes that afternoon he can no longer remember. Why is it that he can speak so easily to Agnes? Is it because she is a girl? To whatever comes from him she seems to answer without reserve, softly, readily. She is his first cousin, therefore they cannot fall in love and get married. In a way that is a relief: he is free to be friends with her, open his heart to her. But is he in love with her nevertheless? Is this love – this easy generosity, this sense of being understood at last, of not having to pretend? (80)

Coetzee lightly explores the world of cousin love and trespasses into the deviant amorous feelings between cousins or siblings educated and raised apart. Just enough to tease, but treading carefully, he concludes of the relationship that Agnes "occupies a place in his life that he does not yet understand" (79). And the crossover from *Boyhood* to *Summertime* is achieved through the repetition of some phrases, and evocation of memories – "'Do you remember,' she says, 'When we used to come here as children …'" (*Summertime* 357). Binding the two narratives together allows for an immediate authority transmission to John of *Summertime* and metaleptic experience for the reader.

Margot's ultimate role in *Summertime* remains more elaborate as the plot thickens. "Much emphasis is placed by the narrative on the question of belonging," and her character provides that to John in Africa (Attwell, "Trauma Refracted" 290). Having read the initial trilogy, the reader cannot but wonder whether the same character is being introduced or another one – which imposes doubt and *unreliability of the text* on the process of reading. Aside from distrust in the process, Margot's character provides additional authenticity and authority through *metalepsis* and continual existence in the intertwining worlds – the real one and literary ones (in *Boyhood* and S*ummertime*).

The ways in which authenticity and authorship are provided to Margot emanate from the fact that her supposed positive attitudes and love towards her cousin have already been previously established in the world of *Boyhood*. When she, as his most public and reliable defender, utters criticisms of John in *Summertime*, the reader lends her more credibility than characters who had just "spoken up" and "met him" in *Summertime* for the first time, such as Adriana. Simply put, Margot's words are deemed more credible because she and the reader share a "history," one ontologically surpassing the world of the texts.

Not only does the reader in a detective-like procedure browse through memory to remember Agnes and what she had "said" in *Boyhood*, but because of the inner logic of metalepsis, readers also get reminded of how they felt while reading *Boyhood*, where they were, how they had loved the book, etc. Through the process of intertextual reading, readers transfer feelings and opinions into book two even though the *Summertime* experience has just begun.

Coetzee expects and even encourages these ontological meanderings between worlds through purposefully repeated sections, sentences, and events from *Boyhood* to provide credibility of an ongoing experience. He, in this way, points to a difference between metalepsis and mere self-reflexivity of language, because metalepsis engages the ontological double-worlds in the reading, whereas self-reflexivity may only comment on the process of thinking. The character of John from *Boyhood* illustrates this when he evokes these "memories":

> But I can't help remembering the first conversation you and I had, the first meaningful conversation. We must have been six years old. What the actual words were I don't recall, but

> I know I was unburdening my heart to you, telling you everything about myself, all my hopes and longings. And at the same time I was thinking, So this is what it means to be in love! Because – let me confess it – I was in love with you in those days. And ever since then, being in love with a woman has meant being free to say everything on my heart.' (*Summertime* 358)

In comparison to the previous paragraph, clearly John's utterances – "[w]hat he said to Agnes that afternoon he can no longer remember" (*Boyhood* 80) and "[w]hat the actual words were I don't recall" (*Summertime* 358) bear a resemblance to each other on purpose. Also when he utters he could open his heart (*Boyhood* 80), and say everything on his heart (*Summertime* 358) share similarities beyond mere arbitrariness. It is the air to these statements, the style itself that bridges the gap between years and worlds, resolutely leading the reader down the path of memory convalescence. And to what narrative end?

Entrusting Margot with the agency from *Boyhood* provides her with additional credibility to judge someone she "knows" from childhood and whose entire family is familiar to her. This furthermore burdens her words of disappointment in John, at which readers are left perplexed and even additionally disappointed. I can only venture a guess as to why Coetzee pronounces such harsh judgment on his old self, to the extent of having Margot say he was a "[f]ailed runaway, failed car mechanic too, for whose failure she is at this moment having to suffer" and ultimately even "[f]ailed son" (376). Nothing short of disgust transpires in the interview at times, as Margot passes judgment on his personality and physical appearance:

> He looks a mess, with his unkempt hair and beard sticking out at all angles. *Thank God I don't have to wake up with you in my bed every morning*, she thinks. *Not enough of a man. A real man would do better than this*, sowaar! (377, emphasis his)

Under the guise of meaning well, and having "a lingering soft spot for John" (360), Margot's confession provides discernments into the double nature of one's thought and motives. Coetzee describes her as someone angry at John when she recognizes something of the Coetzee men in him – their lack of decisiveness and ambition. Not only does she participate ultimately in John's "(un)belonging" (Lopez), but she also perpetuates it through the stories of his strangeness even within the family enclosure and language because "[t]he dramatization of John's idiosyncrasies are part of an often hilarious characterization; more seriously this constant mockery also sketches a process of ostracism" (Birks 33).

Increasingly and poignantly derogatory, from Julia, Margot to Adriana, depictions of John's lack of character increase, whereas, I would argue the true dent in his character is inflicted by Margot because of her professed love and their shared history. The technique of writing about himself in this manner is reminiscent of writing oppositely to the first autobiographies of delusion and grandeur, such as that of Benjamin Franklin for example. The doubling or tripling disgust with himself are tantamount to assault in some points. Smuts provides the insight that since the relationship between John and his creator/narrator remains twice-removed, once by being narrated and secondly by being narrated from memory and a distance, it is impossible to determine whom the "shadowy moral status" (Smuts 24) refer to. "The moral depravity" (24) usually leads to redemption, but in the case of Summertime it remains unclear whether the writer Coetzee is even talking about himself or his old self or his cumulative self:

> In *Summertime*, the question is given an added layer of complexity by the persistent ambiguity that surrounds the nature of the relationship between the writer, J. M. Coetzee, and his subject, "John." The depiction of moral depravity, which is conventionally justified as one of the necessary steps in a road that leads finally to redemption, or at least to absolution, acquires a shadowy moral status all its own when it impossible to determine the subjective locus of the

> moral being that reveals itself in this way. In short, if we are to understand the depiction of moral depravity in *Summertime* as something more than sensationalism, it becomes necessary to establish a connection between "John" and his author, or at least to understand the significance of the relationship between them. (Smuts 24)

With regards to the interview itself, Coetzee also uses Margot's interview experience to highlight *text tempering* in interviews that people might not be completely aware of, but which enables the voice of the biographer to shine through instead of the author or even the interviewees. Attwell views this text tempering as Coetzee's stylistic escape and inability to "rain in" Vincent's possible insights:

> As a rather careless intruder and the target of a pre-emptive satirical strike by Coetzee, it is unlikely that the fictional Vincent *could* produce Margot with this degree of alertness. The point is that the text performs a degree of nostalgia in such moments which serve to deepen and complicate the wounding, the unfulfilled desire to separate. It seems to me that J.M. Coetzee's narrative of Margot is conflicted on the level of style, with the implication that he is not wholly able to rein in the nostalgia or successfully attribute it to Margot herself via Vincent's narration. Both as an act of love and as a tearing away, as *writing*, "Margot" exemplifies the condition of trauma which is our point of departure. ("Trauma Refracted" 291-292)

The traumatic tearing away Attwell assumes is taking place refers to that of John from Africa. Other text tempering includes those when Mr. Vincent explains that he had Margot's interview transcribed, some vocabulary translated from Afrikaans, and finally radically transformed into a monologue by removing interjections, questions, and prompts from the interviewer, i.e. himself (*Summertime* 350). Aside from essentially turning an interview or a two-sided conversation into a monologue, the biographer admittedly shortened the story he deemed "quite lengthy," decided to "dramatize it here and there" and did all that for the sake of having interviewees speak in varied voices (350). Alexandra Effe points to this butchering of text, quite common in journalism and previously discussed by Coetzee and Attwell:

> Coetzee notes that, while writing is dialogic, interviewers want a flow of speech that they can "record, take away, edit, censor, cutting out all its waywardness, till what is left conforms to a monologic ideal" (*Doubling the Point* 65). Mr Vincent is guilty of forming his interviewees' narratives in this way. Margot's story has been vehemently altered by his editing choices. (Effe, "Coetzee's *Summertime*" 271)

Despite her initial agreement to the procedure, Margot ultimately protests being called a "she" instead of an "I" (351), to which she is convinced that the I is the same as she. Such an interesting grammatical and textual self-reference to Coetzee's process of writing about himself, especially because we know that this procedure allows the self to be reviewed from a distance, meaning it cannot be deemed the same just similar. Mr. Vincent is caught in a lie to his subject, by extension, Coetzee having orchestrated everything in the first place.

Coetzee addresses expectorations on the part of the interviewees as well because everyone granting an interview already has formed opinions about the nature of the process and roles assigned. It is this misconception, however, that he points to because the process of interviewing has changed and even journalists have grown bolder and attacking one's personal matters. Margot had expectations that the interview would be merely accurately transcribed, but Mr. Vincent had instead

rewritten "it completely" to her mind (*Summertime* 353). His explanation, however, clarifies that form bears no influence on the content:

> That's not entirely fair. I have not actually rewritten it, I have merely recast it as a narrative, giving it a different form. Giving it new form has no effect on the content. If you feel I am taking liberties with the content itself, that is another question. Do you feel I am taking too many liberties? (353)

Completely at odds with this claim, Margot demands another reading of the interviews, especially maintaining off-the-record topics be kept that way. Her exclaim that the biographer "*can't write down every word [I] say and broadcast it to the world*" (361, emphasis his) focuses on private and public conversations. Public personae, apparently, have no expectation of privacy dead or alive, however, her prerogative to remain off-record so as to keep relationships with people in her life on a good footing remains undebatable to her. Despite the fact, Vincent believes her life story would be interesting for readers because "[y]ou were part of your cousin. He was part of you" (401), Margot remains unconvinced and demands another reading of the interview and her narrative to check whether she sounded more like herself, rather than like the biographer. She assumes the authority over her narrative when it threatens to change relationships with her sister and cousins, but it remains blatantly obvious the deceased author does not share the same luxury – his public persona may be rewritten post mortem.

The irony of Margot's supposed words in a letter to John towards the end of the interview does not escape the reader – "*How sad that when our turn comes to die our story, the story of you and me, will die too*" (388, emphasis his), says she. As a way of concluding this interview, I would mention a part of another written interview-set of letter Coetzee has made with Arabella Kurtz in *The Good Story* in which he talks about repression and that it inevitably comes back to haunt authors because the topics they are intrigued by – get irrevocably repeated. In that interview, similarly to Margot's, the fear of not being remembered appears. Whether as an authorial trickery by a master-narrator who will definitely be remembered – or as a repressed topic that gets repeated, still, Coetzee says the following:

> It is hard, perhaps impossible, to make a novel that is recognizably a novel out of the life of someone who is from beginning to end comfortably sustained by fictions. We make a novel only by exposing those fictions. (*The Good Story* 191)

Through exposing the fictions of Coetzee's self, perhaps accumulated in his interviews and or family history, the process of the narrative of *Summertime* unfolds. Especially in discovering these techniques – he makes *Summertime* into a novel with life-like characters such as Margot. It is the exposure of their fears, such as they would not be remembered, but ultimately Coetzee's fears, that we encounter the novel-like *Summertime*. But in the process, let us not forget it is still his story, a story of a man "comfortably sustained by fiction" (191).

4.4.2.4 ADRIANA

Ms. Adriana Nasciemento, a Brazilian immigrant to Africa and the mother of one of John's students, provides the third interview. Vincent hints her to have been inspirational for John Coetzee's character of Susan Barton in the novel *Foe*. The scrapes of the interview, or innuendo between the biographer and the interviewee, reveal a storyline in which the biographer is pushing for answers on a possible liaison between Adriana and John, whereas she vehemently denies having been even

remotely interested and proceeds to "offend" John's masculinity. To her, "[h]e was a boy as a priest is always a boy until suddenly one day he is an old man" (*Summertime* 418).

She is used in order to raise the question of authorship and ethics by questioning – "how can you be a great writer if you are just an ordinary little man?" (434). As always, it is quite intriguing how Coetzee succeeds in removing his ego from the equation and perseveres with debasing his old character self. Vincent's view, meaning said by a character but ultimately – by Coetzee himself, describes what might transpire in this process, which is that John's greatness as a writer comes from having "*a steady gaze*" (434). Despite the fact this line is uttered by a character, I agree since Coetzee seems to enjoy conversations with his old selves, projected selves and characters as they amass of the two, this steady gaze and unflinching look into one's faults is his best feature, be it as an author (Coetzee) or as a surrogate author (John). Not many authors could withstand looking that deeply into their biggest faults, pointing them out through characters' utterances and then having a laugh at their own debility or lack of character.

Exactly that transpires between Vincent and Adriana, who as a Latin woman proceeds to laugh at John's "woodenness" of character and *his being* itself, while the real-life Coetzee puts words into her mouth and even writes the final "[laughter]" (434; 435) that often ends question-answer repartee between these two characters. The impression the reader gets is that of a masochistic director writing and directing the scene of the very assassination of his character. For example, read the depiction of John:

> You know the word *disembodied*? This man was disembodied. He was divorced from his body. To him, the body was like one of those wooden puppets that you move with strings. You pull this string and the left arm moves, you pull that string and the right leg moves. And the real self sits up above, where you cannot see him, like the puppet-master pulling the strings. (436)

In order to participate with Adriana in the description of this metaphoric disembodiment of John, the reader is required to bring up the real-life Coetzee in his/her mind's eye from interviews, or at least the book cover of the very *Summertime* s/he is reading. That is the only way the full extent or the full weight of her description can take effect in metalepsis. Unless the Coetzee's real self that "sits up above" (436), his physique and stature are relied upon, the dry, ironic humorous effect may not take place because it rests upon the reader's agreement with Adriana that the real-life Coetzee has two left legs and wooden quality about him. From there, laugher essentially takes place, both with him, the puppet master who pulls the strings, and behind his back with the character or the puppet turned puppeteer.

Then, it feels almost like the puppet/character Adriana has become John's puller of strings, has exceeded her limits of character, and turned into the author/narrator. The feeling stems from uttering outrageous claims about the ultimate author, the puppet master and the fact that it is irrational anyone would speak of him/herself in this way if they had a choice:

> Now this man comes to me, to the mistress of the dance. *Show me how to dance!* he implores. So I show him, show him how we move in the dance. *So*, I say to him – *move your feet so and then so.* And he listens and tells himself, *Aha, she means pull the red string followed by the blue string! – Turn your shoulder so*, I say to him, and he tells himself, *Aha, she means pull the green string!* (436, emphasis his)

Being disembodied or in essence, transferring one's mind into a character and bringing it to life projects from these lines. Quintessentially the whole process of character invention can be metaphorically drawn out of these lines – just imagine them as a commentary of the procedure of breathing life into someone, not merely depicting their body and behavior, but also what makes them

tick as characters. I would not venture as far as saying giving them a soul, as it is quite unlike Coetzee to think about himself along those lines, but a projection of soul incarnate has to occur for a character to become rounded instead of flat. What Adriana accuses John of here stands for being too much like a flat character in his own life, lacking purpose, lacking life, pulling strings but being inadequate and not human enough. She concludes, what can be qualified as any artists' worst fear – the wood has no soul and no wooden man can be an artist:

> But that is not how you dance! That is not how you dance! Dance is incarnation. In dance it is not the puppet-master in the head that leads and the body that follows, it is the body itself that leads, the body with its soul, its body-soul. Because the body knows! It knows! When the body feels the rhythm inside it, it does not need to think. That is how we are if we are human. That is why the wooden puppet cannot dance. The wood has no soul. The wood cannot feel the rhythm. (*Summertime* 436)

Not that history has proven great artists have to equal great ethical men (and women), but this ethics of questioning whether beautiful (art) and good (ethical) must coexist in art dates back to Coetzee's love of Plato. Coetzee appears to be having a conversation through his characters with dead poets and abandoned worlds, not merely to himself but his higher or aspiring self as an artist, as well. When John mentions to Adriana that his philosophy of teaching dates back to Plato's burning for truth, that the teacher is bound to recognize it in the student, set ablaze, and "ascend together to a higher realm" (408), we are reminded of transcendentalists and their equalization of truth, beauty and ethics.

Plato and Neo-Platonists remain a clear influence in Coetzee's ethics and other than this theory of learning, which is repeated twice in *Summertime*, he mentions Plato numerously in other works in connection to poets and poetry as mimesis of the truth (*The Good Story* 7). What remains relevant in this *autre*-biography, and closely connected to this idea that the author must represent the embodiment of ethics and his/her truth is reflected in Adriana's discussion of Plato's attack on poets and Coetzee's views on the matter. Namely, Coetzee's standpoint on Plato's attack on poets comes about because Plato believes that poets choose beauty over truth: "Plato's case against the poets" claims when it "comes to a choice between truth and beauty, they are too ready to sacrifice truth" (8). The truth of the matter is that poets have a point as well, says Coetzee, because "the heart of the poets' case is that beauty is its own truth" (8).

What should be reviewed as relevant for self-narrative reflects Coetzee's analysis of autobiographical discourse as a representation of the self "when truth may not be in my best interest" (*Doubling the Point* 394-395), or in other words, the Platonic search of truthful representation even if it involves one's faults:

> The novel asks the question: Why does one choose the side of justice when it is not in one's material interest to do so? The Magistrate gives the rather Platonic answer: because we are born with the idea of justice. The essay, if only implicitly, asks the question: Why should I be interested in the truth about myself when the truth may not be in my interest? To which, I suppose, I continue to give a Platonic answer: because we are born with the idea of the truth. (94-395)

I conclude from this that Coetzee depicts truth as beauty, regardless of whether it is desirable for the subject. By extension, the wood has no soul, isn't human, and lacks beauty but if it does not lack truth it is still worth representing, meaning truth in itself is ethical. Or, in Vincent's words, the greatness of a man cannot be determined by his beauty or ability to dance in this case (*Summertime* 435). Extending that logic, "*If you must be a good dancer before you can be a great man, then Gandhi was not a great man, Tolstoy was not a great man*," says Vincent (435, emphasis his).

Because of the inter-web of metalepsis and double conversations between imaginary and real characters and personalities, as well as dead masters, Adriana's interview is exemplary of the notion of "authentic reading," or the attempt to provide multiple interpretations to a text. In Katy Iddiols' words, Coetzee imposes on his readers the obligation to read his texts without inflicting them with a single reading, or as she calls it "inauthentic reading" (185). The Coetzee texts, such as *Summertime*, provide multiple readings or even "provoke multiple readings" so as to avoid pigeonholing texts into single narratives and interpretations (188). Even if the original intention is posed as moral and knowledgeable, like in the case of famous critics who have been researching Coetzee for years and presume to know the true meaning behind the texts, Iddiols still believes that Coetzee's texts provide alternative readings to any reader. This is because the techniques of double thoughts and doubt-instigating take place every step of the way, which in turn force the reader to take sides and question everyone's intentions, thus providing alternative theories.

The way this process comes about, among other examples, is reflected in this made-up interview with Adriana. Through the procedure of instigating doubt, the reader begins asking a myriad of additional queries, questioning even one's own conclusion. So doubt initiates the process of authentic reading and the seed of doubt can be planted by anyone, the interviewee in this case:

> What is this? Why these questions? You come all the way from England to talk to me, you tell me you are writing a biography of a man who happened many years ago to be my daughter's English teacher, and now suddenly you feel you are permitted to interrogate me about my 'relations'? What kind of biography are you writing? Is it like Hollywood gossip, like secrets of the rich and famous? (*Summertime* 414)

Questioning the intentions of everyone, Coetzee proceeds with planting the seed of doubt in the readers' minds as to what constitutes the most inner intent of various characters, and in this case, the biographer's. Characters are usually permitted to defend themselves and provide an alternative storyline, also fully credible, which puts the reader in the position of an intermediary judge destined to hunt for inconsistencies and changes in the storyline.

In this case, Vincent responded to the accusations by changing the subject; he asked controversial questions to bury the original such as – "*Are you suggesting he was a homosexual*?" (414, emphasis his), which further inflamed the reader's imagination by sheer sensationalism of the author referring to himself in this way, if nothing else. It is the danger of being misconstrued and labeled forever that Coetzee is toying with in making wild accusations and assumptions about himself in writing like this. He solely relies on the reader's intelligent and "authentic reading" to get him out of the trap he poses on himself.

The following strategy employed to boost authentic reading on Coetzee's part is reflected in that Vincent also repeats the question he wants answered, but his way, in his interpretation, until the interviewee becomes irritated. His imaginary predisposed truth is used to demonstrate everyone has an agenda, and the reader best be wary of repetitive questions.

Incredulous she had thrown out all John's letters, Vincent repetitively poses variations of the same question, which allows the reader to come up with possible interpretations – either Adriana is correct in her assumptions and he has an agenda to write "Hollywood gossip" (414), or she is the one with an agenda and lying to cover it up. An example of this technique echoes the search for letters John wrote to Adriana:

> *Do you still have that letter?* (413, emphasis his)
> *And you did not reply?* (414, emphasis his)
> *You did not reply and you did not allow relations to develop any further – relations between yourself and Coetzee?* (*Summertime* 414, emphasis his)
> *You mentioned that there were further letters.* (415, emphasis his)

You were telling me last time about the letters he wrote you. I know you said you did not always read them; nevertheless, do you by any chance recall more of what he said in them? (*Summertime* 417)
There were no more letters? (429)

The sheer reiteration opens up a conversation between parties involved and the reader is expected to pass judgment on the truth after reading authentically, or reading without siding with one narrator or character. Because Adriana had already made an allegation into what might be Vincent's intentions in the biography, Coetzee explores how the accused is already sentenced because the presumed expectancy guilt looms over him in expectation of his defense to the allegations.

Vincent's insistence on the proof in the form of letters for his biography, on something tangible, while spinning his web or his proposed story, is explained as wishful thinking. Any biographer would wish for the discovery of authentic material that would put them on the map. Another possibility refers to the fact that Vincent had hoped Coetzee's letters and the magical twist of his pen could have swayed Adriana to fall for the author John she had never known in that light before. "What if the letter you did not read contained words that would have moved you or even changed your feelings about him?" (432), asks a clearly slanted fan Vincent, and Coetzee provokes the reader to keep asking him/herself in the process of authentic reading what agenda lies behind.

Ultimately, the reader decides. Among numerous alternatives, innuendo, and accusations, Coetzee requires the reader to choose a storyline in accordance with what kind of a fictioneer he or she already is. We interpret based on what pool of ideas already exists to choose from. So the reader more on the skeptical side might believe Vincent wanton of money or fame, and a reader more innocent might side with Vincent being a misguided fan who just researched an author he admired.

Either way, the doggedness of the questioning provides escalated answers that cut into the very fiber of interviews as describes in Coetzee's criticism. He views interviews as "a politer version of courtroom interrogation or, better, the interrogation an investigating magistrate conducts prior to the public trial" (*Doubling the Point* 65). So the more Adriana feels her version of events is under attack the more she escalates in the defense of her story. Adriana's memory of John defines him as "soft," not homosexual but rather as someone who "was not a man, he was still a boy" (*Summertime* 414). More importantly, he is painted as insignificant, as a passing episode who she never had "*relations* with" (414). Coetzee drives home the idea that regardless of whether someone becomes famous or not, each person constructs the story of their lives centering themselves as the eye of the storm.

Intertextuality works to the advantage of this interview because Coetzee places the tall order of knowing all his works on the reader. Vincent claims to Adriana that the character of Susan Barton in *Foe* was created in her image – "*For example – this may interest you – there is a book named* Foe *in which the heroine spends a year shipwrecked on an island of the coast of Brazil. In the final version she is an Englishwoman, but in the first draft he made her a* Brasileira" (437), which gives enough evidence to pronounce them one and the same person. In Vincent's explanation, but Coetzee's words, of course, the character of Susan from *Foe* is:

attractive, she is resourceful, she has a will of steel. She hunts all over the world to find her young daughter, who has disappeared. That is the substance of the novel: her quest to recover her daughter, which overrides all other concerns. To me she seems an admirable heroine. If I were the original of a character like that, I would feel proud. (437, emphasis his)

Just ponder this for a second: Coetzee-real-author has the character of *Summertime* – biographer Vincent – explain to the character Adriana that in another book from twenty-three years ago someone like her featured as the protagonist. If the reader misses the cue because he had not read both books, metalepsis might remain incomplete. But if all cues remain, the resemblance of two

worlds colliding takes effect, the John Coetzee the protagonist of *Summertime* appears as the author of *Foe*, not the Coetzee who actually writes *Summertime*. Not only reflecting his relationship with himself as the protagonist, narrator, and author in the "persistent ambiguity that surrounds the nature of the relationship between the writer, J. M. Coetzee, and his subject, 'John'" (Smuts 24), he extends this ambiguity to Adriana, among others. Just like Coetzee extends Margot's authority, he chooses to share ambiguity and intertextuality with Adriana by making her the inspiration to another character in another book.

Ethics of public scrutiny in a journalistic interview get raised over the issue of consent as Adriana refuses to provide a photograph of their daughter for this article, all the while discussing a man who has died and appropriating his life, on the other hand, she refuses to implicate her daughter without permission or to allow anyone to side her with "*the other women with labels around their necks*" (*Summertime* 437, emphasis his). Intrigued by "what this man of wood" made of her (438), Adriana wonders about John's other subjects and other women attached to his name as his conquests, labeled and accused unable to defend themselves once connected to a public figure. Public versus private life stories provide insight into lack of permission and a sort of forced publication of the private lives of anyone connected to "*The Wooden Man*" (437, emphasis his). So, consent is lost with fame, both chosen or imposed alike.

Finally, I very much enjoyed the curveball Coetzee throws at the reader regarding Vincent as a biographer who usually breaks codes of ethics and remains slanted arguing his own views in interviews. On this occasion, he articulates himself "*reluctant to pronounce a judgment on anyone without ever meeting him face to face. Him or her*" (434, emphasis his) and the irony remains he is doing exactly that to John Coetzee, his subject whom he has never met. "*From the record he left behind. From putting two and two together*" Vincent concludes John "*was a little lonely and a little desperate*" (434, emphasis his), and the reader is left laughing, if s/he reads authentically, at the human ability to lie to the self at the same time as the event takes place.

Vincent remains on polar opposites with Coetzee. Both of whom author/narrators, but the first unable to encompass his actions orally as they take place in the world, Vincent remains unaware of the negative side to his rewriting the history of a famous person. And the second one remains overtly negative and unable to compliment himself. Unless we look at *autre*-biography as the ultimate ego stroke and love of the self, left for posterity to defend "the poor author" attacking himself, Coetzee appears to have written the legacy of negativity and disparity for John's memory. The last two interviews, nevertheless, bring about reconciliation to this image of sheer dour hatred of the self Coetzee provided in the first three interviews.

4.4.2.5 MARTIN

The last two interviews with two made-up colleagues of John – Martin and Sophie, illustrate Coetzee's ideas on text tempering, interviewing as an invasion of privacy and insistence on the private life of subjects to the detriment of their work more than all other interviews combined. The build-up to these interviews had been accumulating in off-hand references pitching the same ideas in bits and pieces, however, unanimously as colleagues and fellow academics the two of them "attack" the biographer's willful snubbing of Coetzee papers and journals for the benefit of (skewed) interviews.

Martin's main argument against providing "slanted" interviews of people who might be settling old scores with the deceased writer is that it would be performed "towards the personal and the intimate at the expense of the man's actual achievements as a writer" (*Summertime* 449). In his mind, except for Coetzee's cousin, the women who have had affairs with the writer run the risk of revealing irrelevant information "[b]ecause it is not in the nature of love affairs for the lovers to see each other whole and steady" (449). Martin's main issue, then, rests with the biographer's choice to focus the biography on John's personal life rather than the public service his writing had provided:

> I repeat, it seems to me strange to be putting together a biography of a writer that will ignore his writing. But perhaps I am wrong. Perhaps I am out of date. Perhaps that is what literary biography has become. (*Summertime* 449)

This critique is countered by Vincent in the explanation of the kind of biography he aims to write – it is not the final judgement on the author that he seeks, that resides in the realm of history, but his interest lies with "*telling the story of a stage in his life, or if we can't arrive at a single story then several stories from different perspectives*" (448, emphasis his). Vincent's most valid excuse for attempting to revive interviews about the author instead of texts of his actual work remains that people closest to John have all died and that interviews he was able to assemble are good enough because otherwise, their memories of John would have died with them.

> *There are other names I would have wanted to add, of people who knew him well, but alas they are dead now. You call it a peculiar way of going about a biography. Perhaps. But I am not interested in delivering a final judgment on Coetzee. I am not writing that kind of book.* (448, emphasis his)

Vincent's biography plays with the notion of how to be truthful in life stories, which of course gets metafictionally commented on when you think of Coetzee as the one actually writing them. Life-story is described in the end as a balance of thought and opinion – "*Because in biography one has to strike a balance between narrative and opinion. I have no shortage of opinion – people are more than ready to tell me what they think or thought of Coetzee – but one needs more than that to bring a life-story to life*," says Vincent (447, emphasis his). Despite the fact that bringing a story to life does require opinions, Coetzee describes Vincent's method as only one way of going about the process. At least if one goes about the process more critically, in a meta-narrative, the (*autre-*) biography can be achieved. Martin's interview provides, amongst other lessons, the message that text should take precedence over storylines in academia.

The issue of varied perspectives and subjective point of view could be illustrated also by an article about Summertime Jonathan Crowe has written in reply to the character of Martin. In my research, I came across this article by Coetzee's colleague who identifies himself as Martin, interestingly enough, and provides further insights into the same period, as described from his perspective. The engaging article is entitled "Arrival: J. M. Coetzee in Cape Town,"[87] The aforementioned author and colleague to Coetzee, Jonathan Crewe, sheds some light on the interview for the position in Cape Town both men had applied for that gets mentioned in *Summertime*, after being warned by some friends he might have been inspirational for Coetzee's new sequel of *autre-*biography.

Having received the book from Coetzee himself, he goes about explaining in the article that he was interested in how his remaining memories would differ from Coetzee's fiction/storyline in *Summertime* (Crowe 11). "I receive a complimentary copy of the book from Viking, with a signed card from Coetzee. Is it a gift or a message? Both?" Crowe wondered (11). Despite recognizing himself, Crowe leaves the sober comment that the "interviewee is surely a compound ghost of Coetzee's Anglo South African academic near-contemporaries of that time, with invention thrown in" (13). Due to his background in criticism and professorship, Crowe's experience allows him to understand that rarely do we encounter characters solely based on someone, rather than composite images of multiple experiences.

In comparison to this realistic representation of events, and the fact that the John of *Summertime* being recalled is single, whereas in reality he was married with two children, Crowe

[87] See Jonathan Crewe for a detailed account of Coetzee and his Cape Town lecturing interests (13-27).

emphasizes that his relationship with his father was painstakingly true up to the death of cancer in his son's care (Crowe 13).

In comparison to this, metalepsis and willful lack of truth perform the function of playful interaction with the reader. Vincent as Coetzee's ventriloquist says about this encounter:

> *IN ONE OF HIS late notebooks Coetzee gives an account of his first meeting with you, on the day in 1972 when you were both being interviewed for a position at the University of Cape Town. The account is only a few pages long – I'll read it to you if you like. I suspect it was intended to fit into the third memoir, the one that never saw the light of day. As you will hear, he follows the same convention as in* Boyhood *and* Youth, *where the subject is called 'he' rather than 'I'.* (*Summertime* 439, emphasis his)

One cannot but smile at the in-joke between Coetzee and his reader who is required to know that *Boyhood* and *Youth* have seen the light of day in reality in order to find it funny. Also, while reading the third memoir it is quite entertaining to read that memoir has never been published as a denial of reality. These intersections of postmodern questioning of fake reality actually lead to an ease of spewing truth that remains undetected because of shattered reality. Coetzee overtly says to the reader he is single in *Summertime*, followed by emotional scenes of the death of his father from cancer. It is easiest, to tell the truth in fiction or in the guise of fiction, and Crowe confirms his experience of Coetzee and his father equals the representation in Summertime. It is my claim here that this technique, highly Coetzean and multiply repeated serves exactly the purpose of confusing the reader only to follow up with absolute truth of the self. So a piece of information false, followed by absolute truth.

Crowe mentions in the article several points of convergence between himself and Martin, most of all in terms of Neruda and the curriculum they taught. They diverge, however, in that Crowe recalls two interviewees for the job, not three and that Coetzee with his intercontinental education and a Ph.D. from the States represented a far better candidate than himself (15). "Where I recognize myself unmistakably in 'Martin' is as the pipe-smoking interviewee University of Cape Town in 1972, applying for the same job as Coetzee. My first meeting with Coetzee took place, in fact, in the foyer of a conference room in which we were to be interviewed for a single position the English Department" (13). Coetzee seemed avant-garde to the stale African environment of the time and Crowe believes that led to his misunderstanding on the part of fellow academics and eventual hatred and misconstruction:

> So here in the foyer I was meeting a South African who had evidently become a type of the new, avant-garde American […]. Coetzee's shoulder-length black hair, casual dress, and reticent manner made him intriguingly different, vaguely countercultural. The slight pallor disapprovingly noted in *Summertime* by his Afrikaner relatives on the farm spoke of northern winters. His air of subdued intensity made it seem as if there might be more to him than met the eye. The tiny red Fiat, left-hand drive, in which I saw Coetzee leave the campus, was not only foreign but would barely have counted as a car in the South African, middle-class reckoning. Ownership of this Fiat, the predecessor of the famous, barebones Datsun truck in *Summertime*, seemed like a gesture of anti-bourgeois austerity, although affordability on an academic pittance probably the choice. (14-15)

Aside from these personalized images and side-by-side reviews of the real-life "Martin" and his book counterpart, the article most importantly comments on Margot and some other *Summertime* highlights such as Coetzee's relationship to Afrikaans as a language and his sense of identity and lack of belonging. For example, in speaking about Africa, Coetzee has Martin pronounce his projected feelings of inadequacy and (un)belonging to the African continent because of the illegitimacy of the

white claim on the black continent. Their similarity lies in the fact that they "shared a common stance towards South Africa, namely that our presence there was illegitimate" (*Summertime* 442).

Despite depicting John as a "misfit" (446) in his time and place, I would argue a certain closure to his legacy comes about in *Summertime*. No longer categorically constructed as awful, but more measuredly average – a "misfit" but a "cautious soul" (446), sweeping explanations and categorizations get left behind and a measure of closure descends upon John in Martin's description of him as a "perfectly adequate academic but not a notable teacher" (444). Not exactly complimentary of himself, but let us conclude guardedly positive in comparison.

Of the same topic, Crowe agrees Coetzee lacked enthusiasm in the classroom, except for graduate students, and believes the descriptions of his self measure up to reality in that department solely because Coetzee lacked a flair for the dramatic:

> Coetzee could, in fact, teach "pretty much across the board," as faculty were normally expected to do. The reported lack of enthusiasm (zeal) for teaching is not wholly a fiction. A flat lecture-room affect was the apparent result. Although the extraordinary thoroughness and searching rigor of Coetzee's pedagogy were not lost on all undergraduates (see Kannemeyer 228-29), the majority, primed for charismatic performance, remained indifferent. (25)

What Crowe adds to Coetzee's image in the period reflects his "negative charisma that made him an object of continuing fascination" (25) for both students and staff alike. An air of callousness about his image descended upon him, especially after his refusal to play politics for the English Department of Cape Town. Once burnt twice shy, not that the colleagues understood as at the same period his visa was still under review for an eventual return to the states. It is my estimated guess he was reluctant to participate in protests let he happened to enjoy the same treatment as the expulsion from America.

In a final literary gem, Vincent's fishing expedition into John's private life in the format of recurring topics leads to a variety of questions aimed at "*the theme of the older man and the younger woman keeps coming back in his fiction*" (*Summertime* 447, emphasis his). I would conclude with Coetzee's words that despite the repetitiveness of subjects and themes "[w]ho can say what goes on in people's inner lives?" (447).

Because of this, even in his own writing "[i]t would be very, very naïve to conclude that because the theme was present in his writing it had to be present in his life," and with that in mind, all these interviews could be just a figment of the imagination present only in Coetzee's inner world. Crowe included, projections of these men's inner worlds fascinate, but reveal no more truthful selves than Vincent's, Coetzee seems to warn readers in the interview. To each of the mentioned narrators, characters, and imaginary selves, the slanted experiences became history, personal and personalized history, which could at least be supplemented like in the case of Crowe, with extra information, if not completely rewritten.

4.4.2.6 SOPHIE

As mentioned earlier, the pair of academic colleagues Martin and Sophie represent a restorative current mediating between previously harshly divisive sides which depicted John Coetzee as a strained black-and-white personality, lacking friends. These two characters paint Coetzee's authorial progress from making bombastic statements about the self to more moderate, human-like personality traits in these interviews.

Ms. Denoël worries about Vincent's potential confinement of John in neat little boxes with categorical descriptions such as "[h]ostile, sympathetic" (*Summertime* 457). She says to Vincent – "as a biographer you above all ought to be wary of putting people in neat little boxes with labels on them" (457).

Similarly, she has apprehensions about the non-academic and sensationalist rewritings of a person that destroy their authority. As a female colleague, who had "a liaison" that did not "endure" (*Summertime* 453) with John, she still demonstrates a lot of academic integrity, just like Martin, because she demands to learn about "what kind of book it is," if "it is a serious book" and whether the biographer "provides authorization for it" (453) before she would speak about the deceased author and colleague. Vincent negates any authorization is necessary because it appears too complex:

> *Does one need authorization to write a book? If one wanted authorization, where would one seek it? From the executors of Coetzee's estate? I don't think so. But I can give you my assurance, the book I am writing is a serious book, a seriously intended biography.* (453, emphasis his)

The biographer evades permission because the author belongs to the world. Just like in Martin's interview, memories of the survivors were not to be trusted (453), the diaries were unavailable (453), and "*the biography will rest on interviews with a handful of friends and colleagues*" (453, emphasis his) to provide varying views on the subject. Cumulatively, to Vincent that will render more credibility to the project overall:

> *Mme Denoël, I have been through the letters and diaries that are available to me. What Coetzee writes there cannot be trusted, not as a factual record – not because he was a liar but because he was a fictioneer. In his letters he is making up a fiction of himself for his correspondents; in his diaries he is doing much the same for his own eyes, or perhaps for posterity. As documents they have their value, of course; but if you want the truth, the full truth, then surely you need to set beside them the testimony of people who knew him in the flesh, who participated in his life.* (453, emphasis his)

What we learn from this section summarizes the point of view by journalists and biographers alike in Coetzee's opinion – numerous perspectives are preferred to one, even the one of the author; authors make up stories of themselves for posterity, therefore, cannot be trusted; authors belong to the world and public scrutiny because of their public work. Since everyone is *a fictioneer*, perhaps not willingly, but Vincent reiterates the idea that telling stories about ourselves may not be optional, that people seem predisposed to restate destinies and memories to ourselves and others. Vincent epitomizes this end of the spectrum. Numerous perspectives versus introducing confusion, provide options to the reader in terms of what to believe in.

Sophie also embodies Coetzee's non-binary views of academics who claim that every human being cannot avoid reinventing the past – "we are all continually making up the stories of our lives" (454). Supposing that, Sophie's personal opinion is no more relevant than Coetzee's or Vincent's, it merely represents an opinion, not the opinion trumping all else after the author has died. She even says as much by raising the question of "discretion" because she does not hold the view that "once a person is dead all restraint falls away" (454).

So if she feels unprepared to share what transpired between herself and John with the world (454), then who has the right to talk about him but the texts he has published himself, he has made public and willfully shared to the public domain? In her view, the only relevant opinion in a biography remains that of the author:

> On that subject my opinion is irrelevant. What is relevant is what he himself believed. And there the answer is clear. He believed our life-stories are ours to construct as we wish, within or even against the constraints imposed by the real world – as you yourself acknowledged a moment ago. That is why I specifically used the term authorization. It was not the

> authorization of his family or his executors that I had in mind, it was his own authorization. If you were not authorized by him to expose the private side of his life, then I will certainly not assist you. (*Summertime* 455)

It would be dangerous to equal these views to Coetzee's private thoughts on the subject, despite the fact he had repeated them before (in *The Good Story*). The character of Sophie says as much when she explains she was worried, "nervous," she would appear as a character in someone's book "in some embarrassing guise" (461) because it had seemed in her youth that "you could not be closely involved with another person and yet exclude her from your imaginative universe" (461). Creating characters as mirroring images of important people close to us testifies to an impossible endeavor and she clarifies it represented a learning experience for her at the time or in her words "[m]y exclusion was part of my education" (461). I suppose the learning she acquired had to do with the process of writing, and as a metafictional commentary of self-narrative, it provides doubt for the reader then that any of the characters in *Summertim*e knew Coetzee in any capacity.

This attests to the "private side of [his] life" (455) that need not necessarily have become public at John's request. Blindly ascribing Coetzee's views to those of the interviewers who also saw the world differently to him, appears impossible for truth to Sophie, but to Vincent, they *"synthesize a whole*" more than the "*unitary self-projection comprised by his oeuvre*" (454, emphasis his). Since they both represent Coetzee's self-projection anyway, they both epitomize Coetzee in opposing poles.

Finally, Sophie's interview provides a closure into Coetzee's supposed Afrikaner identity[88] or lack thereof according to Margot. She says John believed Afrikaner identity was imposed on him as his legacy and "under the gaze of history he felt there was no way in which he could separate himself off from the Afrikaners while retaining his self-respect" (464).

> History – or fate, which was to him the same thing – might have cast them in the role of inheritors to the land, but at the back of his mind they continued to be *they* as opposed to *us*. (459, emphasis his)

Interestingly enough, the "*they* as opposed to *us*" dichotomy actually has *us* as "principally the Coloured people" (459). Sophie depicts John as a utopian who believed in a colorless class of people who would one day roam the Earth because people had intermingled to the extent that race had become irrelevant:

> He longed for the day when everyone in South Africa would call themselves nothing, neither African nor European nor white nor black nor anything else, when family histories would have become so tangled and intermixed that people would be ethnically indistinguishable, that is to say – I utter the tainted word again – Coloured. He called that the Brazilian future. (459)

The "Brazilian future" mentioned leads to his ideal of "ethnically indistinguishable" (459) world union, or in other words everything opposite from Africa at the time. If anything, I would classify this phrase as the most positive Coetzee has provided for his legacy of the self, because the rest of Sophie's depictions of his persona and his art fall equally in disparaging lines like everyone else's reflections.

In repeating phrases on his insistence on a French mistress, just like described in *Youth*, Sophie participates in intertextuality by laughing at his grandiosity – "Of the French mistress it will be expected that she recite Ronsard and play Couperin on the clavecin while simultaneously inducting her lover into the amatory mysteries, French style" (*Summertime* 457). He had no "strong presence,"

[88] See Polona Zajec, for example, for additional ideas on Coetzee's xenophobia and revelations on Africa in *Summertime*.

left no "deep imprint" and aside from helping her leave a bad marriage, she believes the relationship "[c]omico-sentimental" (467). His work lacked ambition (468) and he personally "was just a man, man of his time, talented, maybe even gifted, but, frankly, not a giant" (467).

For someone whose "control over the elements of the fiction is too tight" (468), I am, as always, surprised by Coetzee's insight into the self and bravery to put the negation of the self down for posterity. Attwell provides an insight in a Freudian reading that Coetzee may be melancholic in the true sense of the word, in that reading mourning for the loss of ideal or country could lead to self-dejection ("Trauma Refracted" 290). Or he could be merely deforming the medium, his best quality that either way I cannot but wonder how much of Coetzee truly believes his personal derogatory projections of the self, and how much represents an act for the reader?

4.4.3 Insistence on Records and Quasi-Records in *Summertime* – "Notebooks 1972-1975" and "Notebooks: Undated fragments"

Coetzee's works abound in records, letters, diaries, and quasi-journals because he has found the recipe for a successful truth image, rather than the truth in personal writing. The resemblance of truth sufficiently proves it as long as there is a record, a piece of paper, a jotted down message of the past accompanying it. Very early on, Coetzee has realized that the eyewitness alone cannot bear the burden of truth in a confession. Anne Haeming says that *Foe* alone proves the historiographical approach – that writing down one's story or hauling an object may bear the test of time, as Susan famously regrets not having brought some sand from the island (175). Otherwise, "the presence of an eyewitness alone is not sufficient to convey an impression of authenticity" (175).

In dealing with *Summertime*, following the two other sequels, I am inevitably drawn towards the similarities and differences between all three sections. The segment most prominent in its variety reflects the beginning and the end of the interviews and embraces the *autre*-biography with John's "original" notebooks. "Originality," I am afraid, remains undetermined because it would be our word against Coetzee's trying to prove whether these notebooks had already existed as part of the body of Coetzee papers, or they had been created for the specific purpose of beginning and ending *Summertime*, i.e. bringing about authenticity.

The concept of authenticity remains inextricably linked to the concept of truth in autobiographical discourse. If the "whole truth" remains out of reach and autobiographies deal with facts-driven narratives that only validate blatant lies have not been spoken, then Coetzee's insistence on providing verifiable depictions of events, following potentially unproven storylines and narrations of those events attest to this phenomenon. His authenticity in *autre*-biography remains man-made, playing off of the idea that authenticity often is man-made. Charts, graphs, historical books, and referential texts of all sorts depend on their referentiality in the real world, but often also attest to authenticity that remains unverifiable after a long time. Thus, they demand blind trust.

The effect of *the real* versus *the image of the real* that truly gets provided in Coetzee's texts is referred to in Lejeune on numerous occasions such as in the "Autobiographical Pact" (29). Since doubt should be Coetzee's middle name, he provides in the "Notebooks" the man-made, impossible to verify the reality that refers to its impossibility to prove anything in the real world. Haeming calls this process – literature "aware of its own imprisonment in language":

> Through my exploration of these issues, I will suggest that Coetzee produces a literature which question its own status as art, a literature which questions its relation to the world, a literature which is acutely aware of its own imprisonment in language (and ideology) and, thus, a literature which problematizes these crucial notions of representation. (Haeming 173)

Haeming[89] believes, and I agree, that Coetzee delivers "messengers of authenticity" (175) as outright proof of (his) authenticity in the texts; however, since these messengers of authenticity remain man-made and most probably fake, he, in reality, inverts the whole process. He manages to prove the "edges" of texts in this manner. He offers examples that the image of "seemingly verifiable texts, including diaries, chronicles, exact sciences, physics and game theory" (175) trumps reality in the fight between fact and fiction, essentially proving Lejeune right in the first place. The reason this image of authenticity provides such closure and necessity to people is explained in Haeming – if a certain text lacks authenticity people have a tendency to hunt it down and invent quasi-truths for the purposes of proving a point – "Coetzee is preoccupied with the human compulsion to hunt down and, lacking success, enforce authenticity" (181). So, not only does he invert the whole process in his oeuvre, but he highlights it and with that in mind creates the necessary doubt to decipher between quasi-texts of authenticity and authentic texts.

> Travel writing, diaries and letters are recurring narrative modes in Coetzee's writing and are supported by the These narrative modes all demonstrate a clear inclination towards the sense of the factual to which they each allude. (176)

The repetitive usage of the text formats historically treated as testaments to the truth, and having Coetzee's style of questioning everything in mind, raises the issue as to why he requires indexical texts on some occasions and not others. *Simulating history* rather than reporting it seems the key to Coetzee's textual maneuvers in autobiographical accounts. The simulated texts – in the form of diaries, journals, travel writing, etc., usually get "proven" or corroborated by subjective confessions of the same period. In other words, "autobiographical accounts combine the verifiable side of historical experience with a seemingly truthful subjective perspective" (175).

In Anne Haeming's view, "as a result of the role played by the TRC, South African history has recently begun to be conceived on the basis of individual stories" (173).

> Coetzee repeatedly uses these text forms and consciously includes details that underline the indexical quality of the writing. This technique acts as a *simulation* of collecting historical data, reflecting the objectives of the TRC. However, with these parallels, Coetzee concurrently highlights the shortcomings of these authenticity-driven attempts and, I suggest, almost anticipated what was at stake in the work of the TRC. (175)

With that in mind, the whole and absolute truth in the collective of South Africans – means the acceptance of manifold truths acts as an equal representation of varied voices as opposed to one whole truth in confessions and self-narratives. Causer says something similar on the topic:

> At best, verifiability is a negative, legalistic standard, which would ensure only the absence of outright lies, rather than the presence of truth. Though in some cases it may be ruled out, even factual authority is not something that can be definitively established. The "whole truth" is no more available to autobiography than it is to biography. (Causer 249-250)

Coetzee continues with the present tense in the "Notebooks 1972-1975," perspective typical for quasi-authentic accounts, however, he switches to the past simple in interviews as it is more naturally suited. What stands out as quite different, though, is the publisher's annotation to the

[89] See Anne Haeming for more details on myth and history, as well as Coetzee's *Dusklands*, pp. 176-179.

original book that the *autre*-biography should be viewed as a "fictionalised memoir"[90] (Kusek, "Writing Oneself, Writing the Other" 109) because the real author J.M.C. is in fact not deceased. And if it were claimed to tell the truth then it would appear *Summertime* was published after the death of the author, like Julia mentions (*Summertime* 312). But, since Coetzee has not made the annotation, but the publisher, the *autre*-biography still applies in my account.

The beginning and ending in notebooks provide authenticity and almost a signature of "the real author" who signed off on the authority of the projects. Since Vincent uses no reference to "Coetzee papers," the reader is provided an insight into his real interests before the whole endeavor of interviewing takes place.

In a stroke of final control and say over the text, Coetzee also provides the ending in "his" own words, as if the character utterances had been somehow out of his control. He provides a circular structure in this manner and removes the control from Vincent in one fell swoop.

4.4.3.1 "Notebooks 1972-1975" – Introduction to *Summertime*

> So they come out, week after week, these tales from the borderlands, murders followed by bland denials. He reads the reports and feels soiled. So this is what he has come back to! Yet where in the world can one hide where one will not feel soiled?
>
> (Coetzee, "Notebooks 1972-1975" in *Summertime* 287)

Notebooks themselves incorporate numerous seemingly disconnected stories, except in terms of sensationalism and violence. Having them as introductions into John's life metaphorically bears a significance in an author who had previously always tried to escape feeling "soiled" (287), to the extent that he even left the country in *Youth*. Outrunning history and the legacy of apartheid appears to have failed, as a part of his identity, both the language, the scenery, and the activism seem to have brought him back to the blooded soil he feels soiled in. This time, however, John of *Summertime* looks at the inherited history of violence in the introduction to his last *autre*-biography, to his closing volume of public personae revelation, and unflinchingly discovers the violence inherited in apartheid he had been trying to escape in the hope it would be gone the next time he came calling.

If for no other reason, their sheer enumeration refracts the trauma and "capture how John was tied to South Africa by the haunting images of apartheid violence" (Birks 37). The point of gruesome stories from the press, verifiable in themselves since quoted from the *Sunday Times*, does not appear to show John as someone exempting himself from Africa, but rather they represent the deep trauma that had sent him on his way in the first place. Birks believes Coetzee had set out to jot down "an oblique depiction of state violence" rather than *only* pure condemnation of the regime and "shady complicity of many white liberals" (37). To my mind, the strategy on his part reflects a twofold way of thinking: either it reinforces useless doctrines of black Africans committing a crime or his connection to Africa and the termination of running away from his roots.

Unfairly to an extent, but Coetzee has been seen as perpetuating and reinforcing useless doctrines on black individuals at the time, which is something he was accused of in connection with *Disgrace* as well – perpetuating stereotypes. Reinforcing stories of crimes committed by black individuals to the point of no other narrative goes into the heart of his detractors' argument – namely, as a white South African author his privilege of being heard should be used for political agenda of bringing about peace and understanding between racially motivated fractions, not reporting on the crimes dispassionately from the sidelines. Unfairly and repetitively asked to take sides more

[90] "Unlike the other two it has not been instantly categorised under a 'non-fiction' label but has been described by the publisher (on the book's cover) as "fictionalised memoir – without much surprise since such a categorisation would imply that the subject in question, J.M. Coetzee, was truly deceased" ("Writing Oneself, Writing the Other" 109)

proactively, I believe he had already done exactly that but in a silent, petulant, and reserved way of his, for example by having both a white college professor commit rape in *Disgrace*, as well as an unnamed black group of gang rapists in a parallel on consent and self-delusion in *Disgrace*. We can debate whether that was enough of a mirrored reality and whether he could have done a parallel of one rape instead of the gang rape so as not to alienate the reader against black perpetrators, but I argue he was unreasonably attacked for not taking sides, because he did take a stand but quietly and in a book as is his nature.

The other viewpoint, that the notebooks demarcate the end of running from Africa's ugly side would entail John was both showing the reason he had left for London in *Youth*, and the life he had made for himself after return – his topics of interest and his maturity at facing, on the African soil, what he had been running away from up to that point – the legacy of apartheid he had inherited. The proof for the second viewpoint unfolds also in his references to potential white attackers in black masks:

> For instance, recording the brutalities that happened every day at the time, his "Notebooks 1972-75" open with an ample reference to the Sunday Times reporting the atrocious murdering of black refugees living in Botswana: "The killers appeared to be black, but one of the neighbors heard them speaking Afrikaans and was convinced they were white in blackface" (3). We may of course wonder what is journalistic fact and what is fictional embroidery in John's rendering of the newspaper article. Yet the impact is tremendous as the reader is unmistakeably drawn to start imagining the worst. (Birks 37)

The Botswana story (22 August 1972), epitomizes the horror of civil war and trumped-up human liberties in one page. Aside from that, seven more story ideas appear in the "Notebooks (1972-1975)" – the one about how John does his own manual labor as a form of taking responsibility (1 September 1972);[91] the one about a love affair between races, a white Afrikaner and a Vietnamese (16 April 1973); the one about Kurosawa's movie (2 September 1973); the one about ethics of translation (13 September 1973); the one about lack of lawfulness in South Africa (31 May 1975); the one about a successful school friend who gives him pause about his life (2 June 1975) and the irony of a prison in a white neighborhood (3 June 1975) (*Summertime* 287-297). Merely ten pages long, the introduction of this kind reveals a highly conscious individual, ironic and on the verge of precipice worrying about the politics of the country of origin and willing to take it upon himself to make changes.

Posed as data entries in a diary, whether truthful or poetic, Coetzee had gone to some lengths to choose the topics in question, assemble them in an order and have his say. With that in mind, I argue he painstakingly attempts to establish authenticity at the beginning so that personalized stories from multiple perspectives in interviews may corroborate the diary entries in the pages that follow this introduction.

Other "messengers of authenticity" that appear at the end of entries include italicized notes to self, created to appear as if topics for further conversation or review such as "*[t]o be expended on*" (290), "[t]o be explored" (291), "*[q]uestion*" (292),[92] etc. I believe they represent nothing more than other letters and entries – added proofs of authenticity. They speak of Coetzee's detail-oriented nature and narrative methodology to achieve one and the same goal he had set out at the beginning of *autre*-biography – whether mirroring reality could be enough to reflect actual reality to the point of faking authenticity? The question is up to the readers to decide. But in terms of technical execution, Coetzee flawlessly "proves" reality.

[91] It was uncommon, not to say highly improbable that any white South Afrikaner would fix his own car or do house related manual labor at the time.

[92] All appear italicized in the original.

4.4.3.2 "Notebooks: Undated fragments" – The End of *Summertime*

> Depressed by the booming space of the empty stadium, the players seem merely to be going through the motions. A ritual is dying out before their eyes, an authentic petit-bourgeois South African ritual. Its last devotees are gathered here today: sad old men like his father; dull, dutiful sons like himself.
>
> (Coetzee, "Notebooks: Undated fragments" in *Summertime* 470)

Much more emotional and conclusive to the whole trilogy, the concluding section of undated fragments and ideas for budding stories plays off of the idea of *Summertime* as the end of an era. In other interpretations, the title could have encompassed ideas on a mature artist whose first works were seeing the light of day in the heyday of his novel creation. These ending notebooks invite readers into the cliquey scenes of an uneasy, forced companionship between the runaway son and dying father.

If the first notebooks could be summarized as a testimony to South Africa still being "a wound within him" (*Youth* 241), then the second set of notebooks show John at a crossroads in his family saga between firmly continuing the path or an artist, a selfish path of self-discovery he was trudging on before returning to Africa, or to embrace as the dutiful son the obligations of caring for his dying father and finally atoning for his absence when his mother died. Almost as a reference to questions of belonging within his family as a continuation of issues of *Boyhood*, faced with the imminent death of his father, John also needs to survive the right of passage into *Summertime* as a long-winded metaphor of maturity and death. For who else bears the burden of death after parents die?

In *Doubling the Point*, Coetzee and Attwell discuss how some of his styles emanate Africa despite his attempts to create a neutral type of setting that could be anywhere. In that segment of the interviews, Coetzee notes a parallel between time, history, and the attempt at historicizing oneself in the place of origin that usually occurs in self-narratives:

> So I am not surprised that you detect in me a horror of chronicity South African style. But that horror is also a horror of death – and here we come to the second part of your either/or. Historicizing oneself is an exercise in locating one's significance, but is also a lesson, at the most immediate level, in insignificance. It is not just time as history that threatens to engulf one: it is time itself, time as death. (209)

So, the problem of belonging extends to numerous areas, it seeps into the stylistic choices of the writer despite best interests to avoid such events – "The problem of belonging is not only stylistic; it is also ethical, even ontological, which brings me to a final level of refracted trauma" (Attwell, "Trauma Refracted" 292). I argue the ending of *Summertime* and the chosen fragments in the "Notebooks" connect the idea of death (of his father) to the death of boyhood and running away from his African roots. It connects in a roundabout manner all three volumes as "a lesson" in historicizing oneself we encounter our "insignificance" as well as significance in the grand scheme of things (*Doubling the Point* 209). Death – imminent, looming in the future or close, provides the catalyst for just such calculations in the face of "time as death" (209).

Symmetrically organized, "Notebooks: undated fragments" consist of five fragments extending over fifteen pages. Fewer in numbers of stories, but longer in page numbers, they are reminiscent of short personal family episodes or sketches of moral dilemmas hunting the protagonist John.

The windows into his life with his father describe the solemn state of the two of them, with John assuming responsibility for the debilitated man and generally showing an attitude more apt for the age overall. They do not seem to follow a logical script of progression other than that they inevitably lead to sickness of his father and his potential, insinuated death towards the end. Faced

with the extensive care of the elderly man, he says he is going to have to step up, "abandon some of his personal projects and become a nurse" (*Summertime* 484), or run away again. If he opts to abandon his father, he will have to face the grim possibility of telling him he is not up to the challenge – "One or the other: there is no third way" (484).

From a character who used to say of himself he had no children because he was still a child, faced with the option he would no longer be able to make that claim, John shows massive growth in the *Summertime* of his life. Despite the fact this moral dilemma remains as a cliffhanger, the reader might believe in John after all. Having lost his ability to speak through a cancerous larynx, Coetzee speaks for him and his history in this *autre*-biography, bringing the rift between them to an ending just like he worked through his mother's death with Elizabeth Curren (*Age of Iron*).

4.4.4 Bringing the Story of a Life to an End – Concluding Remarks

> As regards your sense that you are and perhaps have for a while been writing an obituary of your own times and your own life, let me mention that I recently heard about a burgeoning field in terminal care: the dying person is assisted by a professionally trained counselor to record their reflections on their own life – achievements, regrets, reminiscences, the works – which are then tastefully packaged (CD, bound printout) and passed on to the surviving family. It has been shown, said the promoter of the concept, that having a chance to tell their story in this way enables patients to die more peacefully.
>
> (Coetzee, *Here and Now* 103)

Autre-biography partly demands historicizing oneself within the history of your family, your country, your origin, but also reinventing your personal history so it fits within the larger narrative of the jigsaw puzzle that you have created for yourself in repeating your life narratives. Coetzee mentions in conversations with Paul Auster that repositioning yourself feels also like you "have been writing an obituary of your own times and your own life" (103). *Summertime* brings the closure of realization that "having a chance to tell" one's story in one's own language "enables patients to die more peacefully" (103), or in other words, that storytelling in the powerful voice of I (even if it takes the willing form of *he*) brings closure because it provides authority and agency to the person to position him/herself in the history of their country, family and identity.

Similarities to the previous representations of John in *Boyhood* and *Youth* abound, but there are some notable differences in his illustration in the last volume of *autre*-biography as well. The image of John in *Summertime* as an "off-putting persona" (Kusek "Writing Oneself, Writing the Other" 110) continues. His lover Julia describes him as mechanical in their love-making, and so in sync only with the intellectual to the detriment of his "animal self" so she (or Coetzee) sees him as "Homo sapiens sapiens" (*Summertime* 328). "Notebooks 1972-1975" testify John still caters to similar tastes, he is worried about the news of African killer squads and lack of democracy (289), in an episode on language advice he was asked to provide it is claimed he still possesses his particular sense of morality because he does not charge his services to preserve authenticity (293) and asked if he has children he replies "I am a child" (295). The last sentence provides a vision that his self-representation has not evolved from *Youth* and that still his metafictional meanderings into the self, reveal self-criticism, self-deprecation, and ruthless presentation, but most painfully of his sexual performance (Kusek, Writing Oneself, Writing the Other" 110).

John's character receives some vindication though – his "blemished moral being" (Smuts 24) takes shape as somewhat recuperated. No longer are we as readers dealing with black and white, or mainly black character personifications, he is redeemed with his supposed caretaking of the elderly

father (*Summertime* 320),[93] one instance of earth-shattering love-making (342), and becoming a vegetarian (329). Everything John attempts, although much more measured in vocabulary and with a hint of positivity unlike the previous *autre*-biographies, still gets smeared one way or another. Coetzee's recognizable style peaks through for good measure.

The hint of criticism perseveres so if he takes care of his father, then it is mitigated by the description – "a widower and his celibate son, two incompetents, two of life's failures" (312). If he had a one redeeming sex experience in the eyes of a woman, then also she says it was "an interesting experience, but not earth-shaking" (313) because John lacks that quality. Even becoming a vegetarian is tarnished in the Coetzean style, outwardly he did it as an enterprise for writing, his intentions were not pure, claims Julia "I don't know how long he persisted in it, but I interpreted the vegetarian move as part of a larger project of self-reformation" (329). The change had come about as utilitarian, nothing pure or disinterested about it.

So prior to *Summertime*, *Boyhood* represented such a case of that in the "absence of outright lies" toed the line of biography rather than autobiographical discourse with elements of autofiction. But for the "he" and the dismal tone from the narrator to the protagonist, we could not have guessed anything amiss from a traditional autobiography.

As *Youth* approached its inevitable end, Coetzee continued to play out Causer's "factual authority," but with a twist – empty spaces emerged firstly as "absence of lies," which slowly turned into outright lies regarding the misrepresentation of his marriage. Finally, *Summertime* boasts the fewest facts but feels most truthful, readable, and defensive towards the quasi deceased protagonist because it reads like a novel. No longer tied down with facts, the text permeates the chosen facts instead of all the facts, as Coetzee believes that impossible. However, the insistence on data, dates, locations, and quasi proof of interviews after the quasi death of the author provide the feel of factual representation without it being actually true.

In the end*, Summertime* deals with the discovery of life and the self while life happens, along the way – "Neither autobiography nor fiction, it involves us in the troubling understanding of how explanations are constructed while life goes inexorably on" (Akins, "'Summertime' a meditation on self and otherness" 10). Most insightfully, Akins sees *Summertime* as the closest deletion of self on Coetzee's part for otherness, after having addressed in politics, culture, South Africa of his youth and early writing career; in family, community and sexual alliances (1). "[H]e has achieved the appearance of absolute otherness; the self at the center of the writing process has, it seems, disappeared" (1). I have tried to prove, oppositely to this reading, that the close monitoring of the text and stylistic choices on Coetzee's part prove his presence despite authorial attempts to have himself forcefully removed through the death of the author.

Summertime brings those ideas close to home by invoking the death of the author at the very beginning and asking for the dispersed surrogate voices, or ghosts of the author, to come to the defense of his text, voice, and ultimately his relevance in the world, his historical voice:

> By drawing attention to the fact that there are always multiple versions of a story, *Summertime* strips authority from each of the narrative voices. In consequence, the autobiographical narrative is negotiated within the text but also metaleptically across its boundaries. (Effe, "Coetzee's *Summertime*" 268)

At the end of the day, it is a novel-like structure with autobiographical elements on the author surrogacy effect and authority it borderlines, it crosses and reinvents. The real John M. Coetzee represents the first layer of authorship, who creates all characters, even the anti-protagonist John Coetzee of *Summertime*. This anti-protagonist, features in the second layer of assigned surrogacy as

[93] This, in fact, never happened, Coetzee never lived with his elderly father in Cape Town upon his return as he was married, and a father himself at the time. This storyline represents one of multiple avenues of "empty spaces" and even blatant lies in this more factionalized *autre*-biography.

the author of *Boyhood* and *Youth*, who unfortunately never got to finish the third volume (while we know that to be fictional as we are reading the said volume). The third layer of surrogate authorship appears in the form of Mr. Vincent who is the biographer transcribing and writing the interviews about John Coetzee, the protagonist. And, finally, the interviewees orally transmit stories and author them about the protagonist as well, all the while leaving the reader wondering who of them, if anyone, knew the real John M. Coetzee – the Nobel-prize winning successful author not his unsuccessful, pitiful protagonist counterpart (he himself created). The failing fictional counterpart depicts Coetzee's final authorial power – a fictional representation of himself remains truthful to readers because of his skill of representing the imagery or mirroring reality instead of the real. He demonstrates the ultimate authorship in leading the readers' view of him through the blurred boundaries of fact and fiction, remaining a god-like author while appearing to be writing another, the other, the perspective of John.

Agency and authority are brought about through the authority of individual narrators. Such destabilized truth value allows for the authority of the original author to be reinstated because their subjective perspectives remain unverifiable and the authority of the author gets restored through refractions of the self. *Summertime* restores the author and his authority by proving "[a]ll autobiography is storytelling" and all storytelling is biographical (*Doubling the Point* 391), so I would venture this volume represents Coetzee's ultimate proof to the theory and criticism on autobiographical discourse behind it.

V

Coetzee and His Selected Novels

V COETZEE AND HIS SELECTED NOVELS

5.1 Elizabeth Costello – Prophet, Writerly Alter Ego and Hideout in Plain Sight

> I am immensely uncomfortable with questions—like this one—that call upon me to *answer for* (in two senses) my novels, and my responses are often taken as evasive. To defend against that judgment I suppose I should, as a preliminary step, explain my difficulties, explain myself, spell out my position with regard to *answering for.* But my difficulty is precisely with the project of stating positions, taking positions.
>
> (Coetzee, *Doubling the Point* 205)

Just like his Australian period is dominated by *Slow Man*'s intriguing structure, the character of Elizabeth Costello[94] marks an entire period of Coetzee's creation, traversing from one novel to another. After Coetzee shed his role as the public intellectual and provided no personal opinions whatsoever to publicly important issues, she appeared as his most faithful shadow. As he refuses to answer for positions in writing and explain himself outside the work, the Costello woman "took it upon herself" to appear in lectures as a character instead of the academic Coetzee. From 1999 and her first attendance in *The Lives of Animals* to *Elizabeth Costello*'s protagonist (2003) and *Slow Man*'s character (2005), she acts as a ventriloquist for Coetzee's thoughts and a vessel for his private and public statements, because her character permits him to adopt and maintain a so-called middle position or "non-position" (Attwell (2006), Smuts (2012)).[95] Such a phenomenon indicates that the real author hides behind a character who advances Coetzee's (potential) opinions and agenda, all the while providing himself plausible deniability.

Despite the overall agreement with the concept of "ironic non-position," in recent theory, it is agreed that Coetzee does in his own way make a political protest because the role of the non-position became too constrictive and he does want to make a stand on political issues (Rose 181). The way he goes about this process, however, is the use of various other characters to state his position, not only Elizabeth Costello. Still, Costello mainly presents his views on controversial subjects, allowing Coetzee to remain at a non-position. The author, nevertheless, maintains a shadowy presence and boasts an undisclosed personal set of views because, if put on a spot, s/he may simply blame the character for contentious views. If characters are ascribed opinions, nevertheless, moral responsibility no longer lies with the narrator, and fiction can be blamed for any unpopular views taken. Apparently, in doing so, the position of dominant rivalries is completely avoided (Smuts 28). A surrogate character fills a public role, whereas the narrator remains in the shadows or hidden in the so-called negative spaces.

The development of the persona of Elizabeth Costello has taken years and numerous public appearances in which Coetzee suddenly presented fiction instead of a lecture, as he had been asked. She appears for the first time, and unexpectedly so, in Coetzee's address at Princeton on 15 and 16 October 1997. Surprisingly, instead of providing a first-person address, he appeared with lectures "The Philosophers and the Animals" and "The Poets and the Animals," which later on got reworked and published as *Lives of Animals* (1999) – an experimental novel. Sometimes also referred to as the "Tanner lectures" because they were given as part of the "Tanner Lecture on Human Values" at Princeton, they still represent the very same lectures later republished as Lessons 2 and 3 in *Elizabeth Costello*. Other lessons, aside from the Postscript, Lessons 7 and 8, and some subplots that represent original work for this novel, all *Elizabeth Costello* had previously been published and/or given as lectures throughout the years. By keeping authorial rights to the lectures, Coetzee was able to experiment with genres once again and have them reworked into a semi-cohesive novel. Despite, or

[94] If referring to the character, Elizabeth Costello is not italicized. Italics shall mark the novel of the same name.

[95] See Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*, pp. 192–96 for an account of Costello's lectures in context. It also provides contextualized explanations of the last two lessons, "Eros" and "At the Gate" as Coetzee's previous lessons. The "Postscript" is reviewed as completely original work.

maybe even because of its intriguing structure and function for the author, *Elizabeth Costello* as "a proper noun that quilts together a text or series of texts that have been rather difficult to characterize" (Rose 156) attracted completely new audiences to Coetzee, predominantly narratologists and philosophers as it is often viewed as the author's (Coetzee's) philosophical intellectual autobiography of ideas.

What I maintain with regards to this initial Australian period is that the original criticism had been too presumptive to apply the biographical reading to *autre*-biography and Coetzee's novels because of his experience as a critic, his true self could never have been found in just one series of works. It is in the combination of ideas and subjects he has been revoking for years that his true academic interests reside. Additionally, the sample of novels I have extrapolated – *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man* limit the scope of terms of in-depth analysis only because Elizabeth Costello reappears in *Slow Man* as a character, but does not feature in *Diary of a Bad Year* that Coetzee's methods were more readily visible. But in no ways do I argue that *Diary of a Bad Year* does not belong to the early Australian period or that Coetzee only applies his techniques to the chosen novels for this thesis. Quite oppositely, I would like to demonstrate that the subjects Coetzee feels passionate about reappearing in all his novels and autre-biography alike – that the transience of genre in the application of Coetzee's ideas is complete. Genre boundaries cease to exist only ideas and their application remain once Coetzee decides to make a point on metafiction, authorship, migration, the Other, etc. It is these ideas and concepts that hide his true self, not biographical readings of both *autre*-biography and even novels.

In part, a "campus novel, part lecture series, part epistolary response, part literary homage, the text(s) appear(s) to have so many parts that constituting a *whole* is remarkably difficult" (156). But, the novel's metafictional character can be described in that Coetzee, as always, plays with the idea of reality and fiction in that he uses as much of the information from the real world as possible so as to confuse the reader. In these lectures, Costello is supposedly invited to give a guest lecture to the fictional Appleton College in Massachusetts, just as Coetzee is invited to Princeton, and she makes the uncanny decision not to interpret her literature, but animal rights, just as Coetzee does. Costello's son is named John, also playing on the idea she must be based on his mother, and he sees himself as the son of academics on whose work he based his own research, etc. Such plays as well as intra-textual connotations require further development as Coetzee's real lessons are embedded in Costello's fictional ones.

Elizabeth Costello's perseverance through Coetzee's oeuvre launches critical debate into her eventual meaning, perhaps providing more autobiographical reading into the importance that she possesses, as I claim she, in the end, represents a societal role and not much more. Her importance might supersede that of Elizabeth Curren and Coetzee's other author/characters, for example, but she remains quite similar to John from *Scenes of Provincial Life* or JC, for instance, so she should not be equalized with J. M. Coetzee. Rather, her role of providing Coetzee distance and non-positions should be investigated, as well as her transformation through novels. She comes to symbolize Coetzee's eventual metamorphosis into the writer of philosophical and experimental novels contrived of lectures. *Elizabeth Costello* unlocks a whole new audience to Coetzee's work due to the experimentation and notoriety he gains from avoiding to talk about these novels and provide any interpretation for his work throughout decades.

Like the title quote explains, Coetzee to this day is "immensely uncomfortable with questions" that "call upon me to *answer for* (in two senses) my novels" (*Doubling the Point* 205). Known for his irritability at the lack of preparation on the part of journalists or evasive and even taciturn answers to their insistence, with Attwell he discusses this matter. Coetzee takes issue, or as he says has "difficulty" with "the project of stating positions, taking positions" (205) about his work, and especially about how to, in a way "explain myself, spell out my position with regard to *answering for*" (205, emphasis his), which is very often the point of the journalist's insolence or insistence from the interview – J. M. Coetzee's interpretation of his original intentions in a novel, so they can interpret whether he was successful or not.

In the same interview, he delivers the difference between novel writing and critical aspirations, relevant to my claim that the real Coetzee is more visible in the topics of his novels than *autre*-biography exclusively, because his autobiographical work might be staged for the audience. Even in interviews and lectures on academic subjects delivered on-demand, he hides behind Elizabeth Costello or metaphorical stories such as the one delivered for the occasion of the Nobel prize award acceptance – "He and His Man" channeling Daniel Dafoe. I reason the only place to comfortably find the real Coetzee is reflected in his novels and *autre*-biography together, as he is visible in the repetitions of subjects throughout his oeuvre.

What he juxtaposes with Attwell refers to the freedom of writing a novel, and the immense responsibility for the process with that of interviewing which he has no "particular respect for," but does have integrity (*Doubling the Point* 205).[96] The freedom to be oneself, the responsibility towards irresponsibility differentiates the writing of novels from that of criticism. The discourse of criticism, to Coetzee, provides a "tight" (246) room to be oneself, burdened by the decades of rules and philosophical traditions you must lean on as a critic and call to your aid in interpretation. He further clarifies how he feels a lack of weight and relevance in his words at interviews and academic lectures – "I have no sense of going anywhere for my answers. What I say here is continuous with the rest of the daily life of a writer-academic like myself. While I hope what I say has some integrity, I see no reason to have any particular respect for it" (205). Coetzee concludes that criticism resonates less with his inner being – "True or false, it is simply my utterance, continuous with me; whereas what I am doing when I am writing a novel either isn't me or is me in a deeper sense than the words I am now speaking are me" (205). Perhaps, Costello as a character is merely a translation of criticism into a novel because that represents the chosen language of the author.

The novel-writing on a subjective plain, as opposed to criticism and academic obligations, "becomes less a thing than a place where one goes every day for several hours a day for years on end" (205). The place of the novel's birth also becomes unrelated to the daily life of the author because "[o]ther forces, another dynamic, take over" (205) as the author tries to navigate the responsibility for giving justice to what s/he was trying to say in the first place. In Coetzee's view, inspiration takes place, something between the possession of a Muse and dipping into one's unconscious (205). Still, the freedom to be oneself he connects to novels, not essays or *autre*-biography:

> The *feel* of writing fiction is one of freedom, of irresponsibility, or better, of responsibility toward something that has not yet emerged, that lies somewhere at the end of the road. When I write criticism, on the other hand, I am always aware of a responsibility toward a goal that has been set for me not only by the argument, not only by the whole philosophical tradition into which I am implicitly inserting myself, but also by the rather tight discourse of criticism itself. (246)

Elizabeth Costello is born out of Coetzee's necessity to participate in the academic world, but also his utter dislike and disgust at the business side of things in academia. Lectures, classes, publications only to step through the door, and then if any fame is attained, the intellectual is pressed into becoming the public intellectual. As Attwell says, he "appreciated the audiences but he disliked the form, partly on principle" (*Life of Writing* 189). A pound of flesh is asked of all academics, but of novelists to boot – even more. Instead of a request for readings of his fiction, Coetzee was being forced into a political role of a public intellectual of which, willingly, he wanted no part. What he particularly disliked was the authority role he would have to assume if he were to perform the lecture on his own behalf, instead of as part of fiction. David Attwell testifies that the Costello stories "developed incrementally throughout the late 1990s as a solution to the problem Coetzee regularly

[96] See Coetzee's entire interview with Attwell in *Doubling the Point*, pp. 204-206 and p. 246, for more information on Coetzee's feel of irresponsibility and freedom to be himself while writing fictions. He compares that to the responsibility of writing criticism and explains to an extent Elizabeth Costello's character as refuge into fiction within academic lectures and criticism.

faced of being called upon to give academic lectures" (*Life of Writing* 189). His utter dislike towards the expectancy of the author to engage publically about private opinions aided in the Costello stories becoming a part of his academic career. Both audiences and universities supposedly disliked his adopted policy of prefacing his speeches by explaining "that instead of giving the lecture for which he had been invited, he was going to read a piece of fiction" for the reason he once explained "[b]efore reading 'The Humanities in Africa' at Stanford's Humanities Center" as he openly confirmed "he 'dislikes the conventional lecture form' with its 'pretensions to authority'" (189).

For an author who had spent his entire academic career trying to transfer authority on the "Other," write from the perspective of an other, logically, he discovered a way to continue his practice by creating a female perspective, frail and elderly as that "Other" alter ego. His entire fruitful period of creation Coetzee has shed authority and power and donned them on someone else – women, animals, slaves even, such role would have come as two steps back on his entire writerly attempts. Thus, the birth of Elizabeth Costello allows an imaginary elderly academic to disseminate "her" opinions from lecterns all over the world, ventriloquized by Coetzee in a game of simulacrum only he could have created – the author pretending his opinions (some of his opinions) are being said by a character. In essence, every time Coetzee reads a piece supposedly thought up by an imaginary Costello, he perpetuates the world of fiction and embodies a puppeteer welcoming everyone to the show and asking them to pretend it is real. In essence, he implements criticism from fiction into reality, he embodies literary theories and performs them on stage:

> Costello is depicted as a kind of perishable meat offering which is fed upon cruelly or delicately by omnivorous literary scholars and biographers, also by critics who call into question the legitimacy of a life in writing. She is a woman delivered over to others, her fate the fate of people who want to be writers — being yourself for other people. In her navy-blue outfit with white shoes and not-always-clean hair, she looks to her dismayed son like Daisy Duck. (Niekerk qtd. in Kannemeyer 550)[97]

Although the impulse to "externalize the threat […] by subjecting it to fictional representation" is typically Coetzeean, still the perseverance of Costello's character through works of various genres remains mystifying (Attwell, *Life of Writing* 79). His love of fiction, whose powers he is able to control, explains why he poses his views or even someone else's as his character's since that completely neutralizes responsibility. Coetzee in this manner "turned to the resources of fiction, or switched on the power of fiction, to regain control" (79). In spite of Costello's usual interpretation as "a form of puppetry – not a ventriloquist's doll, exactly, because she does not speak for him in any simple sense," Attwell clarifies her stand – she represents a "rather an uncanny puppet through whom Coetzee can mirror back to society its expectations of the writer as a public figure, and subject them to his own inscrutable, and occasionally unscrupulous, effects" (79-80). Thus a reflection and a vessel for his lesson are on being a public intellectual, or in other words –how not to rise to undesirable expectations from the public.

Marlene van Niekerk equals this state of non-position in his quasi novel to that of the quasi autobiographies that precede it and calls *Elizabeth Costello* an unusual novel as "a moving, indirect or pseudo-self portrait of J. M. Coetzee, a portrait of the artist as an old woman" (Qtd. in Kannemeyer 549). The same technique, but less obviously occurs in *autre*-biography as well. The voice in Coetzee's *autre*-biography resides in "the ambiguity that surrounds the moral being of the subject" (Smuts 34), and the moral of the original author is maintained by providing distance from the "subject" he was engaged in creating. Even though both these converge in Coetzee, by pretending John denominates someone distant, a "he" that the narrator no longer knows, the subject can be

[97] The original, unfortunately, is illegible to me because it features in an Afrikaans language newspaper, so I will be relying on Kannemeyer to represent Niekerk's positions on *Elizabeth Costello* as translated on pp. 549-550.

blamed for the past whereas the narrator remains at a non-position. The linguistic side merits commentary because of this in both *autre*-biography and selected novels.

Finally, Coetzee removes himself from Africa as both a physical place and a sense of place in his novels. He exits the postcolonial paradigm through the acts of the genre (Poyner, *J. M. Coetzee and the Paradox of Postcolonial Authorship* 13), but also the complete revolution of his work in the period. Aside from Costello in "her" own novel and subsequent appearance in *Slow Man* (2005), *The Lives of Animals* (1999), she perseveres in the lesser-known "As a Woman Grows Older" and short story *Lies* (2011). The mentioned short story features a woman last-named Costello, but perhaps it is a play on Coetzee's part as we cannot tell for sure whether it is actually the aging novelist. She as a character comes to stand for the shift in Coetzee's work towards academic novels and further experimentation with genre even further. In Hayes' words, the Australian period marks a move in Coetzee "from an overt concern with the politics of difference and the problem of inhabiting a radically intercultural society such as South Africa" towards the "moral debate over what it means to live in a cultural space dominated by the skeptical, rational, and egalitarian side of post-Enlightenment political culture" (*J. M. Coetzee and the Novel* 223) as illustrated in *Slow Man*'s diverging treatment of love and care, and immigration from that of *autre*-biography.

My first claim that novels equally, if not more specifically, speak to Coetzee's long-lasting interests in writing and his true writerly self, are investigated through the process of close reading of the Coetzee papers (from exerts available as part of the two biographies by Attwell and Kannemeyer, since the originals from the HRC have never been published for the general public).[98] Since Coetzee simultaneously wrote *Boyhood*, *Youth* and later on *Summertime* with *Disgrace*, *Slow Man,* and the character of Costello, it is reasonable to presume that his interests extrapolated equally to all simultaneous writing, but got reworked into them in varied manners. Following that, an analysis of Elizabeth Costello's lessons shall be provided with the aim of establishing a pattern of difference between "her" lessons as a character and true Coetzee's lessons that appear elsewhere in his novels and autobiographical discourse. The topics of interest depend on the content of the lessons themselves, but the highlights such as metafiction, authorship, immigration and otherness, self-referentiality, intra-textuality, elderly subjects as methods of disillusionment, authorial trickery, and purposeful misleading into an autobiographical agreement with his subject receive merited analyses.

The possible convergence and divergence from *autre*-biography and the reasons behind such choices merit separate inquiry. Despite the shared author, in Coetzee's own words – "We change from day to day, and we also stay the same. No *I,* no *you* is more fundamental than any other" (*Elizabeth Costello* 221, emphasis his), meaning that even if the works got created simultaneously, the author who wrote one was inevitably changed by the process and might not have been his same self as the one who wrote the next novel. With this in mind, the treatment of truth, fiction versus reality, and authority are analyzed with the view in mind that the author might have tried to prove another point, or might just as well have been an "Other" while writing it.

Not only does Coetzee create a specific world, but his style is also recognizable easily from one novel to another. In Julika Griem's words, "in the process of accompanying the protagonists on their frustrating quest, we are also taken on a tour through 'Coetzeeland', enabling us to nod and wink at many of the literary props and poetic devices, the modes and mannerisms substantiating the characteristic 'gestalt' of Coetzee's oeuvre," as always (87).[99] It is the gestalt of his specific authorial trickery and the companion of uniquely Coetzeean topics that create a world of combined fictional and non-fiction and a recognizable voice across his work.

[98] Barring a trip to Texas, these copies have not been published, their only availability resides within the library Herry Ransom Center. David Attwell researched the Papers himself, and Kannemeyer was provided with Coetzee's personal copies as their biography represented a collaboration.

[99] See Julika Griem for more on Coetzee's most common authorial homage towards the reader and especially how worlds of fictional an reality intervene.

5.1.2 Context and Background to the *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man*

> He is not ~~trying to restore~~ interested in restoring his body to functionality. On the contrary, he is tired of his body, looks forward to its final dissolution. There is nothing suicidal in that. He has a clear sense of being a soul with an undiminished soul-life.
>
> (Coetzee, Coetzee Papers, "Notes and Fragments," *Slow Man*, undated. Qtd. in *Life of Writing* 221)[100]

My claim that fiction represents a safer world for Coetzee to unveil his private self than *autre*-biography comes from the information from numerous notebooks he kept informally about his ideas, and then donated to Texas. A writer so wrapped up in maintaining his personal privacy and the mythology of his being reveals most about his true interests through his work and drafted notes, rather than carefully thought out writing about his public persona. From extensively reading about his creative process from authors who have had the privilege of meeting him and reading his notebooks publicly available in the States, we learn about Coetzee's life-long interests. To comprehend Coetzee's process of writing, and my initial premise that he unveils the self equally well in fiction, or even appears more trustworthy there, it is necessary to understand his creative process. As Attwell and Kannemeyer report in their respective biographies of Coetzee's authorial persona, we can extrapolate conclusions about his immediate and unencumbered style as opposed to published, carefully chosen work.

What these notebooks and manuscripts show is that Coetzee makes few changes regarding the flow of ideas, he rarely censors himself and, most importantly for his *autre*-biography and novels – if a topic proves interesting he transfers it into another book rather than develop it only once. The notebooks attest that Coetzee unexpectedly revises little; he more often removes entire sections or works on a single word for a while (*Life of Writing* 221). If a topic seems amiss in one piece of fiction, as he engages in writing several simultaneously – essays, speeches, and *autre*-biography at the same time as novels – he simply reworks the subject into another piece of writing it fits better subject-wise. David Attwell writes about Coetzee's process extensively and provides insights into the famous pocket notebooks. In his words, Coetzee has a tendency of carrying small notebooks while away from his desk and then transferring the instinctive ideas into manuscripts by hand (xix). Numerous versions follow; after which he types the final version into a computer.

The dated manuscripts of *Elizabeth Costello* and the *Dusklands*, amongst others, are available in Austin, Texas at the "Harry Ransom Center" (xix-xxii) as a gratitude to the USA for their welcome at a difficult time in his life when he once again had to leave – this time England. Inevitably with technological savviness, and after Coetzee's eventual relocation to Australia – the change of places demarcates a switch to computer printouts instead of personalized notebooks. Post-2002, all manuscripts including *Slow Man*, display less personal computer printouts as testimonies to Coetzee's process as opposed to "blue examination books lifted from the University of Cape Town" which he used to write in his manuscript draft versions (xx). Essentially, many ideas for his novels exist in these notebooks even if he never finished writing them in the period before 2002, for instance, *Elizabeth Costello* was published in 2003 and she made her first appearance in the notebooks as Coetzee worked on "As a Woman Grows Older" and *Lives of Animals*. The subject preoccupying Coetzee in this period refers to shame, as it appears in *Disgrace* as well and animal rights as testified by "Meat Country," *Elizabeth Costello,* and the *Tanner Lectures* turned *Animal Lives.* Not only do *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man* share a character, but also the importance of style and voice is discovered from these notebooks.

[100] David Attwell adds in the footnote to this excerpt from the "Coetzee Paper" that the notes appear in typescript, and then Coetzee amended them in pencil, see *J. M. Coetzee and the Life of Writing: Face to Face with Time*, pp. 221-238.

Elaborating on the procedure on *Slow Man*, Attwell emphasizes some common ground for style in all of Coetzee's writing, which are relevant to our initial claims. In Coetzee, the importance of the voice in the draft version takes precedence over the plot:

> The manuscript entries and revisions are meticulously dated, fortunately for those who wish to follow their development. The dating and self-archiving would have served the creative process, enabling the author to move blocks of text around and to recover discarded fragments. Coetzee works with the roughest of outlines. Typically, the earliest drafts are sketched quickly, provisionally, determinedly. Writing as often as he can, daily if possible, he is in search of his subject: the voice especially, embedded in a distinctive genre and a distinctive history. The plot is the least stable of the elements, always subserving the voice, and continually revised. (*Life of Writing* xx)

The voice varies, then, and gets redone until it speaks the truth. The plot is subject to changes consistently to the voice and gets reworked elsewhere if unfit for the novel it was intended. Coetzee's notebooks further testify that his fictions remain nameless until such a moment occurs that the name makes itself known from the process of writing. Coetzee "records possible titles throughout the drafting process, but decisions about them are postponed to the very end. He is content to call a work by a number, such as "Fiction No. 4" until such a time that "the right title makes itself known" (xx). Coetzee introduces all revisions by hand, and up to fourteen times (xx). With the procedure in mind, how does simultaneous work on manuscripts, random essays, letters, speeches, and fiction relate to the creation of Elizabeth Costello and *Slow Man*?

To set the scene a bit, the period of *Slow Man*'s birth also symbolizes a fruitful period in Coetzee's work, but no less than before since he published books almost every year for an extended period prior to moving to Australia in 2002. The difference between the previous years and this Australian period (*Elizabeth Costello*, *Slow Man,* and *Diary of a Bad Year*) was marked by the fact that by then he had already won two Booker awards. Despite not having received the Nobel prize for literature yet, the publication of *Disgrace* cemented his critical acclaim and he became a household name worldwide. Despite the heavy criticism *Disgrace* also brought on its author, and the controversy of his move to Australia which was insinuated to be his response to the heavy criticism, Coetzee was more than established as an (in)famous author before moving to his new homeland. Within a year of living in Australia, he won the Nobel prize (2003).

The appearance of Elizabeth Costello as a character can be traced back to 1998 and the Tanner Lectures at Princeton, which were collected and published as the semi-fictional – *The Lives of Animals* in 1999. *Boyhood*, which he had begun in 1987 as a memoir idea, sees the light of day in 1997 after being abandoned for a decade. Aside from working concurrently on several works, Coetzee also abandons papers and returns to them when the time comes. As something that speaks to his process, it should be noted here that between the initial draft of *Boyhood* and its publication (1987-1997)[101] and *The Lives of Animals* (1999), Coetzee publishes *Age of Iron* (1990), *Doubling the Point* (1988-1992), *The Master of Petersburg* (1994), *Disgrace* (1994-1998), *Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship* (1996) and *Stranger Shores* (1998-2001).

The conclusion remains that he is always involved simultaneously in at least two pieces of writing and works on something every day. He also tends to leave a book if the inspiration fails and revisit it at a later date (*Boyhood* was ten years in the making). Now, if we take note of the pattern of literary interests and methods of writing, let us elaborate on the Australian period. In 2003 Coetzee

[101] If more than one year is provided, the first one marks the beginning of the project and the second one the publication year. Naturally, between the beginning draft version and the published books, it is natural to claim that Coetzee works on several projects at once, and in the case of *Boyhood* if a decade arises between the beginning and publication it is reasonable he abandoned the project for a while and picked it up again. Anyway, the dates attest to massive literary outpour especially considering the fact that he held professorship post in these times as well and wrote around his classes, lectures and academic duties.

won the Nobel prize while he had already been living and working in Australia for a year, but *Disgrace* that contributed to it had been published while Coetzee was holding a professorship in South Africa, not Adelaide. Let us also not forget that Elizabeth Costello as an alter-ego mouthpiece for some of his views, despite her supposed "origin" as an Australian, was written while Coetzee was contemplating the move and applying for the visa, and not after the move Down Under.

The point I am trying to make is that Australia might have been Coetzee's intellectual country of mind creatively, but despite being called his Australian novels, some (such as the character of Costello) have originated while his locus still pointed to Africa. What Attwell confirms is that while *Elizabeth Costello* gets published in Australia (2003), also the *Slow Man* (2005), still Costello was "an active presence in this period" as a ghost "shuffling around Coetzee's house of fiction," (*Life of Writing* 219). For this reason, it is rational to presume that when Coetzee came to a standstill in the *Slow Man* he introduces Costello in chapter 13 as a metafictional device because she might have been on his mind from another novel. If in the same year, in 2004, at the beginning of the year, Costello makes an appearance in the essay "As a Woman Grows Older" and *Slow Man* is written into existence in December the same year, to Attwell's mind, she represents a narrative device introduced in a point of crisis:

> Even after the publication of *Elizabeth Castello* in 2003, she made an appearance in an uncollected story, 'As a Woman Grows Older', in the *New York Review of Books* of 15 January 2004. So it is not altogether surprising that a third of the way into *Slow Man* (what became chapter 13), Elizabeth Costello appears at the door of Paul Rayment's flat. The most concentrated period in the writing of *Slow Man* was between July and December 2004. We can make the following circumstantial inference: in this period, when Coetzee reached what had become a familiar moment of doubt with *Slow Man,* when he reached that typical point of crisis at which the metafictional impulse asserts itself, on this occasion he opened the door and let Elizabeth Costello in. (219)

The presence of Elizabeth Costello is often mentioned as a device that spares the famously private author from taking the position in the limelight. As a problem solver of sorts, all potentially dubious views get ascribed to her character, such as on meat-eating or academic lecture obligations, and since she can be interpreted twofold – as Coetzee or as a character – the author is free of blame. Any occasion that inspires a "familiar moment of doubt" or "typical point of crisis" for metafiction, seems to open "the door and let Elizabeth Costello in" (219). What her introduction into the otherwise realistic novel *Slow Man* provides is a shift in focus from "an affecting story about migration, belonging and senescence to a comedy about meaning itself, a Beckettian shift" (220), certainly, the focus turns on unveiling the author's trickery behind the mimetic process. Just like a magician, Coetzee highlights one element to hide another, and in this case, the power play between the character and the author hides the self-reflected in topic choice specific to *Slow Man*, rather than authorial trickery that he employs everywhere. Coetzee behaves similarly in other work, especially when he names characters in a play of his initials or the full name (JC, John from Elizabeth Costello, Signature of Lady Chandos is also EC like Costello, etc.).

It is relevant to my hypothesis about *autre*-biography and subsequent novels as a refashioning of numerous subjects that I should note here – the writing of the *Slow Man* in 2004 coincides with the beginning of *Summertime,* finally published in 2009. What all *autre*-biography personal writings have in common with the Australian novels, according to Alice Hall, can be the revision of established norms of the genre (Hall 116). Such is the style of narration in *Boyhood* (1997), *Youth* (2002), and *Summertime* (2009) that the third person confessions bend the boundaries of the genre by alluding to the fluid relationship between author and character. By extension, "[t]his same fluidity and reciprocity" apply to *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), *Slow Man* (2005), and *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007) because "the entry of the author figures into the text has a disorienting effect, implicating readers in

the kind of dizzying confusion suffered by the ageing figures that Coetzee represents" (Hall 116). Indeed, the technique allows the reader to feel like the aging character.

The Australian period, in a growing consensus, extends to the three mentioned novels, but not everyone agrees. In this so-called third stage of Coetzee's writing and a most mature one, the established author releases the tight grip on his oeuvre so "self-control is no longer desirable or necessary" (*Life of Writing* 214). Commonly, aside from *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man*, the *Diary of a Bad Year* belongs here, if for no other reason, then because it graphically depicts an experiment. It is written in three lines, with three distinct voices and the intention to be read either horizontally or vertically. I do believe it shares similar topics of interest as the two novels I have included, but since I am interested less with the graphic experimentation of Coetzee's writing, and more with the ontological and topic-related investigation into how the selected novels relate to *autre*-biography, Costello and Rayment's duo perfectly stand on their own as character-author power dynamic and I felt no need to include more work. Also, it is challenging to decide where to stop since the publication of the *Jesus* trilogy has taken place in the meanwhile (*The Childhood of Jesus* (2013), *The Schooldays of Jesus* (2016) and *The Death of Jesus* (2019)), all of which chronologically belong to the Australian period, but critics tend to separately discuss them.

Going back to the *Slow Man*, an anecdote speaks to its possible inspiration and the notebooks explain how its other versions, other than the published one – ended. From this, we learn about the intersection of topics and Coetzee's eventual change of mind towards the final version of *Slow Man* as we have it now. Coetzee's official biographer, J. C. Kannemeyer, mentions the anecdote that might have inspired *Slow Man* and especially the ideas on the decrepit body and growing old. While cycling in Chicago one day in 2002 on a "bitterly cold" day when "the lake was partly frozen, and the strong wind blew some of the water onto the road" his "bicycle skidded, and Coetzee fell and broke his collar-bone" (Kannemeyer 583). The accident rendered him dependent on other people and unable to use his left arm, says Kannemeyer in conclusion from emails and personal interviews with Coetzee and his close friends (583). The biographer assures that "[e]verything, including writing, happened more slowly than before and he could write letters only with one hand by computer," which extended into 2003 (583).

The biographer agrees with Attwell and connects the labor of *Slow Man* to the period between 13 July 2004, and its inevitable completion in December 2004, all twenty-five versions of the text (583). They disagree about the number of versions of the text, as Attwell mentions fourteen manuscripts (*Life of Writing* xx). Quite a speedy completion for the teacher of slow reading and writing, despite the changes in plot and delivery. Seemingly, the Jokićs' were originally envisioned as much more abusive towards the elderly Paul's offers of money, and the love story between Rayment and Marijana was going to be consummated, claims Attwell (220-221). In this way, the decrepit body would become center stage for an erotic life he ends up only dreaming about, and "pilfering from Rayment and abusing his hospitality more obviously" would take a different turn in the evaluation of the hospitality trope (221).

Be that as it may, Coetzee changed his mind and ended up molding Paul as a man "given a new body, new and inferior," which rendered him a new person (221). Perhaps some of the scratched versions of the text in Coetzee Papers on *Slow Man* find a new life elsewhere as Attwell suggests because "ideas and resources" he finds for one novel, may eventually be "taken up only in subsequent works, not necessarily in the novel on which he happens to be working" (221). To the best of my understanding, nevertheless, Paul "purposefully" inhabits a decrepit body with an intact spirit, and as such he should be valued – both signifier and signified to the message of the *Slow Man* Coetzee as originally intended.

And in terms of *Elizabeth Costello*, the novel and character too, develop ideas on the frail elderly body as an act of disillusionment, and her condition deteriorates in every work she features in authorial trickery to show her as a "real" person instead of a timeless character.[102] Although the story

[102] Dissilusionment as technique leads to a defense from the reader. Just like an overt attack of the protagonist in *autre*-biography leads to the reader defending the protagonist, at least in their mind, the sam happens if the character is depicted as elderly, frail or down on their luck like in *Elizabeth Costello*.

"When a Woman" saw the light of day a few months after *Elizabeth Costello that* depicted her as a sixty-six-year-old academic, Elizabeth is seventy-two in this story. Although her son is mentioned, and her name is never said, her identity can be concluded exactly because it is published in the same period – "Her condition has deteriorated; she is increasingly frail and unproductive" (Hall 100). Her intellectual struggles, single-handedly and unaided by her frail body inspire sympathetic imagination in the reader that Coetzee vehemently tries to stop with Costello's preaching qualities.

In the *Cambridge Companion to J. M. Coetzee*, Dominic Head sees the collaborative effect of *The Lives of Animals* and *Elizabeth Costello* as promotion of "the sympathetic capacity while simultaneously exposing its intellectual flaws" (83). Since reason is required to expose the limits of reason, we are led to conclude that "Costello's war with reason has to be conducted through a process of careful reasoning" so she is caught between "sympathy and reason" in both these quasi novels (83). Coetzee also posits himself at the limits of language by embodying a female, at the edge or genre by collective lectures into a single text and reworking it into a novel and at the edge of sympathetic imagination by embodying an other – and aging female which could be said to reside on the verge of good taste and ethical grounds. Even if it represents his "shrewd sense that the female narrator is a strategic way of positioning oneself on the margins of authoritative traditions" (Attwell, *Life of Writing* 142), the move he has never made before, arguably presents a moral dilemma of embodying an other.

In terms of the correlation between *Slow Man* and *Elizabeth Costello*, I might even come to view *Slow Man* as "another postscript to *Elizabeth Costello*" (Mulhall 251), just like some of the short stories act as her precursor. In *Slow Man*, "the colloquies between Rayment and Costello reveal an author searching for the substance of his life's work, as Susan Barton does, and wondering whether it lies in the intimate processes of authorship or in the creations that have their existence in the public domain" ("Coetzee's Estrangements" 235). The various characters developed and expressed in the Australian period and around it "embody aspects of their historical author's life" to purposefully provide autobiographical reading (Clarkson, *Countervoices* 79), whereas in the study of their development I conclude a correlation to the topics and narrative devices such as voice, and character that Coetzee speaks for his literary agenda rather than a single character.

As in dialogism generally collected in Coetzee, not I or you, but I and you dialogue occur on the plane of identity creation in fiction. For that reason, the critical response providing "a virtual acknowledgement that the artist is speaking through his fictional character" only testify to the "double movement of personal revelation and concealment" (Robinson 3) established long ago in Coetzee's creativity outside *Elizabeth Costello*. Just like Coetzee is channeling a woman, that woman is channeling like "a lacuna through the text" the philosophy of Hannah Arendt (Ryan 279), for instance, proving further that she acts as a character in Coetzee's oeuvre. Tentatively, I argue that Coetzee participates in a conversation with philosophers or even with himself by using Costello as an alter ego or a mouthpiece "wearing two faces" but also exposing her "as a fuzzy, somewhat wayward, thinker" (279), varied to himself in her interests and acquired philosophies.

5.1.3 *Elizabeth Costello* in 8 Lessons on Authorship

> 'It is a powerful book, I must tell our listeners. But do you find it easy, writing from the position of a man?' It is a routine question, opening the door to one of her routine paragraphs. To his surprise, she does not take the opening. 'Easy? No. If it were easy it wouldn't be worth doing. It is the otherness that is the challenge. Making up someone other than yourself. Making up a world for him to move in. Making up an Australia.'
>
> (Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* 12)

Inspiration for the aging character Elizabeth needs no far search – Elizabeth Curren often appears as a likely suspect if we take his love of names, repetition of names, and alliteration. In other critics, many suspect Vera and Gordimer played a role in the inspiration for the feminine focalizer of the strong woman he adopted. A move to put himself at the "assertively feminine position" as "a proxy for a self-staging that has little to do with gender" in Attwell's view (*Life of Writing* 142), it nevertheless proved challenging as "[i]t is the otherness that is the challenge" (*Elizabeth Costello* 12). I reason that Coetzee feels equally comfortable in a female voice as long as it mirrors his professorial authorial one of an author or aging academic – in the case of the feminine embodiment such as Lucy from *Disgrace*, he shows inaptitude to fully personify a woman in touch with her senses and fully embodied in her femininity. What is more, faced with true otherness, Coetzee remains silent and usually refrains from providing opinions in the name of such women. The women he does personify have personalities little to do with gender, but rather with aptitude – Elizabeth Current, Susan Barton, and Elizabeth Costello and might as well be identical to Paul Rayment, David Lurie, or John from *Youth* in their authorship, voice, interests, senesce and authorial aspirations or psychological dispositions.

In the chapter on Elizabeth Costello titled "Those who Can't, Teach" and as part of the broader research in the book *Pedagogy in the Novels of J. M. Coetzee; the Affect of Literature*, Aparna M. Tarc particularizes on *Elizabeth Costello* as an intra-textual conversation Coetzee establishes with himself. To her, "[a]s such, and as a lesson, the event of literature is pedagogical" (Tarc 54) and Costello in particular as a character often preaches, as opposed to Coetzee. In her teachings, the style of equaling humans to animals and slaughterhouses to holocaust falls on deaf ears because Costello attempts to fight rationality with irrationality but from the standpoint of the rational. Her style of lecturing emotionally to the intelligent conversation and philosophical colleagues is not rational but falls under the concept of "Affect delivering" meant to compel "readers to take in and consider what narrative is saying, not only in words but in feeling" (54). In Tarc's words, the expected point of her lectures should be along the lines of refusing to be silent, or "a woman 'thinking in dark times'" (65) echoing Hannah Arendt's philosophy, but the overall impression remains that of elderly academic reasoning with rational people about why they ought to become more emotional. In the process, her tragic flaw of aspiring to emotional responses through rationalizing ideas falls on deaf ears as incoherent.

The lessons are divided into eight and numbered as such.[103] Beginning from "Realism," "The Novel in Africa" all the way to two specific sections that originate from *Lives of Animals* and the Tanner Lectures that represent only sections numbered with one and two. They are named "ONE: The Philosophers and the Animals" in which I note the interruption and Coetzee's voice, at least in the content organization as numbers metafictionally point to their difference in comparison to other lessons. Following these, the novel introduces Lesson 4 about "The Lives of Animals" called – "TWO: The Poets and the Animals." To end, the last four lessons – "The Humanities in Africa," "The Problem of Evil," "Eros," and "At the Gate" come in arrow, only to be interrupted by a Postscript that does not cohesively belong to the previous lessons, but sports a style of its own. Coetzee reemerges in the "Postscript: Letter of Elizabeth, Lady Chandos" as Costello could not have written it based on the content, even with all the benefit of the doubt, she is revealed as the character there.

Essentially, the aging Elizabeth Costello, who has won some notoriety in the 1960s for her first and most famous novel *The House on Eccles Street* discloses her opinions on various subjects she lectures on, but also her inadequacies as a mother, sister, wife, and writer accumulated throughout the years. Many mirroring situations are purposefully juxtaposed about these two authors: Coetzee who appropriated Daniel Defoe's novel and turned it into *Foe* stands outside the texts as a reminder while Costello is developed as an author who used James Joyce's *Ulysses* and more specifically the character Molly Bloom to rework the novel from a female perspective. As she travels to deliver these supposed lectures, the reader is invited to trail her along all the while learning about her views on

[103] See Canepari-Labib's *Old Myths – Modern Empires: Power, Language and Identity in J. M. Coetzee's Work*, pp. 50-54 for more information on each lesson in *Elizabeth Costello*.

complex issues such as realism, animal rights, Kafka and the absurd, and other often graphic depictions and offensive comparisons, the most famous of which the parallel she draws about the slaughter of Jews and that of animals in her promotion of vegetarianism.

The lack of charisma in Costello is almost set up by Coetzee, as a disillusionment technique. As a lecturer she presents quite conflicting attitudes, she is elderly, a woman, and exclusively cerebral about topics except for vegetarianism. With regards to vegetarianism and animal rights, Costello expects everyone's sympathy and emotional response versus intellectual sympathy. So her "self reflexivity and shifting consciousness mark the traits of the critical mindset that are the linchpin of the intellectual" (Poyner, *J. M. Coetzee and the Paradox* 173), but she lacks inspirational prowess. Despite everything given to her, she misses the flair for seduction, her audience remains unconvinced and uninspired most of the time but shocked and appalled by some of her comparisons.

Costello's lessons preach instead of teaching, and they are purposefully called lessons as a substitute for lectures which is what they initially were when Coetzee presented them. Essentially, the eight lessons "differ from most novels in having no clear plot or intrigue" (Kannemeyer 546), they appear random except that the subplots act as the glue connecting them. Costello travels either alone or accompanied by her son, and it is these side characters and subplots like a discussion with his son John's wife Norma on vegetarianism that make up the body of subplots the lectures are otherwise missing. The feel of the whole novel is philosophical and instructive, although Elizabeth spends the entire novel "feeling misunderstood by her inability to achieve a certain level of intimacy with her son and her sister, or a measure of emotional rapport with fellow-writers" as testimonies of "a spiritual emptiness in herself" (546). This emptiness sometimes transfers into the theory that she lacks substance, that she merely stands for the author's alter-ego without embodiment.

Oftentimes, the character of Elizabeth Costello is also called Socratic in nature, as it "serves Coetzee, just as Plato serves Socrates as *his* midwife" (Tarc 54). Costello performs pedagogical deliveries that only wield an "internal drama" (54) because of the failure to drive the message through to her audience. In literature, pedagogy is achieved through acting, through the "narrative's aesthetic and formal delivery" (54) together in a performance in a classroom. Such "[a]ffect delivering Coetzee's novel compels readers" to consider in light of not only words but in feeling (54) because lectures require performance and delivery. Tarc argues that "the format, essay, polemic, or memoir delivering the story *is* the story," (54) or that the message is the medium and Attridge agrees by calling it literature in the event because its very form as a lecture is the point of the whole performance (*Ethics of Reading* 9).

Since the reliable narrator is missing, the plot is relatively irrelevant and merely functional to connect the story and since all authority is shunned by the real author (Coetzee), all the reader may rely on is the message, the performance, the form of delivery (Tarc 54). What is especially poignant in these stories refers to their pedagogical nature that specifically comes out in comparison to other Coetzee's work. In Aparna Tarc's words, *Elizabeth Costello* both as a novel and person comes to symbolize intra-textual conversations in Coetzee's work. As opposed to intertextuality with Daniel Defoe, or other famous writers, her omnipresence through various works of fiction comes to stand for conversations between Coetzee himself and his characters, as well as between other novels.

> Each of Costello's lessons stands alone. Still, to gain deeper meaning of what she means requires reading the stories together and against Coetzee's other work. The themes of the animal, human cruelty, salvation, and sympathy raised in *Lives of Animals*, for example, are redressed in "The Problem of Evil" and *Disgrace*. Her ideas on humanizing and humanist education reach back to *Age of Iron, Foe*, and even perhaps *Heart of the Country*. This intra-textual dialogue Costello holds with Coetzee's writing mirrors the intertextuality distinctive of his layered prose. (54)

The reason Coetzee resorts to intra-textuality hinges on the fact that even in the best of times conveying harder contents of human interaction such as "social hatred, sexual violence, torture, and

abuse" (Tarc 54) requires a lot of accumulated authority. Not only would anyone find such lessons difficult to deliver, but without the academic flair put to them, such as abstract thinking and elaborate metaphors, they would prove too difficult for the reader as well as for the writer. If the message is the medium in postmodernism, then "readings inside and between Coetzee's text" allow us to documents "the author's inner struggle to address these hard themes" (54), and his soliton in the form of a non-position.

The lessons outwardly appear philosophical but between the lines, deal with historical guilt, writers' freedom burdened with that quilt, loss of faith in language and one's purpose and others (Attwell, *Life of Writing* 190). So, in discussing the lessons, in particular, I will delve into their usual interpretation as well as what I consider to be the lesson beneath the lesson. Usually, this refers to common literary devices and opinions Coetzee bestows upon Costello, which reflect the lesson on writing and the common subjects he usually develops in all his work such as relegation of authority, metafiction, and anti-illusionism.

Coetzee's lecture on realism delivered at Bennington College in 1996 became Lesson 1 in *Elizabeth Costello*. It was also previously published in the journal *Salmagundi* (Kannemeyer 545-546). Mostly, criticism focuses on the story from Kafka about an ape trying to mimic human speech as a metaphor for realism. But the real lesson behind the lecture includes a casual class on metafiction as well as its implementation. The beginning of *Elizabeth Costello* provides the discourse "more aggressively disenchanting and disappointing" (Murphet, "Coetzee and Late Style" 87) than even the term metafiction anticipates in its common usage. The initial description of Costello dares the reader to find anything positive about her, anything to grab hold of as the novel's protagonist. Any heroic trait, like in Paul Rayment, is hidden.

In an unmitigated anti-illusionism, Coetzee describes Costello through an unknown focalizer and her son John. "After the long flight, she is looking her age" and "[h]er hair has a greasy, lifeless look," and to her son, she performs "as a seal, an old, tired circus seal" (*Elizabeth Costello* 3). With this jab, naturally, Coetzee takes a stab at the expectancy of writers of fiction to join the show, the circus that the academic world demands of public intellectuals. With no redeeming features in a sigh, Costello can only rise from the depths of postmodernism he shoves her to at the beginning of the novel. The purpose of this authorial trick reminds the reader of the deprecation of John in autre-biography which is often a preemptive strike neutralizing potential attack on the part of the reader. Here too, Coetzee inspires sympathy in the reader with such cruel commentary and preemptively stops the reader from disliking the protagonist who preaches boring subjects.

Then metafiction appears out of nowhere immediately on page 2, as Elizabeth is mentioned as frail again out of nowhere the sentence jumps out – "We skip." (2). This opens up an entire world of meanings. First of all, who is this "we" as opposed to "they," both the narrator and focalizer at this point is unclear? Secondly, the issue of whether Coetzee is directly addressing the reader emerges, or whether John her son enters the role of narrator and character at will. Because after this phrase "We skip" appears "They have reached Williamstown…" (2), as the next line, which looks as if it had been pronounced by John. It is made so as the narrator directly addresses the reader and also announces the technique – "At six thirty he knocks. She is ready, waiting, full of doubts but prepared to face the foe," followed by "the blue costume, the greasy hair, are details, signs of a moderate realism. Supply the particulars, allow the significations to emerge of themselves. A procedure pioneered by Daniel Defoe" (4). Regular depictions of the room, followed by a lesson in literature turn the fictional world into metafictional conversations with the focalizer, whoever it might be at the time.

The metafictional lesson being performed for the reader in this novel inspires twofold interpretations – one interrupts the action and the other provides explanations of literary techniques. For instance, in the example, the first line exemplifies the interruption, and the rest of the paragraph speaks to the metafictional conversation with the reader on authorial trickery:

> The presentation scene itself we skip. It is not a good idea to interrupt the narrative too often, since storytelling works by lulling the reader or listener into a dreamlike state in which the time and space of the real world fade away, superseded by the time and space of the fiction. Breaking into the dream draws attention to the constructedness of the story, and plays havoc with the realist illusion. However, unless certain scenes are skipped over we will be here all afternoon. The skips are not part of the text, they are part of the performance. (*Elizabeth Costello* 16)

Such meta conversations become procedurally repeated to no end and they denote a lesson in the implementation of metafictional conversations embedded within the narrative. The transition between fiction and metafiction remains just slightly apparent unless the reader looks for it. Metafictional interjections may include longer lessons and intertextuality or just interrupt the plot as offhand comments. The fake spontaneous comments promote slow reading on the part of the reader, and they are present throughout the novel in examples such as: "[t]here is a scene in the restaurant, mainly dialogue, which we will skip" (7), or "Elizabeth Costello proceeds to reflect on the transience of fame. We skip ahead" (17), and "[w]e skip ahead again, a skip this time in the text rather than in the performance" (24). Julian Murphet takes note of the same phenomenon and warns readers to pay special attention to the implementation of casual metafiction in *Elizabeth Costello* as a lesson on Coetzee's late style ("Coetzee and Late Style" 87), as his metafiction prior to the period was much subtler in nature.

In the final stages of Lesson 1, aside from the testimony about public lectures, hotel experience, the academic dinner and loathed Q&A section, the author Costello delivers Coetzee's lesson on what writers/academics most hate about interviewing – the expectancy of playing the role of the public intellectual. Being typecast into a certain role is equally abhorrent to Coetzee, which he extrapolates in her character as an author attempting to avoid the expectancy. In Costello's case, for instance, the journalist avoids her answers attempting, somewhat typically as she fishes for the answer she needs, to represent Costello as more of a staunch feminist than the author herself declares. The journalist asks variations to the question about Molly Bloom, whom Costello reworked from Joyce, trying to produce a women issue out of the character. She asks, "If you see Molly – Joyce's Molly – as a prisoner in the house on Eccles Street, do you see women in general as prisoners of marriage and domesticity?" (*Elizabeth Costello* 13). On the other hand, Coetzee's Costello is a lesson on avoidance:

> 'You can't mean women today. But yes, to an extent Molly is a prisoner of marriage, the kind of marriage that was on offer in Ireland in 1904. Her husband Leopold is a prisoner too. If she is shut into the conjugal home, he is shut out. So we have Odysseus trying to get in and Penelope trying to get out. That is the comedy, the comic myth, which Joyce and I in our different ways were paying our respects to.' (13)

The whole episode ends in side commentary that we cannot "go on parasitizing the classics forever" (14) as Costello jokingly channels Coetzee to the readers who presumably know about all Coetzee's revisions of the classics. This metafictional objection signals to the interviewer that something new must be created even by her, the questions spewed about the novel and Molly Bloom cannot go on forever in the same format. The act of double meaning always works multi-directionally.

Coetzee publishes the adaptation of the lecture "The Novel in Africa" as Lesson 2 of *Elizabeth Costello*. It was initially delivered at the Centro Historico in Mexico in March 1998, at the Writers' Festival in Sydney in May 2000, as well as at the University of California in Berkeley at the Townsend Center for the Humanities in 1998[104] (Kannemeyer 545-546). These debates about animals "are used

[104] In the same year, Coetzee presented the lecture innumerous places and "The Lives of Animals" made up the text of Coetzee's Tanner Lectures at Princeton in 1998, and were also published in book form. See Kannemeyer, pp. 545-546.

as touchstones for debates about cruelty in general" (Attwell, *Life of Writing* 195) – their main message refers to the useless nature of cruelty towards what people consider less intelligent than themselves. Lack of reason and intelligence in common sense, for some inexplicable reason, justify people's moral high ground and imminent cruelty. The method chosen to drive this message home mainly represents shocking the audience and making unlikely similes such as when Costello scandalizes everyone by claiming that the treatment of cattle in the stockyards of Chicago provided a model for the planners of the European gas chambers (195).

On two planes, Coetzee converses with the reader – one in the written down words of Elizabeth Costello, and the other demands his/her imagination outside the text and intra-textuality with other novels. For instance, Costello produces ideas on African novelists such as that s/he is expected to play the role of the "Other," of the exotic for Europeans and such acting out of one's identity prevents them from creating original work – "African novelists may write about Africa, about African experiences, but they seem to me to be glancing over their shoulder all the time they write, at the foreigners who will read them" (*Elizabeth Costello* 51). The African novelist Emmanuel Egudu, another character, echoes a similar stand that "to the West we Africans are all exotic, when we are not simply savage. That is our fate" (47). Instead of writing embodied novels that speak with their topic to a predominantly African audience, in the tone of voice, body, melody, and language of their own, the African novelists "have accepted the role of interpreter, interpreting Africa to their readers" (51).

> 'Yet how can you explore a world in all its depth if at the same time you are having to explain it to outsiders? It is like a scientist trying to give full, creative attention to his investigations while at the same time explaining what he is doing to a class of ignorant students. It is too much for one person, it can't be done, not at the deepest level. That, it seems to me, is the root of your problem. Having to perform your Africanness at the same time as you write.' (51)

This idea is not entirely innovative, since Coetzee has presented before in his *autre*-biography the notion that the English language cannot speak the African condition. In *Youth* and real life, he uses Afrikaans instead of English for concepts that signify untranslatable ideas. The performance being asked of African novelists also portrays similarities to writers of fiction demanded to perform lectures about their fiction, which were never meant to be read out, to earn a living. This brings us to the second point, Coetzee's common referentiality to the world outside one text relies on a clever reader who would be a connoisseur of all his work to make the connection. On the surface referring to African novels, Costello claims that a writer's work requests public appearances they had not applied for

> Part of his living he earns by writing books that are published and read and reviewed and talked about and judged, for the most part, by foreigners. The rest of his living he earns from spin-offs of his writing. He reviews books by other writers, for example, in the press of Europe and America. He teaches in colleges in America, telling the youth of the New World about the exotic subject on which he is an expert in the same way that an elephant is an expert on elephants: the African novel. He addresses conferences; he sails on cruise ships. (42)

But such trips take a toll on the work itself as it turns into something else, a novel becomes "not just a voice but a performance: a living actor performing the text for you" (50). Metaphorically, the discussion invokes images of Coetzee refusing to partake in the acting out of his writing as a public intellectual. Costello pronounces that the "novel was never intended to be the script of a performance. From the beginning, the novel has made a virtue of not depending on being performed. You can't have both live performance and cheap, handy distribution" (50). The writer may not keep their integrity of s/he obsesses over "all these strangers to please, month after month – publishers,

readers, critics, students, all of them armed not only with their own ideas about what writing is or should be, what the novel is or should be, what Africa is or should be but also about what being pleased is or should be?" (*Elizabeth Costello* 43).

Furthermore, the Tanner Lectures at Princeton from 1997 and 1998 are reproduced as "The Lives of Animals" in *Elizabeth Costello*, and those become not only Lesson 3 but also Lesson 4 of the novel. Lesson 3 bears the subtitle "One: The Philosophers and the Animals" and it offers the subplot of Elizabeth's dynamic with her daughter-in-law over vegetarianism. Before reading these two lectures at Stanford, thus, long before they formed a part of *Lives of Animals* or *Elizabeth Costello*, Coetzee was said to have announced his dislike for conventional lectures "with its pretentions to authority" (Attwell, *Life of Writing* 189), but I might add it is rather because of its claim of authority attached to the invitation for the academic to give a lecture, and it is because of that I note a major difference in Costello. Although she is known to vocalize her dislike of the academic circles, her trips remain impressive in numbers and she usually accepts invitations, unlike Coetzee.

The palpable problem between Norma and Elizabeth makes itself known in the issue of sentimentality in Elizabeth's books about animals, which Norma as a philosopher of the mind finds too simplistic and incongruent or as she says – sentimental (*Elizabeth Costello* 61). Costello mentions the heart several times in discussing animals but avoids one issue in particular – "If principles are what you want to take away from this talk, I would have to respond, open your heart and listen to what your heart says" (82). In vaguely referring to the heart, she never enunciates the problem of reason – she is paradoxically attempting to reason with the audience about how they should open their hearts and avoid reason. The supposed author, in the end, also refuses to isolate a single issue in animal rights she would like to back, such as declining to eat them, hold them captive or perform experiments on them, but much like Coetzee, Costello wishes to stay non-committing. "I was hoping not to have to enunciate principles" (82), she says. Her extremist views emulated in the comparison of German's "willful ignorance" (64) about the death camps to people's slaughter of animals for food are delivered in a polarizing speech she might not have intended in the first place, but could have guessed would happen.

Not only do dietary habits get discussed in different countries and religions in this lesson, but also some of Coetzee's preoccupations from his previous work are addressed again such as ideas from "Meat Country." Both *Elizabeth Costello* and the essay "Meat Country" propose the matter of disgust in eating certain animals as the key towards whether they get slaughtered or not – whether an animal is considered clean or not (87). Since Norma is the one who polarizes this opinion instead of Costello, I argue Elizabeth Costello as a character shares Coetzee's views and vocalizes them, but so do other characters as well. Elizabeth Costello as a novel is rather his ventriloquist dream, not merely the character whose all opinions cannot possibly match those of Costello. Compare the two excerpts:

> 'The ban on meat that you get in vegetarianism is only an extreme form of dietary ban,' Norma presses on; 'and a dietary ban is a quick, simple way for an elite group to define itself. Other people's table habits are unclean, we can't eat or drink with them.' (87)

And the second reference stands for an essay written under Coetzee's name and before *Elizabeth Costello*. He extrapolates similar ideas although it appears Costello maintains a preaching moral high ground, or in other words, the styles differ whereas opinions do not:

> In our time and place, tales like these evoke moral disapproval, even in deeply carnivorous circles. The death of the bear, the deaths of the flamingos, disturb us as the death of the beef ox does not. Why? Because there are so many more oxen than bears on earth, we say. Because we eat so much more of the carcass of the ox than of the carcass of the flamingo (do flamingos have carcasses or mere bodies?). The gourmet's nonchalant wastefulness, the disproportion

> between his pleasures and the slaughter that must take place to satisfy them, affront our sense of what is right. ("Meat country" 45)

While ideas remain quite similar, Coetzee mentions also – "Is it fair to remind ourselves of the Nazis, who divided humankind into two species, those whose deaths mattered more and those whose deaths mattered less?" (45), echoing Costello, but in a much more subdued language. The two paragraphs prove our initial point that the topic and subjects the feels strongly about get reworked in multiple works of fiction or essays until he is satisfied with the results. And since he simultaneously writes several novels, their mutual intra-textuality allows us to differentiate between the character and the author's view – in this case, Coetzee's view provides a more serene subdued language that that of Costello.

In *Elizabeth Costello*, the character of Norma obviously acts as a destabilizer to the conversation and further inspires the topic development. In fact, characters such as she all speak for Coetzee because he also expresses himself through them emphasizing his awareness of the opposing views. Disparaging commentary from other characters such as her son John likewise aid the plot – John points to a major flaw in her arguments which is that for someone who tries to avoid the age of reason and reasoning exclusively, how come she cannot "be an ordinary old woman living an ordinary old woman's life? If she wants to open her heart to animals, why can't she stay home and open it to her cats?" (*Elizabeth Costello* 83). Quite a legitimate question about someone who preaches love of animals but spends not time with the actual animals and rather lectures about their conditions.

In spite of some opinions that feel closer to Coetzee than Costello such as that "all this discussion of consciousness and whether animals have it is just a smokescreen. At bottom we protect our own kind" (87), still, the language of most "her" lectures stand for extreme phrasing someone like Coetzee would never have been caught making public. His agreement in principle exudes from sentences like "[t]humbs up to human babies, thumbs down to veal calves" (87), but it epitomizes vocalization of partial arguments, just like that of any characters, no more or less in Costello. It is in the combination of all their opinions that Coetzee can be located.

Lesson 4 bears the title "Two: The Poets and the Animals" and relates more to the poets' role in the treatment of animals and public responsibility. The argument goes that poets depict animals in poems and share responsibility for their eventual treatment as non-human and reason-free in the public. Even as Costello is "tired of clever talk about animals" (103), Coetzee raises the issue of the practicability of her emotional demands as the discrepancy between wishes and reality makes no difference to the animals. In other words, "we may certainly wish for there to be community with animals, but that is not the same thing as living in community with them. It is just a piece of prelapsarian wistfulness" (110). In the end, the issue that people like to eat meat is raised, as actions lack no words, so John wonders what she is trying to accomplish:

> 'Do you really believe, Mother, that poetry classes are going to close down the slaughterhouses?'
> 'No.' 'Then why do it? You said you were tired of clever talk about animals, proving by syllogism that they do or do not have souls. But isn't poetry just another kind of clever talk: admiring the muscles of the big cats in verse? Wasn't your point about talk that it changes nothing? It seems to me the level of behaviour you want to change is too elementary, too elemental, to be reached by talk.' (103)

Costello projects quilt over animal treatment of the whole human race, which she carries on her shoulders. The human race is cursed for everything they have done – "embracing the status of man has entailed slaughtering and enslaving a race of divine or else divinely created beings and bringing down on ourselves a curse thereby" (94). Her lectures perpetuate that guilt on behalf of

humanity to the audience. But as John comforts her at the end of the lesson – "There, there. It will soon be over" (*Elizabeth Costello* 115), alluding to a solution, or more likely, to her eventual death.

The problem with poetic language in *Elizabeth Costello* and this lesson, in particular, refers, and self-refers by Coetzee, to language comparisons purposefully on the verge of "blasphemy" (94). All created to shock, they are reminiscent of confessions – "Man is made in the likeness of God but God does not have the likeness of man. If Jews were treated like cattle, it does not follow that cattle are treated like Jews. The inversion insults the memory of the dead. It also trades on the horrors of the camps in a cheap way" (94). The next image calls up slavery in comparison to animals and even equals it – "a philosopher who says that the distinction between human and non-human depends on whether you have a white or a black skin, and a philosopher who says that the distinction between human and non-human depends on whether or not you know the difference between a subject and a predicate, are more alike than they are unlike" (111). Some logic may be ascribed to them, but mostly their effect remains shocking, not instructive throughout the lesson.

Lesson 5 titled "The Humanities in Africa," originally given at the Carl Friedrich von Siemens Stiftung in Munich in 2001 was also "delivered as a lecture at Stanford University and in Canberra, and afterward collected in *The Best Australian Stories* 2002 (edited by Peter Craven)" (Kannemeyer 545-546). The lesson offers explanations on the state of affairs of the humanities in Africa. An unrelated lesson from that of the title stands out – the one on Coetzee and Costello. The real lesson in Elizabeth's story about posing naked imparts the issue of writing something down versus re-counting it vocally. Writing something down embodies the story, whereas saying it out loud may invoke a reaction on the part of the interlocutor that is visible, and the speaker is allowed time to recover and further explain versus the finality of writing that may not be changed. The story she is unable to write communicates a departure between herself and Coetzee who spoke on the body with complete ease and lack of shame in *Youth*, for instance. Elizabeth, "[t]hrough the medium of an imaginary, unwritten letter to her sister Blanche" describes "several scenes in which she posed naked and then performed sexual favours for her mother's ageing artist friend, Mr. Phillips, as he lay dying in his hospital bed" (Hall 95).

The episodes on how she comes back to the nursing home and poses nude as sympathy for the aging ladies' man offers an honest portrayal of, what she believes, an act of caritas that mirrors the word used in *Slow Man* as well. Elizabeth "crosses back to the bed, sits down side-on where he can get a good eyeful, and resumes the pose of the painting. *A treat*, she thinks: *let's give the old boy a treat, let's brighten up his Saturday*" (*Elizabeth Costello* 153, emphasis his). Such "episodes challenge taboos about the representation of ageing and sexuality, but also continue to puzzle, even plague Elizabeth herself for years later with their sheer unrepresentability" (Hall 95). Spending time with him, in her forties, as an act of sympathy for a cancer patient, Coetzee depicts as mercy but also as a challenge of public views on the elderly. The language of the whole affair is quite disillusioned, "there is nothing pleasant in folding that cold, blue hand in her own," as she "watches the tears well up, the old-folks' tears that do not count for much because they come too easily" (152), followed by a confessed attempted fellatio. Aside from typically Coetzeean manner of breaking taboos by portraying that the elderly people have desires, the anti-illusionary language adds weight to the whole process as he mercilessly depicts the scene – "It is the first time she has seen pubic hair that has turned grey" "old man's nether parts, cursorily washed" but still achieves sympathy from the reader because of the real lesson on caritas:

> As for her, Elizabeth, crouched over the old bag of bones with her breasts dangling, working away on his nearly extinct organ of generation, what name would the Greeks give to such a spectacle? Not *eros*, certainly – too grotesque for that. *Agape*? Again, perhaps not. Does that mean the Greeks would have no word for it? Would one have to wait for the Christians to come along with the right word: *Caritas*? (154, emphasis his)

In the other Australian novels, also Paul Rayment is demanding care of this kind as an act of caritas from Marijana, which she eventually denies completely. As Coetzee himself becomes older alongside his characters, these new subjects get broached more and more. In *Diary of a Bad Year*, J C too feels infatuated with a much younger Anya, and it remains unclear what aside from her presence he wants of her. Still, the language of disillusionment as technique is the real lesson in *Elizabeth Costello* and her treatment of caritas as seen in this novel. Each word carefully thought out and placed, the language shows the "disjunction between Costello and Coetzee on the problem of representing the obscene and the violent in fiction," which become "strikingly apparent" (Poyner, *J. M. Coetzee and the Paradox* 173). In comparison to Coetzee's comfortable representation of Costello in her "acts of inhumanity" even "the most stomach-churningly intimate detail," Costello does not have the stomach for it at all and even argues that she would never tell a living soul let alone write the event down. If she to put down this event in an intimate letter to her sister, one can only imagine how she would verbalize Coetzee's rape scenes like the one in *Disgrace* or the torture in *Waiting for the Barbarians.*

Elleke Boehmer discusses the queer Coetzee in her article on "Queer Bodies" as his first embodiment of the "Other." Despite the well-established ideas that Elizabeth epitomizes Coetzee in another form as his mouthpiece, Boehmer disagrees. According to her, the "queerness of John Coetzee in *Elizabeth Costello* emerges not from the fact that, finally, having stood so often on the side of the silenced other, in *Foe* as in *Disgrace*, he has now spoken from within the very body of the other," but the proof that "he has impersonated – not merely ventriloquized" Elizabeth Costello (Boehmer, "Queer Bodies" 131) she finds in their differences as authors, and especially in his incapability to successfully embody her as a woman because he has no desire to be one actually. In essence, he "does not actually want to *be*, to form part of, the body of a woman" (132) as he quite often slips into gender stereotyping and misogyny (130).

Additionally, Boehmer finds evidence to her stand that Coetzee feels uncomfortable in the body of a woman relies on externalizing Costello and referring to herself as "she" and her body of a woman feeling disembodied most of the time. Coetzee continues the same practice in other works as "with *Slow Man* he again externalizes Elizabeth Costello, who is now become the unwelcome companion to the bodily reduced Paul Rayment (132). Such treatment of a character speaks about the author himself because

> Coetzee has in a sense stripped her of flesh, reduced her centredness as a physical human being. She is often represented from the outside, as elderly, dying, as through the device of her mostly absent son John. This is an odd, if not queer technique, for, by repeatedly describing Elizabeth as tired, greying, shrivelling, and so on, *and* as a reasoning if sympathetic character, what Coetzee the novelist effectively does is to de-sex her. (130)

Except in that one lesson in which she feels like a flesh-and-blood personality, mostly she is represented from the outside just like he is in *autre*-biography (133). Elizabeth even bids calling by her last name, just like Coetzee, as his style renders it too personal to think of her as Elizabeth – she is described "almost objectively, ostensibly by herself, yet without any sensory evocation of what this extreme experience of pain must have involved" (133). Even basic depictions of her feel icing – an Australian with no warm stories of the home, a grandmother and mother disinterested in hugging or spending time with her grandchildren, and even a bit disinterested in her adult children's personal stories.

Not including the mentioned scene in the hospital and her "caritas" act, I maintain she mirrors Coetzee to the extent that her feminine and "other" has been abolished, not because of Coetzee's lack of knowledge on the subject, but because of his utter discomfort. Costello, according to Boehmer, at times feels empty "just as the wind instrument she imagines herself as being for him" and an image of an "empty vessel, filled with air" (131). To a man of his age and stature, inadequacy to fully

embody a woman, elderly at that, occurs "because the embodiment of such humiliation and victimhood profoundly disturbs and unnerves him" (Boehmer, "Queer Bodies" 133).

So, all in all aside from the obvious on the humanities in Africa, the real Costello/Coetzee Lesson 5 extrapolate the problem of writing down embarrassing topics or avoiding them wholly. The conclusion of the whole lesson comes to light in Costello's words "I would say that it is enough for books to teach us about ourselves. Any reader ought to be content with that. Or almost any reader" (*Elizabeth Costello* 154). But the illogicality of her reasoning begs the question – if sexual, bodily, or violent topics are extracted from texts, how would readers learn?

In Lesson 6 called "The Problem of Evil," Coetzee focuses on the rationality behind evil. An earlier version of "The problem of evil" was published in the journal *Salmagundi*, and it also got presented in Chicago in September 2001 (Kannemeyer 545-546). In Attridge, I encounter the same talk that was given in the Nexus Conference on "Evil" in Tilburg, Holland in 2002, in which he discussed Elizabeth Costello's participation in a conference on the same theme as a metafictional in-joke (*Ethics of Reading* 194-195). Alice Hall calls this procedure "mirroring" because "Elizabeth is also taking part in a conference about the question of evil in Holland" (*Elizabeth Costello* 140). Lesson 6 focuses around the trip to Amsterdam and potential vindication for, what Costello explains was taken as a step too far – her lecture on the "massacre of the defenceless" slave animals that she inflated beyond good taste when she likened the killing of animals to the holocaust (156). The real lesson, however, concentrates around the author of fiction castigated for her opinions that become politicized up to the level of ruining her career, everything Coetzee tries to avoid through the very existence of Costello.

Costello develops the problem of evil through the cursory mentions of the devil and daemons after which she proceeds to discuss the responsibility of writers who willingly or unwittingly make evil attractive and disperse its ideas without intent because their attractive books gain popularity and disseminate "evil" views (164). In comparison to the previous lesson that focuses on the evil that should not be written down as a precaution, in this one the issue centers around self-censoring oneself, both in avoiding some topics that promote evil and in trying not to disseminate them afterward. Her stand echoes other mentions in the novels, but essentially self-censoring is necessary if one is to avoid promoting evil, especially by the writer him/herself:

> Obscene because such things ought not to take place, and then obscene again because having taken place they ought not to be brought into the light but covered up and hidden for ever in the bowels of the earth, like what goes on in the slaughterhouses of the world, if one wishes to save one's sanity. (159)

The whole debate centered around an author she had read, who would also attend the conference, but she had not realized it when she wrote her whole lecture around an attack on his book. Costello proceeds to self-censor trying to avoid offending him and asks the ethical question of whether she should do it for the reason of societal approval: "What if she tries softening her thesis? What if she suggests that, in representing the workings of evil, the writer may unwittingly make evil seem attractive, and thereby do more harm than good? Will that soften the blow?" (164). In spite of the dilemma, she decides to go through with the original lecture in order to save people's humanity – "To save our humanity, certain things that we may want to see (may want to see because we are human!) must remain off-stage. Paul West has written an obscene book, he has shown what ought not to be shown" (169).

The moralizing and preaching character of hers shines through these self-righteous crusades notwithstanding her self-check in metafictional language, such as the questioning that in old age she sounds like a censor instead of an author, etc. I argue Costello is challenged with these thoughts by Coetzee himself as unilateral thinking has never been his forte. As a thinker, he differs from this character in that Coetzee feels societal oppressions and provides more than just logical outcomes for his actions, but emotional responses as well. Costello, on the other hand, places herself center axes in

her thinking, despite not having her life to back her words. She preaches others to renounce writing evil, but also admits inability to write explicit scenes (which Coetzee often does write); she poses Paul West as the example of what writers should not write about because

> certain things are not good to read or to write. To put the point in another way: I take seriously the claim that the artist risks a great deal by venturing into forbidden places: risks, specifically, himself; risks, perhaps, all. (*Elizabeth Costello* 173)

Oppositely, she indulges in reading West's fiction as she would be unable to comment on it had she not read and reread it multiple times. Then Costello proves the discrepancy in her words and actions by further promoting it in her lecture. Thus, the reader feels her hypocrisy in arguing that Mr. West "when he wrote those chapters, came in touch with something absolute. Absolute evil. His blessing and his curse, I would say. Through reading him that touch of evil was passed on to me. Like a shock. Like electricity" (176), but she never develops the issue of her passing it on to the audience. Thus she deletes her influence or just remains blissfully ignorant of it when it suits her, for which reason she remains disembodied and inauthentic as a character.

Coetzee, on the other hand, affords a lesson in between the lines about the nature of evil, which is that evil can and does happen to everyone, and authors' responsibility lies in teaching through example, not preaching at people. He does not shy away from jotting down Costello's experience with evil as she was attached by a sadistic man – "Her jaw was broken; it had to be wired up; she lived on milk and orange juice, sucked through a straw. It was her first brush with evil. […] He liked hurting her, she could see it; probably liked it more than he would have liked sex" (165). The scenes of gratuitous violence that Costello has refused to write down ever or tell anyone may save someone in a similar situation just because they had read this and recognized human evil in its embodied form much more than the lesson on censorship she provides. Despite the possible authority to speak about "evil" she might have gained from this episode, the issue remains Costello is written by a white man "imagining female suffering" and usually those authorial self-projections "are deemed unacceptable" (Head 84).

The personal responsibility Costello calls for in writing evil, however, today more than ever demonstrates this lesson as visionary. Social media has shunned this responsibility completely, and with that in mind governments themselves have to police the coverage on suicide, rape, and war to prevent harm from evil topics (also censor along the way). Perhaps Coetzee's lesson 6 can be considered as a precursor, written in 2003, of what ended up happening in modern society – which is if ethics gets removed from the reader-response with the aim of making a sale, then the law has to change in order to safeguard people from inadvertent evil, even if that entails censorship.

The following lesson, "Eros," develops into Lesson 7 of *Elizabeth Costello*. This lesson seems most feminist in Costello's reactions. As she retells the myth of Eros and Psyche in erotic detail – "When Psyche's lover comes, his wings are left drenched; or perhaps the wings drip seed, perhaps they become organs of consummation themselves. On occasions when he and she reach a climax together, he breaks apart like […] a bird shot in flight" (*Elizabeth Costello* 183), to which Costello responds that if written by a woman, she wonders what happens to Psyche. More specifically she queries "*if you can say what it was like for him, why not tell us how it was for her*" (183, emphasis his). The topic opens up the issue of how Gods see humans, and whether they think of humanity as people do of animals.

After tables have turned, she draws attention to the feel of being observed and the impotence animals must sense at human curiosity – "Aside from our erotic gifts, are they curious about us, their anthropological specimens, to the degree that we, in turn, are curious about chimps, or about birds, or about flies?" (190), she raised the question in her common style of diatribe without offering any answers. If humans observe animals as "a circus" or a show for their amusement, in "Eros" the roles have turned. Elizabeth Costello emphatically believes that "they peek at us all the time, peek even between our legs, full of curiosity, full of envy; sometimes go so far as to rattle our earthly cage"

(*Elizabeth Costello* 190). In the change of perspective, humans turn into intriguing animalistic specimens.

So if anything can be concluded from this feeble section, original in nature as opposed to others beforehand – Coetzee's embodiment as not only a woman but a feminist wondering about ancient poetry and the perspective of God, and men, is uniquely male. "Psyche, Anchises, Mary: there must be better, less prurient, more philosophical ways of thinking about the whole god-and-man business" (187), Costello concludes. Perhaps in her wondering, she announces the feminist reading of most classics that actually come to fruition since 2003 and the publication of *Elizabeth Costello* as that other way of thinking about men and God.

From Kannemeyer again, I learn that Coetzee's papers testify he wrote "At the gate" in May 2001, during his visit to Stanford (546) and it denotes original work for the purposes of this novel just like "Eros." This last lesson displays Costello seemingly being put on trial for what she has done or failed to do during her lifetime (Graham 233). The entire lesson metaphorically depicts Elizabeth Costello attempting to enter paradise, or what we as readers experience as a potential paradise because of "a light so blinding that earthly senses would be stunned by it" (*Elizabeth Costello* 196). She must provide "a confession" of belief in order to cross the gate. Since Costello dislikes the expectancy of confession, she calls it a "statement of belief" (212).

> Seated at one of the pavement tables she briskly composes what is to be her statement. *I am a writer, a trader in fictions, it says. I maintain beliefs only provisionally: fixed beliefs would stand in my way. I change beliefs as I change my habitation or my clothes, according to my needs. On these grounds--professional, vocational – I request exemption from a rule of which I now hear for the first time, namely that every petitioner at the gate should hold to one or more beliefs*. (195, emphasis his)

She avoids vehemently any reference to herself as a believer, in the religious sense. The justification Costello provides defends her suspended belief because she is a writer – "It is not my profession to believe, just to write. Not my business. I do imitations, as Aristotle would have said" (Graham 194). The mimetic procedure prevents belief as she argues it is her job to understand people. If anything "[s]*he believed in life*: will she take that as the last word on her, her epitaph?" (219, emphasis his). Until the end, it remains unclear whether she makes it over the gate, but Coetzee has Costello provide several lessons on postmodern concepts, like always, when she seemingly gets used to the world pre-gate and she exclaims "How beautiful it is, this world, even if it is only a simulacrum! At least there is that to fall back on" (215). In the postmodern world, simulacrum might stand for a household name, but in a novel, it definitely shows Coetzee's sense of humor and a wink in the readers' direction.

On writing this confession, Costello deals with the common nightmare of revisions, so upon finishing the judges, standing in for censors in a metafictional interplay comment that another revision is always necessary. They believe Costello needs to again revise – "Revised to the limit, you say. Some of us would say there is always one revision more to do" (199). She presents herself, the second time, as the secretary of the invisible, the dictation secretary whose only job was to write down without judgment (199). But, called upon to answer for historical guilt, she responds to the accusation that as the secretary of the invisible she was ready to speak – in one interpretation speaking for otherness, or the aboriginal people of Tasmania as she is Australian – but was never summoned (199).

Upon changing her plea several times, Coetzee brushes up on his two favorite subjects – that of identity as a changeable entity through time.

> 'You ask if I have changed my plea. But who am I, who is this *I*, this *you*? We change from day to day, and we also stay the same. No *I,* no *you* is more fundamental than any other. You might as well ask which is the true Elizabeth Costello: the one who made the first statement

> or the one who made the second. My answer is, both are true. Both. And neither. *I am an other.* (*Elizabeth Costello* 221, emphasis his)

In denying she has changed her view, but her entire identity because the identity that adorned her at that time in history was responsible for the answer then, she echoes Coetzee's treatment of *autre*-biography's John and his personal growth through *Scenes of Provincial Life*. An other she inhabited at the time of the answer has altered so that *I* and *she* merged into Costello as she appears before the judges.

The Postscript in *Elizabeth Costello*, according to the Coetzee papers got based on "The letter of Lord Chandos"[105] by Hugo von Hofmannsthal (Kannemeyer 545-546).[106] The letter appears random enough that it could even be argued it is out of place at the end of these 8 Lessons. Bradshaw believes that "Costello herself couldn't have written the 'Letter' and wouldn't see why it is a fitting 'Postscript" ("Introduction" 8). Its origin gives the idea it dated 1603, by a person called Lord Chandos and it was directed to the famous philosopher and scientist Francis Bacon – the establishing force for the age of reason over renaissance values of the time. However, the actual author of the letter can be found in "the twenty-eight-year-old Austrian poet and writer Hugo von Hofmannsthal" widely known in the literary circles as "the Chandos Letter," it is viewed these days as one of the "most influential and telling documents of literary modernism" (Pippin 3).

What happens in the novel, is that Coetzee uses a response by Elizabeth to this letter as the Postscript to *Elizabeth Costello*. The whole enterprise essentially becomes a ruse in which supposedly Elizabeth Costello steps over into the world of another author. By responding in the Postscript as Lord Chandos' wife, Elizabeth transforms into another character in *Elizabeth Costello*, as she cannot have written something in the 18th century and the spell, if there was any left, is broken. "For an author and her character do not and cannot share a single world," says Mulhall, the very moment their worlds merge or "the moment the author inserts herself into the world of her character, she becomes another character and so cannot intelligibly relate to her character as his author" (*Elizabeth Costello* 247).

The only section Coetzee (or Costello) quotes shows as follows:

> *At such moments even a negligible creature, a dog, a rat, a beetle, a stunted apple tree, a cart track winding over a hill, a mossy stone, counts more for me than a night of bliss with the most beautiful, most devoted mistress. These dumb and in some cases inanimate creatures press toward me with such fullness, such presence of love, that there is nothing in range of my rapturous eye that does not have life. It is as if everything, everything that exists, everything I can recall, everything my confused thinking touches on, means something.*
>
> Hugo von Hofmannsthal
> 'Letter of Lord Chandos to Lord Bacon' (1902)
> (226)

The way Coetzee inserts Costello in the letter is by signing her at its beginning and end. In the fashion of many feminist reprisals of famous work, Costello begins her letter as "Letter of Elizabeth, Lady Chandos, to Francis Bacon" (227) and addresses the scientist as Lady Chandos whose husband had previously written to him. Not only does Costello jump centuries as a character, but she inserts herself as a re-embodiment of another author's wife after the scene "At the Gate," which leads the reader into the supposition she might have been reincarnated. Her intention in writing the letter to

[105] See Robert Pippin for historical background and details on philosophy behind the letters, pp. 4-8.
[106] Kannemeyer adds the publication he refers to is Von Hofmannsthal's *Selected Prose*, translated by Mary Hottinger and Tania and James Stern, New York, Pantheon Books, 1952, see pp. 545-546 for more information.

Bacon is because she, in the manner of writing of the time, needs to ask for Bacon's answer about something she calls "revelation" (*Elizabeth Costello* 229). Elizabeth C. contends "[a]ll is allegory, says my Philip. Each creature is key to all other creatures. A dog sitting in a patch of sun licking itself, says he, is at one moment a dog and at the next a vessel of revelation" (229). The entire postscript speaks about faith and the Creator's intention for living beings, not humans necessarily and it represents an ending suitable for the novel – "perhaps in the mind of our Creator (our Creator, I say) where we whirl about as if in a millrace we interpenetrate and are interpenetrated by fellow creatures by the thousand" (229). She finishes the allegory in an image of fleas and insects, perhaps speaking of death and burial under the ground after which creatures interpenetrate.

Signed finally with – "Drowning, we write out of our separate fates. Save us. Your obedient servant Elizabeth C," (230). The signature itself perpetuates the interplay of authorship and Coetzee's common performance of alliteration to his own initials and that of his characters. Elizabeth C., just like John C., J. C., or Señor C., displays a practice common enough to even conclude the letter was chosen because the Lord Chandos' name ended in appropriate initials. In Kannemeyer, Coetzee furthers the idea by calling her Lady C:

> And when asked, in conclusion, to comment on the function of the ending of *Elizabeth Costello*, based on a text by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Coetzee's reply reaffirmed a principle he has maintained consistently ever since *Dusklands*: 'I tend to resist invitations to interpret my own fiction. If there were a better, clearer, shorter way of saying what the fiction says, then why not scrap the fiction? Elizabeth, Lady C, claims to be writing at the limits of language. Would it not be insulting to her if I were diligently to follow after her, explaining what she means but is not smart enough to say?' (Qtd. in Kannemeyer 565)

J. M. Coetzee's ultimate lesson in *Elizabeth Costello* remains that of authorship and writing, in combination with the utmost respect for fiction and its processes. "If there were a better, clearer, shorter way of saying what the fiction says, then why not scrap the fiction?" (565), in other words, if criticisms could do the job of fiction they would cancel each other out. In *Elizabeth Costello* both are necessary, but fiction takes primacy as Coetzee's ultimate lesson.

5.1.4 Converging and Diverging points with *Autre*-biography

> 'Of course we draw upon our own lives all the time – they are our main resource, in a sense our only resource. But no, *Fire and Ice* isn't autobiography. It is a work of fiction. I made it up.'
>
> (Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* 12)

As with all Coetzee's work, the open signposts to his personal life inspire readers to directly go for the most obvious biographical readings. His encouragement to us as readers inspires us to "wrestle with what such performances might mean" (Poyner, *J. M. Coetzee and the Paradox* 170). Jane Poyner, just like Attridge calls these puzzling texts "especially over Coetzee's performance of Costello on stage" as public performances of a role (170), also called "textual transvestism" (Graham 217).[107] The term encompasses flourishing imitative versions of classical texts with a modern twist and specially written from a different voice such as in this case from a male perspective cross-dressing as a female voice. Graham focuses on the reading, among other ideas, of textual transvestism as the author's response to the notion of Other, the so-called becoming of the other regardless of the sex,

[107] See Lucy Graham for more information on intertextual connotation for Coetzee's work on female voices, pp. 217-222.

the process of "taking on" the voice of another (Graham 232). What she is careful to separate, and I agree, is that Coetzee does not traverse into the culturally other, and female minorities and his black voices remain limited or silenced (232).

The connection between *autre*-biography and Coetzee's selected novels reads like a roadmap into his description of the self – whereas *Boyhood* and *Youth* perform the function of autobiography about authorial origins, the Costello woman represents "a meta-autobiography of the writer as a philosopher of the self" (Niekerk qtd. in Kannemeyer 549). The *Scenes* together provide an image of boyhood and the identity of a writer in search of his calling, all the way to *Summertime* and application of the acquired knowledge about the self. Whereas *Elizabeth Costello* unleashes the writer, provides a mouthpiece for his more controversial views, and works on the limits of language to offer "what being a writer – perhaps a last dubious manifestation of the divine and salvation – could mean in this era" (549). The role, meaning, and potential salvation of the writer descended from poets takes center stage in these novels and further frees Coetzee from the role fame has imposed – the role of the public intellectual.

The demand on the public for "the pound of flesh" from someone who became famous by proclaiming independence from such a world when he refused interviews or at least carefully selected interviewers, someone who protected his family his children in his *autre*-biography by creating a completely new genre to hide them in – was on the verge of losing his authority and relinquishing it for the public when once again he changed the rule of the game. Instead of allowing public attacks that he was not modern enough, not feminist, not black and all the other nots as a white male he embodied, he invented a character and submitted willingly his authority to her – Elizabeth Costello. Just like he invented a completely new genre to create autobiography he was comfortable with, I believe Coetzee also invented Costello to avoid public speaking in his own name, as well as to play the game of fiction to its very limits all the while hiding his self in the subjects that interest him rather than the opinions of a single character.

The examinations of the self continue in all novels in the Australian period, both as cautious examinations of a character at odds with himself like Paul Rayment or in the case of Costello someone who is too old to lie – "I say what I mean. I am an old woman. I do not have the time any longer to say things I do not mean" (*Elizabeth Costello* 62). Costello, in a manner of speaking, tries to refine her own self in comparison to Rayment's (and to Coetzee's by extension) so "[i]n this regard, *Slow Man* is almost a continuation of Coetzee's "*autre*biography" project in the *Scenes from Provincial Life* series, especially part 2 of that project, *Youth"* (Pellow 529). Often referred to as his spiritual autobiography, *Elizabeth Costello* in all her appearances mimics Coetzee purposefully. In the initial quote, she admits we "draw upon our own lives all the time – they are our main resource, in a sense our only resource" (*Elizabeth Costello* 12) meaning the inner truth extrapolates to the world, our worldview is our only autobiography.

The same ploy that creates non-accountability in *autre*-biography also occurs in Elizabeth Costello – namely the protagonist gets narrated from the outside perspective of "he/she." Furthermore, intellectual authority is stripped away through various processes, but mainly self-referentiality. Any time John does something well, he mitigates it with self-deprecating comments and Costello too – when she is given a point or provided a compliment she brushes it off with something negative to offset authority. For example, a colleague compliments her vegetarianism and she responds "I'm carrying a leather purse. I wouldn't have overmuch respect if I were you" (89). Like a Freudian disillusioned father, no one and himself included is worthy of a straightforward compliment with no mitigation.

The readers are invited to make connections between the lives of the Costello woman and Coetzee for the purpose of providing a wrong (sometimes correct) biographical reading, which creates only one superficial layer of reading Coetzee

> There could be some autobiographical resonance in the experience of Elizabeth Costello, Coetzee's alter ego, when, in the 2003 novel named after her, she recollects how she 'forty

> years ago, hid day after day in her bedsitter in Hampstead, crying to herself, crawling out in the evenings into the foggy streets to buy fish and chips on which she lived, falling asleep in her clothes'. (Kannemeyer 113)

Resonating with depictions in *Youth*, about his own miserable self, Coetzee applies knowledge about autobiography and truth he has extrapolated over the years – as long as the fact matching expedition is satisfied, no one except the participant can corroborate the inner truth that took place. His entire oeuvre in autobiographical discourse plays with the idea that as long as details match one's sequence of events, truth in autobiography is ultimately a very private affair – storytelling expediting between the participant's inner identities and psychological mechanism helping and preventing him from remembering the feel of the event, not the storyline. Most people think in events and facts, but what Coetzee brings to the table of autobiography refers to the fictive, fictional, and supremely subjective memory of the event, which ultimately stands for one's private truth. Outwardly, Costello might perfectly have visited Hampstead and had a similar day as Coetzee, in terms of the plot they could have had the same day. But the authorial echo here is performed on the cognitive remembrance of that experience, which repeated in the same words, but lived in on the inside in similar language, remains highly unlikely.

Such and many other examples focus on interlinking the two stages of Coetzee's creation in order to produce diversion and confusion so postmodern in nature that the reader stops analyzing, but still it affects the reading. As Jane Poyner researches, in his later works, "the figure of Coetzee most obviously haunts fictionalized texts to disrupt the pacts of genre" (*J. M. Coetzee and the Paradox* 169). And if a specific genre no longer applies, the reader is left disembodied and unsure in the world of fiction. What Murphet points out is how Elizabeth Costello might be the only book required to read "in conjunction with the Acknowledgements" ("Coetzee and Late Style" 87-88), begging the questioning about its true nature and purpose from the very beginning. The Australian novels fundamentally focus on the figure of the author and foreground narratological issues (Canepari-Labib, *Old myths* 50).

The world of fiction and non-fiction intertwine in both *autre*-biography and novels, just like some truth is available in fiction, equally, some fiction appears in *autre*-biography. Whereas *autre*-biography applies theory to the autobiographical discourse, these novels "openly demonstrate the author's willingness to blur the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction even further" (50). *Elizabeth Costello* collects lectures, post-conference questions, interviews, another author's letter century apart, etc. into a quasi-novel in order to create fiction, all the while alluding to the reader to the lectures that were originally Coetzee's. In essence, Coetzee creates Costello on paper to speak through his lectures, then perform he on stage in a lecture, then turns her in a novel, but beforehand asks readers to see the Acknowledgement section as if providing credence for "her" work. The back and forth between them is supposed to provide credence of reality to fiction.

Let us pay a closer look at Coetzee's response on autobiography and Elizabeth Costello's as mirroring efforts on their values. In explaining the background to her novel, Costello claims authors "draw upon" their "own lives all the time – they are our main resource, in a sense our only resource. But no, *Fire and Ice* isn't autobiography. It is a work of fiction. I made it up" (*Elizabeth Costello* 12). In responding to Arabella Kurtz, Coetzee said "not that autobiography is free, in the sense that we can make up our life-story as we wish. Rather, the claim is that in making up our autobiography we exercise the same freedom that we have in dreams, where we impose a narrative form that is our own, even if influenced by forces that are obscure to us, on elements of a remembered reality" (*The Good Story* 3).

Thus in both cases, drawing up from one's remembered reality represents the story of the self Coetzee believes can only be told. These novels from Coetzee's Australian cycle, and the "pseudo-autobiographical works that bookend" them, demonstrate the porousness of the genre as a construct and potential "critical point" in history that might mark the end of the genre in a classical defined

form (Murphet, "Coetzee's Lateness" 4). As Jane Poyner explains, each revelation of truth has a price, and the genre is merely a method to achieve the goal.

> I began this chapter with Coetzee's question, what does each revelation I make cost? By this Coetzee means, what cost to the discourse of genre does truth-telling entail? In these later, quasi-fictional works Coetzee may appear to be making public interventions in the familiar format of the public lecture and the opinion piece. Indeed, the similarity in belief and personal traits between Coetzee and his characters in the works discussed here might seem to bear this out. (*J. M. Coetzee and the Paradox* 183-184)

Identity in Coetzean notions remains fleeting and adorned on demand depending on the roles we play. Costello wonders whether in the days "of fleeting identities that we pick up and wear and discard like clothing" she can even speak of her "essence as an African writer?" (*Elizabeth Costello* 43), and by extension anything else. This sense of identity concedes with *autre*-biography and other sections of Costello such as Lesson 8 and her appeal to the jury that she has not changed, simply another person was presented before them a "she" she no longer recognizes as herself, she has become "an other" (221).

In becoming an other, in any sort of embodiment, one must also leave the authority of the previous persona behind. In Coetzee's case, the identity of a professor, lecturer, scholar is removed any time he performs a reading of fiction. Another way he "eschews authority" and this time in fiction is by pillorying his characters and including himself as a character (Danta, "Janus Face" xvi). This practice extends to most of his work, be it fictional or autobiographical:

> There is no writer I know who is harder on his characters [than Coetzee], particularly those characters whom we might associate with the author — Jacobus Coetzee in *Dusklands*, David Lurie in *Disgrace*, the central characters of *Boyhood*, *Youth* and *Summertime*, the testy narrator in *Diary of a Bad Year*, or even Elizabeth Costello, both tired and tiresome in those moments when she is most clearly ventriloquising Coetzee's beliefs. (Ashcroft 145-146)

At no time is Coetzee seen as more deprecating and self-deprecating than when he is ventriloquizing his beliefs. What his other practices in writing demonstrate refers to what occurs after the authority has been shunned – "while the author may 'take' responsibility for the desire to create, this in no way means that the author (say, Elizabeth Costello) wields overwhelming authority over his or her character (say, Paul Rayment)" (Jolly 93). At the moment the torch passes to another, Coetzee's lesson shows that the responsibility of the author lies only in the inspiration, after which the character or the "Other" may "dismisses the advances of his figurative author, not vice versa" (93) and refuse to conform. The identity reached in the confrontation with the "Other" still reflects the cultural construct that "Western philosophic tradition has accustomed us to think of as an individual's 'real' and 'fundamental' identity" (Canepari-Labib, *Old myths* 215). The substitution and replacement in idea with a linguistic sign denounce all identities as fake because the language may only show "a pale shadow and a representation":

> According to Coetzee, because of the very nature of language, which replaces the real thing with a linguistic sign, any identity achieved can in fact only be a fake, a pale shadow and a representation. It is precisely the distance between language and the 'real thing' language stands for that some of Coetzee's characters try to bridge by consciously rebelling against language, in particular the language of authority spoken by various systems Coetzee depicts in his texts. (215)

If extrapolated to a concept of nations, Coetzee as a white male struggles throughout his oeuvre with the representation of responsibility and guilt for national atrocities, and by extension with his inherited privilege and authority. Just like John in S*ummertime*, Costello too describes feelings of being "'soiled' by her political environment" (Smuts 34). The understanding of her positions on the novel in Africa, as well as her other philosophies of self and otherness generalize from these views. Smuts refers to her the reality of her self at the mercy of an "inability to exclude from her voice the antagonistic demands of her environment, the uncertainty that attends her moral being in the face of those demands" (34). In describing Costello's take on Australia, Coetzee might as well be taking sections from *Summertime*:

> 'But do you find it easy, writing from the position of a man?' It is a routine question, opening the door to one of her routine paragraphs. To his surprise, she does not take the opening. 'Easy? No. If it were easy it wouldn't be worth doing. It is the otherness that is the challenge. Making up someone other than yourself. Making up a world for him to move in. Making up an Australia.' (*Elizabeth Costello* 12)

Inventing a new world for otherness to inhabit is weighed by "more resistance, a weight of Australias made up by many other people, that you have to push against" (12). And as testified by Attwell, Coetzee's notebook entries him switching daily between autobiography *(Boyhood* at first, later *Youth),* to the Costello story 'What is Realism', followed by *The Lives of Animals* (the two Costello stories written for the Tanner Lectures on Human Values at Princeton) 'Meat Country' and *Disgrace* (*Life of Writing* 192), which allows for the conclusion that connecting between autobiographical work and fiction is well documented.

Nevertheless, in fiction, versus *autre*-biography, Coetzee "as a writer claims to be driven by a sense of responsibility towards a sense of freedom" (Elmgren 8), a conclusion drawn from his statements about fiction originally from *Doubling the Point.* "The *feel* of writing fiction is one of freedom, of irresponsibility, or better, of responsibility toward something that has not yet emerged, that lies somewhere at the end of the road" (*Doubling the Point* 246, emphasis his).

A diverging point, in this case, refers to a style employed in *autre*-biography versus fiction, which is usually analyzed in terms of the classification of the late style according to Edward Said. Julian Murphet's whole article on Coetzee's late style in his Australian period rests upon Adorno's late style and his view that Coetzee must have read Adorno. Murphet bases his case upon Adorno's opinion that "growing detachment from the world" comes from growing old ("Coetzee and Late Style" 88). In the light of this, the Australian period analyses incorporate a set of measures requiring Coetzee to write differently in Scenes from Australian novels.

However, Coetzee was quoted to have said in *Here and Now*, prompted on Said – that "the case of literature, late style, to me, starts with an idea of a simple, subdued, unornamented language and a concentration on questions of real import, even questions of life and death" (Auster and Coetzee 97). I would argue then that despite the common understanding of late style, and *Elizabeth Costello*'s inevitable inclusion in it as the Australian period begins with that work, many forget that Coetzee writes simultaneously. With this in mind, *Summertime* gets finished and published after *Elizabeth Costello*, but *autre*-biography's unique style prevents critics from comparing it to novels or archiving the biography with Australian fiction according to similarities in style. In essence, all the work in the period of two decades, and definitely after Disgrace, can be included in the late period as mostly it is created together.

In the era post-apartheid, Coetzee has become increasingly more self-revealing, but his past infamy of a secluded private person seems to have kept critics from concluding and noting this phenomenon. These later fictions and quasi fictions "locus in dominant characters, often but not always male, in whom we are invited—even encouraged—to recognize the author himself" (Robinson 46-47). The divergence between the character of Costello, who used to be thought to speak

for Coetzee at the beginning of criticism on *Elizabeth Costello*, now opens the rabbit hole of possible interpretations on the difference between John from *Scenes from Provincial Life* and ultimately Coetzee. According to Charlotta Elmgren sees the disjunctions between "stories of childhood in these passages and John's own experience" as relating "Coetzee's story of the child" but also debunking myths (53). The late style in her mind demonstrates a Coetzee involved in a process of as much "dismantling fictions as it is about creating them" (53).

Especially poignant fictions he tries to debunk vary in *autre*-biography and Elizabeth Costello. For the former, he concerns the innocence of children (54) but diverges into obsessive debunking of the myth of peaceful vegetarianism and animal rights in *Elizabeth Costello*. As a private person, he publishes the essay "Meat country" under his name and says "I try obstinately to hold to a regimen which, although it does not include socialism or sandals or cold showers or even free love, does include a dislike for cars, a deep affection for the bicycle and a diet without flesh. I hold to these preferences as discreetly as I am able, aware of their comic potential. They seem perfectly sane to me, but I have no interest in making converts" (43-44).

In comparison to fiction, the vegetarianism Elizabeth Costello preaches is nothing if not flashy. All of which leads to the conclusion that Coetzee's methods encompass confession and a desire to shock, debunk myths, attach sanctities to inspire conversation, not converts necessarily, but thinking creatures. So the methodology and principle of his actions, when he personally diverges from his characters, prove a point, shocks and inspires, but does not provide biographical reading into his lie, only a simile to important subjects. Coetzee also deals with the ironic representation of Greek Gods, Christianity, and other topics that the child of *Boyhood* would never have considered a worthy topic. "The young Coetzee of *Boyhood* finds the idea of Jesus' resurrection so preposterous as to be laughable," says Danta, but Elizabeth Costello is filled with Christian allusions ("Melancholy Ape" 129).

In the Australian period, as Coetzee himself becomes older, his characters also age. This produces the imagery of waste and wasted opportunities in Coetzee's depiction of frail elderly bodies especially as representing stereotypes he is trying to unravel (Hall 109). According to Alice Hall, these tropes borrowed from Becket, who was also known to mention "the tramps, trashcans and ageing protagonists" (109) symbols of wasted time and opportunities. In all Australian novels after Coetzee's relocation, in *Elizabeth Costello, Slow Man* and *Diary of a Bad Year* "the protagonist is debilitated by age and disease, and starting to lose his grip on things" (Kannemeyer 594), which diverge in the treatment of topics from *autre*-biography. All in all, most topics from autre-biography become reworked, but in varied ways. Divergences and innovation, inevitably, becomes part of all Australian novels, otherwise, there would be no point in its existence.

5.1.5 Concluding Thoughts on *Elizabeth Costello*

> Now that it is over and done with, that life-time labour of writing, she is capable of casting a glance back over it that is cool enough, she believes, even cold enough, not to be deceived. Her books teach nothing, preach nothing; they merely spell out, as clearly as they can, how people lived in a certain time and place.
>
> (Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* 207)

The disillusionment of someone measuring their contribution at the summary of one's life's work, like in the title when Costello laments "[h]er books teach nothing, preach nothing" (207) spells out a uniquely human experience of fear whether we could have done more without purpose, whatever it might be. These lines also demarcate a few sections of *Elizabeth Costello* that "feel" embodied instead of removed and distantly observed as if a lecture from an audience. The paradox of course crops up in that the language she addresses herself, third-person "she," has any feel to it, let alone

personal. The eight "lessons" of *Elizabeth Costello* "cohere around the eponymous character, a fêted Australian writer, who enables a self-reflexive and deconstructive performance of Coetzee's cultural authority" (Powers 458), but they also test intellectual authority and boundaries of genre with the most experimental structure Coetzee has ever sported – surrogate lectures by a fictional character, letters, diatribes, interviews, and Q&A sections all congested into one.

Impossible to interpret in any single theory, Elizabeth Costello provides food for thought to completely new audiences of philosophers interested in cultural authority and notions of eschewing personal authority for one's intellectual work. Referred to as Coetzee's "alter ego" (Bell 174), his "mouthpiece" (Graham, "Textual Transvestism" 219), his "surrogate" (Attwell, "Life and Times" 33) and many other names removing her authority, recent criticism has finally come to agree that these fictionalized ruminations Coetzee provides on contentions current debates (Poyner, *J. M. Coetzee and the Paradox* 170) discern between Coetzee and Costello and should provide her with an identity of her own. At this point, she stands as a separate character from that of her author (Poyner 2006) in comparison to their diverging views, hers stand out in their desire to shock and appall in confession style, pedagogical necessity, and boring delivery – all of which Coetzee possesses in trace but does not embody as we can conclude from his collected work over the years.

Elizabeth Costello, in a reached consensus, is born out of Coetzee's necessity to participate in the public academic world, but utter disregard for criticism and performance of his work from paper to speech. The authority he had amassed was threatened at the gate of a fiction author pushed towards a public intellectual and he decide to transfer that authority to another, to an other. By writing fiction, he created a safe house for his private self realizing that "the writer has to have amassed sufficient authority to provide a persuasive mimesis of it" (Attwell, "Mastering authority" 218). *Elizabeth Costello* becomes the mimetic interpretation of Coetzee's amassed authority and a project of turning one's academic career into a projection of the self embodied in an elderly woman.

His practice demonstrates that "there is a split between an author, his creations and their opinions, where the holder of the opinions is necessarily vague. It is 'shown', not said; a 'mere' demonstration of patterned self-styling about which, ironically, we already knew" (Rose 181). "He distances himself from the cultural criticism, but "it is less obvious why Coetzee goes to all this trouble" (Hayes, *J. M. Coetzee and the novel* 223). "These strategies of authorial refraction on the one hand seem to run counter to the aspiration to speak in one's 'own voice', but on the other hand, they enable Coetzee to present the idea of voice itself as a series of countervoices" (Clarkson, *Countervoices* 80).

The non-position is also a position – as Coetzee has said many times, in autobiographies silence or empty spaces of what has not been uttered tell the truth just like words – "As I have said before, what interests me in these fixed life-stories is not so much what finds its way into them as what gets left out" (*The Good Story* 14). What Costello brings to the audience reflects a collection of his opinions refracted through many characters, not just herself. The burden of responsibility in comparing varied countervoices rests on the reader (Effe, *Ethics of Narrative Transgression* 154). By linking himself to his characters, their narratives, and "delusions," Coetzee invites the reader and the critic to find his own (154).

Discussing writing, Coetzee himself says that the "art of the writer" can be located in "creating a shape (a phantasm capable of speech), and an entry point that will allow the reader to inhabit the phantasm" (*The Good Story* 179). The character and its "meaning is so often something one half-discovers, half-creates in retrospect" (Coetzee and Morphet 6). The shape of Elizabeth Costello provides exactly that bridge or the phantasm for Coetzee to reach the audience in his diatribes, *Slow Man,* and other essays as a phantasm for some of Coetzee's views.

5.2 *Slow Man* and Coetzee's Alter Egos in Novels – Converging and Diverging points with *Autre*-biography

> She sighs. 'If I were going to put you in a book, as you phrase it, I would simply do so. I would change your name and one or two of the circumstances of your life, to get around the law of libel, and that would be that. I would certainly not need to take up residence with you. No, you came to me, as I told you: the man with the bad leg.'
>
> (Coetzee, *Slow Man* 88-89)

Repeatedly, Coetzee pursues the same topics of interest in the selected novels that reveal his true self. In fact, some selected novels, such as *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man* (but we could say the same for many more),[108] take the reader on the journey of Coetzee's literary self and numerous academic interests that, to my mind, reveal him better than any ploy in *autre*-biography that is carefully designed to do so. This venture into Coetzee's selected novels, *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man* investigates the premise that *autre*-biography in a writer who is a connoisseur in literary theory equally helps him reveal and hide the self. It is his mastery to hide the true self in *autre*-biography, and reveal it in novels that I explore here.

The *Slow Man's* protagonist, Mr. Rayment, manages to unite numerous ideas explored in other Coetzee's alter egos through his various oeuvres – such as his studies on authorship, power, border crossings, acts of visitation in the reality of the text and outside it, reality and fiction, history as a story, and deficiency of the body as an act of defiance. Other topics, conversely, appear for the first and even only time, such as explicit probes on slow philosophy of reading, senescence, the body purposefully hurt outside the slave/owner paradigm, care as caritas, and the Western world's economic migration and subsequent issues of belonging. What I believe repetitive topics prove is Coetzee's life-long interest investigated and resolved through alter egos of his name, or word play that speak to his true self.

Compared to novels, I extrapolate biographical reading may not demonstrate the best course of action for the interpretation of *autre*-biography in an author so interested in narrative theory. Rather, the sheer repetitiveness of his topics of interest in the selected novels from his subsequent Australian period attests to his true academic interests and ploys he used to deflect from them in *autre*-biography. Sieving through what projects he was writing at the same time as *Scenes from Provincial Life*, and most importantly in the aftermath of them, a clearer image of his interests may be ex-rayed than in a trustful biographical reading of his autobiographical publications. I argue that his immediate Australian novels, *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man* (*Diary of a Bad Year* to an extent as well) continue the project of self-revelation and hiding in linguistic trickery, but provide more honesty as they appear as fiction. Since fiction poses the possibility to unveil what one likes, and hide under a character's name something one dislikes, it provides the perfect cover for honesty that autobiographical writing that requires honesty at all times.

Authorship in the *Slow Man* can best be represented as a metafictional Chinese box of revelations about the process of writing and circular denunciation of ideas. Admissions occur between Mr. Rayment, the protagonist, and his imaginary writer/creator Elizabeth Costello who is also the protagonist from another novel of the same name. Together they discuss, as if puppets in a puppet play, how they feel forced to behave by something outside of themselves in the creative process of coming into being. Like *autre*-biography, their relationship juxtaposes the author as a character in the novel and the protagonist who is unaware of the author's ruse.

Together, these characters question authorial power as independent in the process of creation by using metalepsis to question the reality of the text, and the readers' perception of it. Propelled to behave a certain way so that the process of writing could take place, they expose character versus

[108] Such as *Diary of a Bad Year*, *Age of Iron* or *Master of St Petersburg*, to name but a few novels connected to a variety of Coetzee's biographically read novels.

authorial power just like the power play in *autre*-biography between John-the-protagonist and John-the-author. The Costello woman claims that "the man with the bad leg" (*Slow Man* 89) came to her, that a character cannot be chosen or willed into being, but that both the character and the author enter a state of unwilling obsession with one another until the issue the author needed to address – gets resolved. This challenges the authority of the author and assumptions of the reader about the process of fiction taking place in front of the reader's eyes as the text unfolds by using metafiction in both *autre*-biography and novels.

Coetzee further uses the *Slow Man* to pinpoint the readers' voyeuristic position in that, similarly to the character of the author – Elizabeth Costello, they should be aware of watching something private such as the thoughts of the characters and unnatural position that creates. This position further breaks the bonds of realistic representation and adds to the idea of "border crossing" between the reality of established norms in novels – one writer, one imaginary world. Coetzee highlights this position, naturally, in place of stressing his own shadowy presence as well. As the characters transgress from the world of the text into reality, that venture also opens a window for Coetzee's shadowy presence as the "real author" is intuitively sensed by the reader the entire time.

Another authorial common ground with *autre*-biography that Coetzee once again revises in these novels, as well as autobiographical discourse, refers to the notion of truth and fiction, or in other words, the truth in fiction. Apparently, disbelieving the procedure of mimesis creates a sense of suspense over the whole novel. To achieve this in *Slow Man*, Coetzee "sends" Elizabeth Costello as the author to inhabit the world of the character. She, in turn, does not mimic reality but takes up "residence" (89) with the character waiting for him/her to create their own story. They both, however, renounce responsibility for the creative process. Costello, as the imagined author, claims the character "came" to her and she would have preferred another character but they remain stuck together as unwilling participants. Paul then embodies the trope of the unwilling host to the unexpected visitor, so as to bring home the idea of the border crossing between genres, reality and fiction, and visitation in narrative and the "real world." The border trope, additionally, can be extrapolated to issues of economic migration and (un)willing reception of foreigners in Australia, as well as the system of care organized as such within the system.

Such is the care system in Australia, the land of Coetzee's self-imposed exile from Africa, that in comparison to *Summertime* it provides a calm retirement. Whereas *autre*-biography exposes the African system compelling an old man (John's father) into forced work well-into his seventies for mere survival, his lack of conditions to enjoy the retirement, and his incumbent humiliation in the face of disease are compared to Paul Rayment. As opposed to Jack's, Paul's is a calm retirement of a prearranged organized world, ruined possibly only by circumstance and lack of attention in the human factor. All in all, the two men mirror each other in opposed circumstances of their old age.

Whereas the aforementioned Jack has no retirement or time to ponder his old age and disease, Paul has all the money and time in the world to ruminate on the opportunities missed and try to recreate a family he had not formed on time. In drawing a comparison between the two worlds, Africa offers one imaginary solution to the condition of old age and bodily wasting away in the representation of Jack, versus that of Paul in *Slow Man*. Such is Paul's circumstance that even as an exile, he is able to comfortably live out his old age and promote the idea of care and caritas. If care has been lost in the well-off world, at least the protagonist in Australia can buy care, whereas in Africa care and guilt go hand in hand with family members. Let us remember that John invented taking care of his parent, probably out of guilt or as a revival of his father who once again lives in books, as in reality, Coetzee did no such thing as take care of him before his passing. Although written out in *autre*-biography, it was false and a symbol rather than the truth.

Coetzee, additionally, echoes immigration in topics of belonging in *Slow Man* as well as his *autre*-biography, with the notable difference that Paul and the Jokićs rework the subject of economic migration instead of exile. As the first novel composed after Coetzee emigrates to Australia (Samuelson 39), *Slow Man*'s plot follows an immigrant and returning settler who still has an accent, Paul Reymont, originally from France and residing in Adelaide. But the immigration of these characters, as opposed to his African ones and himself at that time – is willing. Another illustration

of border crossings, this schematic problematizes the issues of real and imaginary borders and the immigrant journey into settling into a new location, especially in terms of their countries of origin. Paul Rayment becomes mainstream as he also comes from a dominant French nation, famous for imposing their culture into varied colonies, whereas the Jokićs arrive later and still have not settled without losing status. They represent Europe's Other, The Balkans, and in that suffer a setback in their economic status until one day they might recover and prosper.

Murphet subscribes to the belief that Coetzee's Australian fiction reads as "novels in novels" with a distinct escape or "flight from homeland, from the body, and from the very comforts of novelistic form" ("Coetzee and Late Style" 86). Such is *Slow Man*'s perspective of the foreigner that it can only be called a perspective of "[n]ovels against the novel" (86), or novels that reveal the process of creation. The foreigner Paul Rayment is a man with no land – he comes to see himself both as immigrant and native, mainstream and Other. The nurse taking care of Paul after his accident, the love interest of the protagonist – Marijana, is a Croat displaced from her home in the Balkans. David Attwell enunciates that the word "slow," besides the deficiency in the body and its slow degradation, also plays into language. "His attraction to Marijana is based partly on the fact that she comes from a corner of an old Europe with which, given his French childhood and his Catholicism, he imagines he has some affinity. Her slow assimilation of Australian speech is part of what makes her attractive to him; like her, he speaks English like a foreigner, phlegmatically, with deliberation" ("Coetzee's Estrangements" 234).

Both immigrants, but in different positions, they settle the new world and bring their skill set into it. Marijana's family and in particular her son Drago, cross borders by assimilating and trying to doctor the photos of the settlers in Australia and mimic belonging into this new world. Paul, on the other hand, despises fake belonging and rigidly avoids change. Coetzee illustrates Paul's refusal of the prosthetic leg as clear avoidance to accept reality and adapt. The tragic flaw of the character remains his "slow philosophy" towards adaption to the new world he is inhabiting and his denial of the newly-arisen reality he inhabits in which he is crippled, older, and bodily inept to care for himself. Instead, he ventures into an imagined love affair with his love interest, oblivious to her disinterest and decisive evasion to return to work. Strategically, Coetzee uses the body as symbolic for the idea of crossing boundaries between appropriate grief and maladaptation because of denial.

Once again, estrangement as a consequence of displacement from one's natural habitat, even to a person who feels heavily out of place, figures extensively in topic choice and manner of handling writing in Coetzee's novels and *autre*-biography. Attwell says that Coetzee rarely considers any place "just a *home*," but rather a failure to belong and integrate, a "failed self/other relationships" (229). Characters from *Scenes from Provincial Life* and *Slow Man* all feel a sense of estrangement from the surroundings and the self because of circumstances. Since a person may not choose their history, only their country, Coetzee develops characters that try to outrun their inherited histories or as Attwell believes the "consistent premise of Coetzee's writing" which is that "you do not choose your history; it chooses you" (232).

Outside circumstances may also influence the sense of estrangement within the self especially if the person feels incapable to change. According to Attwell, the way Coetzee develops this issue aside from history is reworked through the body and language – "the tripartite architecture that surfaces again and again in the novels" – the body, history, and language (233).

> This helps to explain the tripartite architecture that surfaces again and again in the novels: the subject (frequently a subject living unhappily in a body, often a body in pain, marked by contending social forces); history (as a field of contestations, "torsions of power" in Coetzee's phrase from the Jerusalem Prize acceptance speech) (*Doubling the Point* 98); and language (as a field of representations, cultural codes that precede the subject, themselves historical and forever slipping into obsolescence). (233)

The body philosophy of *Slow Man* is a wider adaptation of ideas of inadequacy – inadequate response to life by adapting slowly, inadequate response to the mid-life crisis by falling for one's married carer and trying to adopt her children and problems without her asking, and also being an inadequate slow character that tortures one's creator by not driving the plot forward. The slow body makes for a slow plot, tests the reader who progresses sluggishly through the text and uneventful life of the protagonist to such an extent that the imagined author has to step in and produce Marianna – another character to replace his obsession with the original Marijana, which will lead nowhere in the author's (Elizabeth Costello's) opinion. This plot twist allows Coetzee to deploy rhetorical questions, metafiction, gaps in the narrative to slow the reader's progress through the text and to engender meditation and alternative meanings.

Alternative meanings merge into intertextual conversations with other novels and references, which is very common in Coetzee. Matthijs Baarspul and Paul Franssen focus on the *Slow Man* as an intertextual conversation with its predecessors (254). The intertextuality they are after speaks of authors' pre-texts as frames of reference for their own creation. They claim this process can be extremely creative if the author, like in Coetzee's case, merely leans on the predecessors and ends up creating something new instead of copying from the greats. *Slow Man*, then, converses intertextually with *Ulysses*, *Heart of Darkness*, the writings of Plato, and others (255). Similar to the ideas of intertextuality and the old times, Vermeulen also encounters Marijana's Balkan origins as grounds for connections to epic poetry and folk song, or as he phrases it "the cliché of the Balkan as Europe's interior exotic other" ("Abandoned Creatures" 668). Even Paul notes that Drago Jokić is a name worth of a ballad (*Slow Man* 69), and with this in mind, the intertextuality with the old world is established and with the other as Paul has come to signify Australia's mainstream because of the sheer number of years he has inhabited it.

There is a disinterest in Coetzee that spreads over years even after his *autre*-biography, a disinterest to comprise realistic stories over metafictional ones. *Slow Man* is no exception, despite the realistic mode of its beginning and a single focalizer (the reader loses "consciousness" with Paul when he passes out in the hospital – words disappear), it soon turns into a narrative study of how a novel should be written, with the entrance of Elizabeth Costello, Coetzee shifts the realistic plot towards a more abstract one of authorship. In "Abandoned Creatures," Vermeulen calls these novels (*Slow Man* and *Diary of a Bad Year*) "infused with a certain abstractness" (656). To him, these novels show Coetzee's true interest towards inventing something new and experimenting with novel forms rather than "conveying the lived experience of Australia, Coetzee's new home" (656).

The *Slow Man* compares to *autre*-biography in that it also exemplifies Coetzee's favorite topics of authorship, author-character conundrum, metafiction, and the body as a vehicle for the soul, but the novel also extrapolates new topics. The question of growing old becomes center stage, although Coetzee has broached the topic on numerous occasions before. Until the *Slow Man*, that topic has been overshadowed with the African-related topics of old-age care, security, rape as bodily invasion, disease, etc. (*Disgrace* and *Age or Iron,* for instance).

The issue of place, likewise, gets reworked from a different standpoint. Since Coetzee seems detached from Australia and much more neutral, he is able to invent settings and write from a necessity standpoint for the plot instead of from the truth. For example, the neighborhoods mentioned in the novel do not exist or do not have a supermarket that he invents for the narrative only. In *Slow Man,* for instance, Coetzee uses the street names of Adelaide, but it is not a novel about Adelaide, it has a perfunctory mention of location of a polite naturalized citizen rather than a native, claims Boehmer ("Coetzee's Australian Realism" 5).[109]

Coetzee additionally broaches the subject of the slowness of reading and writing by introducing devices to slow down the plot and have the slow man behave deliberately slowly. Narrative devices such as using multiple foreign languages then translating them create wordy dialogues – slow the reader down on the path towards understanding the text.

[109] See Boehmer's "Reading between Life and Work: Reflections on 'J. M. Coetzee" for more on the interplay between self-masking and self-retrospection that marks much of Coetzee's work both in *autre*-biography and novels.

And finally, modern questions of hospitality and border crossing develop as the *Slow Man* introduces the idea of parallel ontological worlds of the author, protagonist, and the reader, which all get mashed into one after a border crossing from perceived reality into fiction. The entrance of Elizabeth Costello, another character from another novel – posing as the author in *Slow Man*, may not be that innovative (Balzac had done it a long time ago), but still, it represents innovation in the treatment of the subject. Costello represents the author caught mid-creation negotiating with the subjects to change the plot. Coetzee introduces her as an unwilling guest to an unwilling host, all following modern tendencies of literary interpretation. What this break from reality does, in combination with metafictional side commentary, is make Coetzee relevant for the modern reader because of his twist on the creative process. The character who transgresses worlds, in Coetzee, also negotiates authorship and power by subverting their own privilege and relenting it to the character.

All in all, Coetzee's life-long interests remain present in novels just as much as in his *autre*-biography. Both novels and autre-biography pieces get created at the same time, often left for a while, and then similarly reworked. The topics that intrigue Coetzee indiscriminately get written, but from a different point of view, which ends up making them relevant as they remain original. Anyone familiar with his oeuvre may take note of the fact that most of these topics appear in other works after the selected works here (post-2005, such as in *Summertime*), which speaks to Coetzee's perpetual interest in them more than anything he willingly reveals in *autre*-biography. *Autre*-biography remains a choice on Coetzee's part, what to include and exclude is planned also so as not to offend the living family's privacy, whereas novels reveal his unrelenting interests. The sheer repetitiveness of certain subjects speaks about the author's obsession with some subjects across years that he worked into both novels and semi-autobiographical works.

5.2.1 Slowness of the *Slow Man*

> 'It means I can go very fast,' he says. 'PR the rocket man.' 'Rocket Man,' says Ljuba. She gives him a smile, the first she has ever given. 'You aren't Rocket Man, you're Slow Man!' Then she breaks into giggles, and embraces her mother's thighs, and hides her face.
>
> (Coetzee, *Slow Man 258*)

The plot of *Slow Man* can easily be summed up in a few sentences – Paul Rayment, a settler in Australia from France, is catapulted from his bicycle in an accident in which he loses a leg. Unwilling to adapt and wear a prosthetic leg, he begins a journey of self-discovery as a newly sickly elderly man, searching for love that would recuperate him in an unlikely place – with his married nurse Marijana. His attraction to her and her family is disparaged by the supposed author of the novel, Elizabeth Costello, who appears in the middle of the novel, descending from a different reality in order to show him his love interest makes no sense for the plot of a good novel, and offer him Marianna and Drago as escapes to his desires. Marianna, a blind woman his age, should be a better surrogate for his passion, and Drago the son of Marijana should replace his father urges. By becoming the godfather to the boy, Costello believes Paul would stop desiring a son in his old age as a repair for longings left undone. But most of all, Costello's apparitional presence opens up the novel to narratological issues of authorship, metafiction, and side commentary dividing the novel into two parts – the first one realistic and marked by a debilitating injury, the second one narratological and marked by issues of stamped writing and plot retardation. Costello's character comes to stand for an intellectual novel in the second part of *Slow Man*, rather than a factual realistic one as it begins, it turns into a study of narrative techniques.

So who is this Slow Man and how did he come to stand for the philosophy of slow reading? Narrated in thirty chapters, the *Slow Man* stands for a refusal to change under changing circumstances, and on a different ontological level, he represents the text as an immutable independent creation

refusing authorial command. In his biography, Kannemeyer quoted Coetzee's reply regarding the title and the original intention behind it:

> Asked what he meant by the title, he replied on 4 February 2005: 'Besides the primary meaning of slow (as in to ride slowly), I had the following connotations in mind: (1) slow as in 'slow on the uptake,' 'slow to get the message,' not very perceptive; (2) slow as a euphemism for not very clever, stupid; the virtuous side of slowness, as in (3) Nietzsche, 'I am a teacher of slow reading'. (583-584)

In fact, the slow philosophy is imposed on the reader at the break of reality and fiction so as to provide meaning. The novel "divides into two sections" as a manifestation of the change of narrator – from unknown to Elizabeth Costello (Kossew, "Border Crossings" 63). Kossew calls this ontological break into the world of fiction a border crossing between fiction and metafiction which aims to unsettle "the reader's desire for certainty" (63). She agrees that whereas the "first section is a seemingly realistic account of a collision between a cyclist and a motor car on an Adelaide street," it is followed by "the metafictional entry into the text of Elizabeth Costello, the Australian feminist writer whose lessons are the subject matter of Coetzee's previous text, *Elizabeth Costello*, and who appeared earlier in *The Lives of Animals*" (63) only to break with reality.

In Mehigan, I encounter an explanation for this authorial necessity and he sees Costello as "an echo of Rayment's conscience, a client-figure in the novel whose function is to prick her host's conscience and help him assemble a picture of reality" (Ch. 12). Costello's character also stands for Coetzee's impatience with realism and "a gesture of abandonment, even reckless" because it created "a detached view of the likely reaction in many a reader" (Attwell, *Life of Writing* 212). Since Coetzee often takes a detached view in *autre*-biography as well as novels and the choice of characters, it is safe to say in this novel he prioritized metafiction over fiction, post-structuralism over realism, and purposefully so. In making the reading of the *Slow Man* – slow, questionable and detached, Coetzee appropriated the text as his own brand of experimental writing.

All of the above, namely, the play of words used for Paul Rayment regarding "slow" or "slowly," which describe Paul's body and actions, the border crossing between the world of perceived reality – of fiction and metafiction, and the introduction of the previous character from novel and essays into the *Slow Man* – embody the many narrative devices employed in the novel to produce a slow reading. The slow reading is thus established as the imposed norm of retardation in the readers' perception and focus on the narrative techniques rather than the plot and reading for enjoyment.

Let us begin with the breadcrumbs Coetzee leaves in the texts regarding the protagonist as a Slow Man. Both semantically and graphically, the author represents Paul's lack of speed in making decisions. The mockery of his debilitating body, done with the sheer aim of producing irony that the protagonist lacks the basic skills for becoming a protagonist – the Rocket Man, such as charm or decision-making abilities, chokes with the "reality." In the reality of the novel, it is the reader's ontological understanding bestowed upon him/her in that Paul in fact is a protagonist – but a bad one, a Slow Man, a man in lack of decisions instead of abundant with them leading the plot forward. Replete with contrasts, Paul is like no other protagonist, he is ridiculed by the author Coetzee implicitly and by his author-image Costello explicitly. While the reader is meant to absorb the irony that Costello calls out Paul and explains the many reasons why he cannot be a main character, in the reality outside the text he already is one.

The protagonist is ridiculed and manipulated at every step, a move similar to *autre*-biography and the treatment of John, which inevitably produces sympathy in the reader, but introduces slow reading in the attempt to understand the mockery. Paul's eagerness to romance Marijana gets revoked by Costello who pushes him towards another suitable Marianna, similar in age to himself, but then laughs at him in Beckettian depiction of the encounter. Words such as "helpfully" and "clumsy" add to the awkward imagery of Paul having sex with Marianna, one blind the other one mutilated and with a sort of paste over his eyes when – "[t]he dress opens via a zip at the back, which helpfully goes

all the way down to the waist. His fingers are slow and clumsy" (*Slow Man* 106). She repetitively urges Paul to change, and stop living a small life – "Become major, Paul. Live like a hero" (229). Costello renders his entire life useless unless he learns to behave worthy of being put into a novel – "Be a main character. Otherwise what is life for?" (229).

Other repetitions of the word slow, leading up to the last chapter and the name itself the *Slow Man*, occur throughout the novel as breadcrumbs, as mentioned, to the legacy of Becket and comedy at the face of awkwardness that Coetzee inevitably inherited in his style. Elizabeth Costello, playing the role of the extended hand of the author, invites irony as a technique of retardation when she recites the beginning of the novel and begs Paul to analyze his accident in literary terms – "Think how well you started. What could be better calculated to engage one's attention than the incident on Magill Road, when young Wayne collided with you and sent you flying through the air *like a cat*" (100, emphasis his). The two worlds ontologically collide in the reader as s/he is made to participate in the trap posed to the protagonist to analyze himself, almost like in psychotherapy, looking in on the most hurtful event of his life like a nice setting to the scene. The irony is lost on the presumed author, but not on the reader, nevertheless, who must inhabit another ontological realm of looking in on the scene but including Coetzee as the ultimate mastermind behind the two of them.

The paradox of the author's dissatisfaction with the character deeply tugs at the reader's common perception of power within the writing. Traditionally envisaged as a mere jotting down of real lives and characters found along the way, the novel from Costello's perspective corresponds to a tug of war between the author and protagonist. Her attempts to reason with Paul into becoming a better character, becoming a more reliable logical personality who deserves to be put in a novel, creates a paradox. She disappointedly says her great opening in of the novel is being wasted – "What a sad decline ever since!" (100).

Ontologically complex, this relationship of the author-character bickering with the protagonist emphasizes the common conceptions of the text as misconceptions and slows down the reader on the path towards reading the plot – the reader is steered towards reading the paradox of two ontological worlds –the text and the reality s/he knows as true. The reader is urged to view Costello's cruelty from the perspective of mother-like care that follows and insert themselves into the fiction in which the author has come down from reality into fiction to motivate the character. Her chastising words about his slowness when he "embarks alone on the slow sideways descent of the stairs, holding tight to the banister, sweating with fear that a crutch will slip" (63) turn into rooting for his change and betterment and try to win over the reader in the battle between author and character.

Yet to no avail. Puzzlingly, Paul seems set in his slow ways, until the author renders power completely to him and surrenders to letting him be – "[s]lower and slower, till by now you are almost at a halt, trapped in a stuffy flat with a caretaker who could not care less about you" (100). In his defense, Paul brings up "the aged and infirm" need not hurry anywhere, and he will cope and get by, albeit: "more slowly than before, perhaps, but what do slow and fast matter any more" (17), he wonders. Thus the repartee of attack and defense continues between the characters of the imagined author and protagonist, providing food for thought to the reader and a slow reading by launching paradox, irony, and synonyms to slow as plot retardation techniques.

Another way the lack of plot becomes compensated is by using metafictional comments, multiple languages, and letters, or in other words through language and narration. In literary studies through narratology and semiotics, there have been theories discovered about the notion of slow reading and slow writing as philosophers and literary critics have been pointing to postmodern literature purposefully slowed down, devoid of action and plot. As Casimir Komenan explains in reference to the *Slow Man*, such literature is "made weighty" ("Writing Slowness" 176) for the purpose of slowing down the process of reading. In plots slowed down and maid weighty with the various mechanisms, the plot itself takes second place to metafiction and side comments. The form becomes more important than the plot.

According to Komenan, Coetzee tenaciously slows down the plot in his many works of fiction and non-fiction, let us bring to mind the letter-writing in *Youth*, for example, and metafiction as the device to question John's actions and speak directly to the reader instead of through the body and

mind of characters in *autre*-biography. Even more so in *Slow Man*, Coetzee uses "devices like soliloquies, dialogues, confabulations, multilingualism, fragmentation, letter writing, and multiplicity of stories" as methods or "retardation ploys whereby the novel evolves slowly" (Komenan 190). Also called retardation devices, these mannerisms of writing focus on language and the loophole of questioning itself, rather than providing the reader enjoyment in the process of reading. To confirm this, Komenan furthers as proof that after the opening "accident on Magill Road, the admittance to the hospital and the amputation of PR's right leg, to the closure of the novel, no significant events happen" (181). Except for the event of Elizabeth Costello, who instead of a person, should be considered as a retardation device, all plot available at the beginning of the novel, remains present throughout as the protagonist refuses Costello's suggestions on how to advance the plot.

Namely, Elizabeth tries to get Paul away from his unreasonable love infatuation with Marijana towards a more plausible love interest Marianna. This second Marianna with two *ns* would suit the plot narrative of two elderly people with similar backgrounds, and even more relevantly, with a similar more plausible future. Costello as Coetzee's "first recurring character" (Aubrey 97), opens the two ontological worlds and dissects them in the middle to descend from reality into fiction and correct Paul in his wrong ways. In the words of Sue Kossew, Elizabeth "unsettles the reader's desire for certainty" ("Border Crossings" 63) when she represents herself as the writer of the *Slow Man*, while the reader experiences Coetzee to already be fulfilling that role. The feeling of walking into a trap pushes the reader into a slow reading so as not to miss anything.

Coetzee also emphasizes the need for slow writing – at least he writes slowly in a process that apt for a "tortoise character" he depicts (*Slow Man* 228). The protagonist Paul Rayment personifies the idea of the "dynamic still" or a retardation device that is on the one hand still, but on the other kept in motion (Wilm 3) in that Paul is still mobile while remaining disabled and refusing a prosthetic leg. What Jan Wilm sees as Coetzee's unique style is what he comes to call the probing "effects of slowness" in his slow philosophy in which a single event propels the character to slow down, stop, rethink and reevaluate her/her life (4). The slow philosophy includes both the formal level and content as playing grounds for Coetzee's talent and Wilm provides the most thorough study into both strata as well as the reader's response.

Such use of such retardation techniques as "temporizing characterization, speech acts, fragmentation, epistolarization, retrospection and embedded tales" enable something Komenan calls "scriptural perfusion," or in other words perforation of multiple techniques within the singularity of a text ("Writing Slowness" 189). In general, metafictional comments of Coetzee's caliber require slowing down for sheer understanding of the text, let alone for intertextual connections. Additionally, the wordy and lengthy depictions of Paul's plight add to the numeracy of pages, but as fillers not content. For all these reasons, a "novel like *Slow Man* should not be read quickly, that is, 'Read for the Plot,' a surface-level component, but it should rather be read slowly, that is, 'Read for the Form,' for the author's 'Style and Language'" (189). These techniques combined provide dialogic and conversational deceleration (182), but also a slowdown in the pace of reading based on the graphic representation such as italicized use of words or repetitiveness.

From another point of view, Gillian Dooley believes the slow pace of plot and events in the *Slow Man* is inspired by Adelaide as a setting to Coetzee's novel. Depicted as a somnambular city of low crime, or "A Dozy City" in her words (258), Adelaide inspires nothing short of a nap in Coetzee's description. In real life, however, Adelaide provides a setting for high murder rates. Dooley ascribes this incongruence to the fact that to Coetzee Australia belongs to "the realm of the personal rather than the political" (258). In contrast to the politically charged plots in South Africa, these choices speak to Coetzee's lack of knowledge or even disinterest in other "sceneries." He was even famously quoted to have said as much in an interview in 1984 when he explained to Folke Rhedin – "I do believe that people can only be in love with one landscape in their lifetime. One can appreciate and enjoy many geographies, but there is only one that one feels in one's bones" ("Interview" 10). The "horrors" of Adelaide belong to the personal in that they lurk from old age, injury, and illness, not "malignant ideologies" like in South Africa (Dooley 263). From that, it extrapolates that the slow plot may also derive.

References of world literature and intertextuality bring about a variety of meanings to different readers and rarely provide singular understanding, this affecting the (slow) reading. According to James Aubrey, and I fully agree, the slowness of the protagonist may be attributed to his refusal to act as the main character, as the hero. Unfortunately, Aubrey equals the role of the hero to Don Quixote in the article and then creates a parallel with something he extrapolated from the novel, but I do not view is that clearly stated – he says that by extension Paul refuses to be a hero like Don Quixote as if that is the only heroic character in world literature (96). I would not go so far as to equal the two. Being a hero, being the main character, and being worth putting in a book (*Slow Man* 229) is something mentioned in the novel, however, the conclusion that Paul should be worthy of Don Quixote is based on two quotes in the text seems an overreach. If extrapolated, Aubrey says Paul is a "literary hero who simply will not behave like Don Quixote," whereas I would agree it refers to a more broad metaphor of Don Quixote's behavior, not a single literary reference.

Further to this, Coetzee's specific type of language blending without a direct translation, but only the use of the readers' prior knowledge of relatively common phrases in many languages – leads to a slower reading (Komenan, "Multilingualism" 127-128). Such cases, despite the innovation and language blending they epitomize,[110] still retard the action and plot from flowing naturally and even disable enjoyment for the reader by obstructing the flow. The reason for this is that there are no clear boundaries between languages, just italic letters to demarcate the transition into another language. Both Indo-European and South African languages get intermixed in the same sentence or paragraph with English, requiring the reader to decipher the meaning and rely on his or her worldliness. For example:

> Elizabeth come live with you, she fix up everything, no more gloomy.' 'Gloom.' 'No more gloom. Is funny word. In Croatia we say *ovaj glumi*, doesn't mean he is gloomy, no, means he is pretending, he is not real. But you not pretending, eh?' (*Slow Man* 251, emphasis his)

This graphical representation of the use of different languages (multilingualism) in *Slow Man* is a tendency Coetzee also shows in *autre*-biography. For instance, review the following two examples from *Scenes from Provincial Life*, and compare them to the previous quote from *Slow Man*. All three mirror each other in style, as Coetzee writes the words in the original language next to the translation, or removes the translation but maintains the words in the original and with accents. Either way, the reading is rendered slower as the reader browses through his/her knowledge to bridge the meaning.

> In his trunk, brought all the way from Cape Town, he has the five hundred cards on which he has written out a basic French vocabulary, one word per card, to carry around and memorize; through his mind runs a patter of French locutions – je viens de, I have just; il me faut, I must. (*Youth* 206)

> Though he knows no Greek words beyond *hubris* and *areté* and *eleutheria*, he spends hours perfecting his Greek script, pressing harder on the downstrokes to give the effect of a Bodoni typeface. (163)

The process of removing the dominant language that feels natural from the text leads to the reader becoming unfamiliar with the speech flow. The author reveals him/herself as a "semiotician" (Komenan, "Multilingualism" 130), and someone who purposefully slows down the reading by

[110] There is nothing that can possibly be added to extensive lists of examples from *Disgrace* and *Slow Man* testifying to the phenomenon of blending, mixing and translating from one language to another. See Casimir Komenan, "Multilingualism," pp. 126-128 for the extensive list of examples.

providing unnatural phrases – too long because of translation, repetitive, or simply unknown. These intellectual games mid-sentence and mid-plot may not be everyone's cup of tea, especially if the reader has come with the sole purpose of discovering what the novel was about and what happened in the end. No such luck in the imposed slow reading of the *Slow Man* as it provides intellectual games to both willing and unwilling participants. In his investigation of both *Disgrace* and *Slow Man*, Casimir Komenan enumerates a total of six languages in these two novels "as fragments or broken pieces blended together" he encounters in Coetzee's work "words in English, Croatian, Russian, Afrikaans, Xhosa and Zulu" ("Multilingualism" 130). All of them combined, "bring about a fragmentary writing, a new form of prose" much slower and innovative, which establishes Coetzee even within post-modernism as "subversive" (130).

Fragmented writing as such introduces Coetzee as a subversive and innovative writer yet again, although his love of form is quite well-known from *autre*-biography. What readers face on top of the subversion in form – is the combination of form and content as destabilizing methods to provoke slow reading. The breadcrumbs often lead to an in-joke between the true author and reader. Both in *The Slow Philosophy* (Wilm 81) and "Writing Slowness" (Komenan 179), authors use the name of the person who ran down Paul Rayment – Wayne Blight as the example of just such play of words. "To blight" as a verb means "to damage" or "to spoil" something, and in recalling his name Paul claims that the boy who hit him, and effectively ruined, damaged and spoilt his life, is called "Wayne something-or-other, Bright or Blight" (*Slow Man* 20).

This Blight of his nightmares has "befallen" (21) Paul, he "bumps into him" (27), he "struck him down" (54) as an angel of God and then turned into a metaphor. The persona of Wayne Blight becomes a bigger metaphor in the novel – a symbol of an accident waiting to happen. He turns into a trope and an eponym as well:

> Why not let him be, coasting along peacefully on his bicycle, oblivious of Wayne Bright or Blight, let us call him Blight, roaring up from behind to blight his life and land him first in hospital and then back in this flat with its inconvenient stairs? (81)

Also a verb apparently, Costello continues with the "blight" word play and even calls Paul by this wretched trope when she accuses him of being a "punishment brought down to blight the last days of her life, an incomprehensible penance she is sentenced to speak, to recite, to repeat" (162). Blight also converts into a metaphor for life's unexpected traps, one day you could be breezing about unawares until "Wayne Blight guns his engine" (256) and comes for you. Although such word-play represents a source of enjoyment for the readers, it slows the reading down to even a halt, at times, until all the possible meanings have been sorted out.

The Slow Man has a slow philosophy of existing in the modern world. As long as living slowly, not changing, or adapting is possible, he is willing to give it a try, but not his best mind you. Through the "slow" life mantra, Coetzee cultivates the idea of maladaptation in the modern world, especially in the face of the changing world as one grows older and the topic of power to make a decision about your body when all else fails. His Paul Rayment shows courage, full of harmful self-sabotage, but courage nonetheless – to be himself despite criticism. The slow philosophy of change, or his lack of engagement with life frustrates the storytelling of the novel as well, which is why the author Costello flings herself from reality into fiction to speed the character along to his destiny. This destiny she has envisioned is at odds with Paul's desires and they battle out their relationship on the level of the novel with metafictional comments. In other words, Coetzee takes advantage of metafiction to frustrate and slow down the plot.

Alongside all other techniques he uses, metafiction provides ground for a discussion on intertextuality, power, storytelling, and border crossing between reality and fiction – all issues he has extensively covered before, but he also approaches them from another angle in the *Slow Man*. In this novel, the imagined ontological worlds get mashed similarly like in *autre*-biography, readers "watch"

the author and character fight for power, all the while perceiving that the true mastermind – Coetzee, hides behind metafictional comments, *Elizabeth Costello* and the slow philosophy of reading.

5.2.2 Authorship as Border Crossing between Reader and Text

> Now let me ask you straight out, Mrs Costello: Are you real?' 'Am I real? I eat, I sleep, I suffer, I go to the bathroom. I catch cold. Of course I am real. As real as you.'
>
> (Coetzee, *Slow Man* 258)

Investigations into border crossings such as literal, linguistic, or ontological ones get launched into any Coetzee's novel. He is often accused of having utter disregard towards conventional borders posed between the readers and text in an ontological sense because fiction and reality merge in his novels. Authors and characters meet instead of inhabiting separate worlds as authors "visit" their characters (*Elizabeth Costello*). This phenomenon also occurs in *autre*-biography, as Coetzee annulled the borders between the protagonist and the author by referring to him(self) in the third person.

In the *Slow Man*, Coetzee crosses the border of language appropriacy, as mentioned in his slow philosophy, when one language slides without translation into another. In the words of Casimir Komenan, these instances of "linguistic fractures" ("Writing Slowness" 182) of the text are created for the sole purpose of becoming decelerators and slowing down the reading of the *Slow Man.*[111] The way these structures provide retardation of the plot and slowness of reading, as he points out, comes down to "increasing the number of words" and "creating recursive constructions and linguistic impurity" (183). They blur boundaries between the reader and the expected content, which leads to slower reading in order to decipher the intended meaning.

On an ontological level, Coetzee crosses the common restrictions between the protagonist and the author supposedly living in their separate worlds – the fictional and realistic one respectively. Sue Kossew systematically classifies the structure of *Slow Man* as clearly twofold – the beginning denotes a purposefully realistic account of Paul's debilitating accident, and the "metafictional entry into the text of Elizabeth Costello" marks the second part of the novel ("Border Crossings" 63). Metafiction or the questioning of oneself about the self, one's feelings about storytelling in authorship and one's life – all come together in the *Slow Man*. As Costello replies to Paul – she is real, or at least as "[a]s real as you" (*Slow Man* 258). The meaning of the phase is pregnant with possibilities – either both of them embody characters and by extension are unreal; or to the author, the character is real and inhabits the same space as him/her in the process of creation; or both of them are unreal because Coetzee epitomizes the real author to they must be characters. In all of these likelihoods, the crossing from reality into fiction and subverting borders of the text unsettles certainty in the reality-fiction relationship (Kossew, "Border Crossings" 63).

Certainty is predominantly important for the reader as it establishes a pact with the author about what is allowed in a novel, and what boundaries are not meant to be crossed. Prior to postmodern literature more rules applied, but in Coetzee, as a postmodern author, little remains sacred. According to Zoe Wicomb, the reader in *Slow Man* "like Paul, is cut loose" from the moment "another level of reality is established within the fictional work itself" (8). This "cut loose" refers to techniques that give the author's encouragement to the reader to make up his/her own mind about the events in the novel since the author, the real author, and the protagonist, cannot come to an agreement about what is real. She sees two competing realities in the *Slow Man*, the "world which we as readers enter, then Paul's 'reality' would turn out to be that of another world" (8) and of course, that of Coetzee's reality as the author who sent Costello from one place to another as the real puppeteer.

[111] See Casimir Komenan's "Writing Slowness" for enumeration of all lines in French, Dutch, Russian, Latin, Spanish and Croatian languages as he classified and extrapolated them form *Slow Man*, pp. 181-183.

What then connects the worlds, but also highlights their separate nature is the metafictional commentary sent from Coetzee's world as a sign to the reader that the world as s/he knows it is about to end.

The only strain maintaining the two fragile worlds real is the fact that the author has decided not to cross over between worlds through a convention with the reader. But the fragility gets broken through metafiction. Both Paul and Elizabeth as characters perform the function of metafictional commentary aimed at the reader but in the form of self-questioning and uncertainty. In a text devoid of certainty, when characters highlight something and then deny it, the questions stay with the reader:

> 'So,' she says. 'I am rather a doubting Thomas, as you see.' And when he looks puzzled: 'I mean, wanting to explore for myself what kind of being you are. Wanting to be sure,' she proceeds, and now he is really losing her, 'that our two bodies would not just pass through each other. Naïve, of course. We are not ghosts, either of us – why should I have thought so? Shall we proceed?' (*Slow Man* 80)

The reader is left puzzled as to why Elizabeth Costello would say she and Paul were ghosts and unreal unless that was exactly what they were – fictional characters in a novel. Even further, they inhabit only the mind of the reader as "ghosts," without a physical form in the world. Once this spiraling thinking begins, the reader dwells in multiple ontological worlds as s/he is required to read the lines of the novel and the between the lines of worlds – the fictional world and the real.

Similar to *autre*-biography in which the reading depended on knowledge about the author from the real world and then an intrinsic comparison to "John" in *Scenes from Provincial Life*, in *Slow Man* the reader must inhabit and compare ontological realities of the text with his/her reality in which the reader is s/he, sitting on their comfortable couch and the writer is J. M. Coetzee. All other realities that seem real to characters – deepen the sense of literary realities and narratological possibilities, but eventually belong to fiction. Only with that frame of mind can readers engage in Costello's metafictional games and read the novel as a visitation made by an author attempting to play God.

Costello and Rayment equally try to play God – Costello to Rayment and Rayment to the Jokić family. Kenneth Pellow deals with this concept and calls Costello a "trolling, godlike figure and a busybody" (540). But still, a unique feature to these godlike creators takes place as Costello-the-author is caught red-handed in the process of creation. She negotiates with the protagonist mid-writing. What *Slow Man* brings to the table, as opposed to other examples of metalepsis in postmodernist fiction is the acting out of the author trying to bring the protagonist to life – Costello "acts to bring her protagonist into action" (Ergin and Dolcerocca 217). Some literary critics view this as Coetzee's impatience with mimesis (Samuelson 41), but it also adds to innovation in metalepsis. Such treatment of characters, unwilling to reside within the confines of the eponymous book in which they feature (41), additionally assures the reader boundaries of the established norms are broken.

The concept of author-protagonist traditional roles in which the author writes what s/he has witnessed is questioned at every step. The character and the author-character both refuse to be contained. They jump from one ontological level to another, while the reader inhabits the third. All these deliver a "multi-level structure of reality in which there is no highest level" (Ergin and Dolcerocca 216). The world of fiction and the world of experience collide in the reader. Word play additionally inflates ironical language as a wedge between two considerations of the world – ironic and realistic. For example, Paul insists on discovering Elizabeth's plans, and she toys with irony:

> Paul's insistence on what the concrete and the real is, and his ignorance of fiction around him create a metafictional dramatic irony, which Coetzee gives away in a quick-witted word play: Paul corrects Costello for rhyming his name Rayment with „payment", insisting that it rhymes with the French word *vraiment,* really. However, he seems to forget his first name in this

> pretentious game of rhymes: Paul Rayment in French pronunciation sounds more like *pas vraiment,* not really. (Ergin and Dolcerocca 216)

By insisting on an answer about whether he has any autonomy and what Costello's plans entail for the future and such, instead of proving his independence, Paul sounds in the end like he does not even know his name. This achieves the linguistic border crossing as the character sees his name in one way – (Rayment) *vraiment (*true), and the author another – (Paul Rayment) *pas vraiment* (untrue). The effect of comedy is achieved in his insistence that he is a real man, autonomous, but the reader concludes that Paul focuses only on the last name, and the author made fun of him by combining his name and last name into something that sounds like "not really" thus providing the final judgment that the character is fictional. In this way, border crossing continues into the realm of linguistics to achieve the effect of reality in fiction.

All the mentioned authorial tricks subvert established border tropes with readers of novels and belong to postmodern literature. Aside from the ontological borders subverted, the linguistic ones provide Beckettian play on the established realism. The border crossing between physical boundaries of the text, or literal borders mapping established stories of varied nations add to the storyline of fiction versus real. By using varied ontological levels that pool in the reader, metafiction, and inadvertent linguistic play on words – the characters remain unconscious about what the reader understands. The border crossings of linguistic and ontological styles achieve the effect of intimacy with the reader because of a "secret shared" with the author, behind the backs of characters is accomplished.

5.2.2.1 Border Crossing between Author and Protagonist – Unwanted Visitor and Unwilling Host

> 'I AM HAVING visitors,' he announces to the Costello woman. 'It won't be your kind of evening, I'm afraid. You may want to make other arrangements.' 'Of course. I'm glad to see you getting back into the social whirl. Let me think … What shall I do? Maybe I will go to the cinema. Is there anything worth seeing, do you know?' 'I am not making myself clear. When I say make other arrangements, I mean make arrangements to stay somewhere else.'
>
> (Coetzee, *Slow Man* 128, emphasis his).

Numerous acts of visitation take place in *Slow Man*, all of which unwelcome, surprising and unwanted. The most important boundary-crossing visitation transpires when Elizabeth Costello as the character from *Elizabeth Costello* the novel becomes the author in *Slow Man* in Chapter 13. This event marks the ontological crossing between two worlds in the reader's mind, as we cannot say it happens in reality. Post this event, other visitations arise. The visitation trope extends to the (un)welcome intrusion crossing borders of one's house, or in other words – their home, then the unwelcome visitor is explored through the physical borders of one's country as an extended metaphor of immigration into one's home, and finally, the trope is protracted to the evaluation of the once visitor – turned host through the character of Paul Rayment who becomes the host after adopting Australia as his home.

In any case, the tropes of physical borders, home as a concept, and visitation become discovered through the uninvited visitor and an unwilling host. As Michael Marais explains, in *Slow Man* the "focus on the unannounced visitor and the unwilled change that he may precipitate in the unwilling host is more apparent than in any of the previous novels" (277). The border trope, and especially the idea of the unannounced and unexpected visitor extends to three parts in this novel and will be explored as such: the trespass into one's house/home and invasion of privacy, the host/guest

paradigm in creation, and the invasion of one's country/home. Coetzee goes about the development of these ideas through the metaphor of author/character, fiction/reality, and mainstream/Other.

The physical borders of one's home, or temporary dwelling and the expectancy of an invitation before a guest arrives are broken on all of those occasions. For instance, when Costello simply takes Paul's key and becomes a roommate instead of even a short-time visitor, she crosses societal expectations. On another occasion, Paul receives Marianna as a sex guest, yet also a bit unwelcome and definitely not sought after by him, but by the narrative represented in Costello who sets up the affair. One more unwelcome visit ensues when the man who made him into an invalid, Wayne Blight, comes by without warning to Paul's hospital room, most likely to avoid a lawsuit. And towards the end of the novel, Paul and Elizabeth pay an unexpected visit to the Jokić's apparently to recover stolen items, but perhaps rather catch a glimpse of the happy family and satisfy the narrative. Still, theirs is an equally uninvited appearance and unwilling host in the form of Marijana just like all the visits paid to Paul.

Aside from "real" visits within the novel, the intellectual unwelcome visitation is explored through the idea of visitation between inspiration (character/guest) and the author (host). In the narrative, Elizabeth Costello and Paul Rayment as the imagined author and character "constitute the central axis of conflict in the novel between order and resistance; restoration and damage; fact and fiction" (Ergin and Dolcerocca 215). The game of extending the invitation and revoking it provides a deeper question of whether feeling welcome is even necessary for intellectual visitation to occur. With that in mind, Elizabeth arrives at Paul's house uninvited but expecting a welcome, or in other words, she feels at home in Paul's intellectual space as his creator. Paul, on the other hand, feels flabbergasted by her visit and existence, but also feels powerless as he knows something bigger than himself is at play. Paul believes himself incapable of withdrawing the invitation as he did not expect a visitor in the first place and never extended one. The conclusion is made, however, that inspiration needs no invitation in writing, it actually needs to be surprising so as to possess the author.

Coetzee drives at the conclusion that the host (author) has no power over the character (guest) because inspiration drives the author despite appearances. Marais elaborates on the author as host and Costello's tangible loss of power despite the appearance of invasion (visit to his house uninvaded) on her part because

> the host is not sovereign in this relationship: she is invaded and taken hostage by the unannounced visitor and, in the process, dispossessed of self-possession. To respond obediently to inspiration in the way described by Costello is thus to give oneself up to that inspiration. It is to write, and therefore to act, while being acted upon by an unknown authority. It is to write despite oneself. ("Coming into Being" 282)

In the end, Paul is mistaken in feeling powerless as he represents inspiration that has come to possess the author. In this case, the roles are reversed, the character/author Elizabeth is used to explore this idea on authorial possession – how the author (guest) came to Paul's house (host). Whereas Paul considers "his author" to have the power of his creation, to host him, Costello, on the other hand, sees herself as powerless and possessed to write about Paul. "'You came to me,' she says" (*Slow Man* 81). "In certain respects I am not in command of what comes to me. You came, along with the pallor and the stoop and the crutches and the flat that you hold on to so doggedly and the photograph collection and all the rest" (81). The author must give way to inspiration. Thus, Costello becomes the host of inspiration, and gives away her power, in order to create. This "unknown authority" forces her to write despite herself (Marais "Coming into Being" 282), and despite the dislike towards him as a character, which speaks to her powerlessness.

Coetzee further develops the idea of reciprocity between the author and character – Elizabeth says to Paul – "'You came to me. You –' and he interrupts her all indignant – '*I* came to *you*? *You* came to me!'" (*Slow Man* 85, emphasis his). The imagined author and her character accuse one another of being the host and holding power. In this way, Coetzee provokes thoughts on the subject

of inspirational possession – when the muse strikes, not only the author becomes changed, but everyone else in the presence of the "inspirational" visit, regardless of how inconvenient. They constantly pin-pong power between them, but also juxtapose it, claiming plausible deniability. It is this "antagonism between Rayment and Costello" established in this scene that "governs the mood of much of the novel," they promote *Slow Man* as an exercise of authorial power (Head 86).

Michael Marais, as a famous postcolonial critic, sees Costello's inspiration to share power with Paul as equal to hospitality towards the Other. He introduces the trope of the Other combined with hospitality in reviewing *Slow Man.* In this view, the Other in the image of Paul embodies the unwilling apparition, the Other unaware of his power, as he comes to possess one in inspiration ("Coming into Being" 281), but remains oblivious to it. Not only does the apparition of Costello as the author become an unwilling host of inspiration in this view, but also the reader assumes the role of the host to the text.

As always in Coetzee, the reader stands for the ultimate host of the novel and settles the debate on power between the unwanted visitor and unwilling host. The nature of fiction and the process of creation are put on trial in the mind of the reader who is awarded the investigation into the responsibility and origin "of authorial inspiration" (Head 86). The trope of the reader as an invaded and unwilling host matches this procedure of determining the rightfulness of authorial power.

The way that Coetzee turns *Slow Man* into a reader's world is described by Marais through the concept of reading a novel as "an attentional event" ("Coming into Being" 294). Essentially, the writer assumes the place of host who aspires to possess the reader, willingly or even against his/her wishes. Such an attentional event represents an "endeavor" that "blurs the boundaries between host and visitor: the novel, which hosts the writer's spectral gift of self, wishes to possess the reader, to make of him a host and of itself his visitor" (294). The gift of the self must possess the host, must be intriguing to the host but unwillingly according to this view. A willing host may not be possessed as s/he has extended the offer of hospitality.

The idea of being hostage repetitively emerges from both sides, the author and the character, but if the novel provides quality content, the reader may also become possessed and turn into a receptive host. How many times has a book proved unputdownable if the reader lent him/herself to become a hostage to its content? In a loss of control to extend the invitation and become host, Marais encounters true possession of the reader, meaning loss of power precedes inspiration, both the author as host and reader as host. In other words, "[w]hile the reader under inspiration becomes the host of the text, it is only in having been taken hostage by it. The reader hosts the work through losing the ability to extend an invitation to it" (290). Possession takes place only if the host remains unwilling.

There is also an expectation of unconditional hospitality that predates the possession of the reader as "*Slow Man* is haunted by the unconditional hospitality through which it has come into being but of which it is merely a trace. In other words, its desire to possess the reader, to assert control over the reader's reading of the novel, is beyond its control" (296). The reader, once possessed, shares the author's possession, the original inspiration as well as the responsibility of providing language as the home for the Other:

> Under inspiration, then, the reader is faced with exactly the responsibility that confronts the writer, that is, to animate the word, to make of language a home for the other. As in the case of writerly responsibility, the issue at stake here is not whether or not this task can be accomplished but the fact that, in the event of being inspired by the text, the reader is charged with the responsibility for doing so. (290)

The responsibility to animate an imaginary world extends from the author to the reader and is shared. Just like the author who was inspired by a character had to channel the possession until s/he animated the world around them in the form of language, equally so must the reader reinterpret the meaning of the said language by once again becoming possessed, albeit in a different way. Based on the readers' personal predilection, s/he becomes host to the text, authorial intention, and the original

inspiration as well. The reader becomes the target audience, the receptor of the message, and the ultimate unwilling host in the process of writing.

These varied acts of visitation within the fictional world of the book, and outside it in the reader's mind as a meeting place reality and fiction in the form of Elizabeth Costello's trips to and from different novels (*Lives of Animals*, *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man*) aim to question the premise of boundaries of the visitor and the host – "Visitor Elizabeth is both visitor and visitation" (Kossew, "Border Crossings" 67) crossing a classical threshold between worlds. Paul often wonders something along the lines of – "*Who is this madwoman I have let into my home?*" but he also demands to know the opposite, why he is chosen – or "'Who am I to you?' (*Slow Man* 81, emphasis his). Elizabeth Costello, speaking in codes and as an unwanted visitor, also represents a conundrum for the character to solve about what is real. We return to her godlike nature of crossing between worlds and coming less like an angel and more like an apparition. Such trips intuitively turn Paul's world on its head, because he comes to doubt whether he himself is real.

Indeed, the subversion of the border trope between the character and author emerges in a*utre*-biography as well, in particular with the character of John-the-author and John-the-boy (or John-the-adult), who converse simultaneously in the reader's mind as the (unwilling or even unknowing) host requires to discern their separate voices. The instability of the text produces that the imagined borders between the text and reader become postmodern and ironic, unstable to the limit of collapsing unless the reader steps in. This, in turn, leads to the questioning of the real world, or in Sue Kossew's words – "the discourses of certainty that set up material and imperial borders" are subverted ("Border Crossings" 62).

Also in *autre*-biography, Coetzee has knowingly explored the themes of "migration, transnationalism, and authorship" previously, what both *Youth* and *Slow Man* share refers to Coetzee's challenging of "the national as a fixed and valuable category" (Vold 35). Just like John-of-*Youth* leaves Africa to "come back home" to the country of his mind, so does Paul return to Australia after his parents whisk him to France again. Coetzee's novels and autobiographical writing reestablishes the notion that one may be born in one location but feel another nationality as closer to him/herself for any reason possible. The country of the mind always wins in Coetzee, although he extensively deals both in *autre*-biography and in novels with physical borders between countries and unwilling hosts to the unannounced visitors in the form of the Other – or immigrants.

The way the real geographical border trope connects to the fiction/reality in novels we had previously discussed is in its very identity – the border symbolizes an imaginary line drawn on physical maps. It also lives and in the people's minds as the inspiration of national pride, so in fact, a physical frontline between nations is merely a convention that only exists on maps, but never in physical spaces. Literally a line on an invented map, a border stands for the story of nations we tell ourselves through history. Especially in *Slow Man*, with the question of economic immigration, the visitor and the host can be viewed more broadly as the host country and guest/immigrants arriving in that country post natives.

In Australia's particular case, however, as Coetzee wrote in *The Good Story*, history is merely represented as a story that changes – meaning that the story changes with the narrative consciousness. Initially, Coetzee says, "I have lived as a member of a conquering group which for a long while thought of itself in explicitly racial terms and believed that what it was achieving in settling ("civilizing") a foreign land was something to be proud of, but which then, during my lifetime, for reasons of a world historical nature, had to sharply revise its way of thinking about itself and its achievements, and therefore ta revise the story it told itself about itself, that is, its history" (*The Good Story* 78). Australian European citizens had to admit they had conquered land from the natives, that in fact while they represented themselves as hosts they were guests and immigrants. After people "underwent some kind of evolution of consciousness" the "better and truer history" reveals "white Australians today remain the heirs and beneficiaries of a great crime committed by their forebears" (78).

Coetzee further focuses on people's ability to revise their history and also suffer few bouts of consciousness but rather get on with their lives (79). The visitor as the last "guest" arrives in the

country, in this case, taken as Australia, but if s/he is European and white, s/he in self-provided entitlement sees him/herself as the host over natives. It is this paradox that Coetzee highlights, people forgive themselves their historical trespass easily and keep on living their revised stories as history. "My great-grandparents were criminals (the revised story goes), complicit in an evil project whose fruits I am at present enjoying. Yet at the same time, my great-grandparents were courageous, upstanding people who suffered hardship so that their descendants could have a good life" (*The Good Story* 79).

So in *Slow Man*, in light of these views, Paul and Marijana come to represent immigrants, the Other, but European and white, albeit unwelcome by Australians who were there first. Acts of visitation and hospitality in this narrative are related to the border trope investigation of immigration and host versus visitor in that Marijana from the Balkans is Other to Paul from France. The character of Paul Rayment was born in France, raised in Australia, and then returned to France by his parents only to decide for himself he was better off in Australia and move there permanently. At that point, he can be viewed as host to Marijana who arrives later.

The migrations of the protagonist were solely economic and for other reasons, he was at no time forced to leave any country, thus I note that Coetzee focuses on economic willing migration rather than forced – war or poverty-stricken people and their migratory needs such as during his African period. The duality of the character with no land haunts both the imagined author and character alike. They ponder on the meaning of language as an identity marker in people who have been made homeless but migrant tendencies of modern living. Paul accepts the duality of his position:

> 'Don't mock me, Paul. I said nothing about returning to French. You lost touch with French long ago. All I say is, you speak English like a foreigner.' 'I speak English like a foreigner because I am a foreigner. I am a foreigner by nature and have been a foreigner all my life. And I don't see why I should apologise. If there were no foreigners there would be no natives.' (*Slow Man* 231)

Paul accentuates the trope of immigrant versus native, of home versus adoptive home but also highlights the duality that without the one (mainstream), there would be no Other. The distinguishing of natives comes from locating the barbarians, the unknown of the equation. But one may be a foreigner in one's own country, as he explains, just like John was in *Boyhood* and just like Paul feels "all [his]life" (231). Paul sees himself as dual – "*Not cold*, he will say, *and not French either. A man who sees the world in his own way and who loves in his own way*" (162, emphasis his).

As an immigrant once hosted by Australia, now in the changing modern times Paul is provided with the opportunity to welcome another wave of immigrants – the Jokić family as a semi-local. His personal history stands for the idea that everyone is someone's host or visitor, mainstream or other. To native Australians living many generations on the island, Paul is nothing but an immigrant however long he may inhabit the island, but to the Jokićs' he is the host, the native to their Other. A nit-picking history buff may go so far as to say that once not so long ago Australian indigenous tribes played more than unwilling hosts to English and other European immigrants, thus fairly recently Europeans of any kind represented uninvited guests in Australia.[112]

A mirroring image to this situation is provided in the Paul and Elizabeth – Paul who may be seen as an immigrant for all sense and purposes should play the host in his home to Elizabeth who represents "native Australian" in this context – Australian national two-three generations indigenous to the island:

[112] Not to go in detail here, but Coetzee and Kurtz debate on the meaning of being Australian and the particular psychological conundrum of feeling pride of one's ancestors at the same time of realizing their crimes towards Aboriginals. Additionally, important for the debate on host and visitor, Coetzee develops the idea of doublethink and draconian punishments Australians provide to asylum seekers nowadays as a conundrum from people who historically did the same think a few decades ago. See *The Good Story* for details on Australia, pp. 77-99.

> By turning up at Paul's door as an unannounced and unexpected visitor, Elizabeth relies on his hospitality to take her in. It is this trope of host and visitor (or even host and parasite) that returns us to the border of the nation itself. Contemporary popular discourses in Australian politics have emphasized the importance of policing borders to keep out unwelcome refugees or asylum seekers. (Kossew, "Border Crossings" 67)

What Sue Kossew rightfully draws our attention to in this quote refers to the changing policies Australia has adopted in modern history – from all immigrants should be welcome to the island to "emphasized the importance of policing borders to keep out unwelcome refugees or asylum seekers" (67), or otherwise put, unwelcoming host to the unexpected and uninvited visitor. Coetzee also spoke about the draconic measures towards immigrants that Australia implemented – as the "new legislation threatens the draconian penalty of indefinite detention on some hellhole of an island for people who fail to follow the prescribed procedure for claiming asylum – namely, filling in a form at a refugee centre somewhere abroad and taking their place in a long queue – and instead choose to pay a shady smuggler a hefty fee to transport them as near as he can get to the Australian mainland" (*The Good Story* 88).

He does not mention explicitly any of these unwelcome policies in *Slow Man*. The more recent immigrants – The Jokićs, have lost status and family in their relocation and despite Paul's offer to replace both, the price seems too high as Marijana is sagely aware there would be a price. The moment Paul becomes the host to the Balkans family, he also adopts the position of the Australian towards Balkans, towards old Europe.

According to Vermeulen, the status of the Balkans as old Europe is mainstream to Australia and other to Western Europe – "Paul's impossible desire for a Marijana who is linked to the Balkan and to epic form is, in other words, essentially a novelistic desire" ("Abandoned Creatures" 669) or a desire to integrate the Other in the self that was lost. Trying to joke with Paul, Elizabeth points to the Jokić family as she tries to guess whether they will have kept the old European ways of receiving uninvited quests wholeheartedly, or they would be more like Paul – and reject their unexpected visit. She juxtaposes Paul as settled and Australian, host to the "Other":

> Should they pay a last unannounced visit, for old times' sake? How will the Jokićs take it? Will they slam the door in the faces of their surprise visitors; or, coming from the same world, broadly speaking, as the Mittigas, a world gone or going, will they make them welcome and offer them tea and cake and send them home laden with gifts? (*Slow Man* 241).

The border crossing between Elizabeth points to has the air of irrelevant in the part of the world Marijana comes from, whereas she is quite aware Australia considers it impermissible. Her questions, then, point to the amalgamation of two cultures and a sense of wonder on the part of Elizabeth as a native Australian as to when the amalgamation occurs in immigrants – at what point in time they become Australian and stop the customs of their native land.

The unwillingness of the host to accept the guest Elizabeth mirrors the unwillingness of the host country to accept him (Paul). Despite his claims that the language he speaks with an accent does not bother him, his loneliness and lack of Australian friends speak to "the relation between a language and its speakers" (Clarkson, "Countervoices" 165). Clarkson mainly arguments the relationship of the native and the foreign in the English language (165). The language in her view embodies a linguistic boundary to be crossed, one that in spite of the lack of awareness for the visitor is still there for the host. In what I may only presume the meaning, Clarkson refers to the *chthonic* "butterfly" in language, which dictates "the boundary between the native and the foreign" (165). If the *chthonic* means earth(ly), innate, then the comparison to a foreigner's language that is changeable we may infer from "butterfly."

What perplexes in the experience is that "[n]ot even the Australian woman Elizabeth Costello, Rayment's sometime companion in the novel, offers significant points of alignment with the Australian experience" (Mehigan Ch. 12) and curtails his sense of loneliness, but she uses him like an experiment, a test subject for her own research. The sense of the relationship between them has been repeated numerous times in Coetzee's work – and it reads like that of a scientist and test subject rather than personal. I argue this characteristic or manner of representing a relationship represents Coetzee's nature and it is repetitive in *autre*-biography as well (think of the relationship between John and his women in *Youth*, for instance). Costello as host to Paul fails to make him feel welcome as "[h]er interactions with the protagonist underscore the isolation that Paul Rayment still feels in a country decade after the migration of his family from Europe to Australia" (Ch. 12).

We return to the main premise of the authorial design in *Slow Man* that just like in *Scenes from Provincial Life*, brings back issues of place and belonging (Head 89). One may feel out of place at one's home, one's body, and even one's language. On the other hand, Coetzee develops the paradigm of unwilling host/ unwelcome guest to advance issues of resistance towards "authorial design" in the image of Costello (89), fluidity of the perception of host versus guest and its constant changeable status as well as the topic of geographical boundaries as stories:

> Rayment's impulse to resist the authorial design brings us back to the question of place and belonging, since the rejection of Costello is based on his perception of her outsider status. Costello's manipulations of a group of characters, configured to demonstrate the fluidity of national identity under the sign of economic migrancy, is shown to be brittle, as insubstantial as Drago's fake photographs. As a treatment of ethnicity and belonging the novel reveals itself to be a forgery.[113] (89)

What Coetzee as a recent immigrant in Australia raises is "the sensitive question (for Australians) of how economic migrants should be received, in a nation built on the efforts of migrants; it also throws the issue of personal history and belonging into uncertainty" (18). Through the trope of host/guest, he shows that host changes based on history as a story we tell ourselves in different generations. He also broaches the changeability of the fact/fiction conundrum viewed from the perspective of the author as host, but devoid of power as the inspiration (character) comes to possess him/her. And finally, the reader as the host of the texts drives issues of power in a narrative, in which case in Coetzee the reader always wins as the ultimate intellectual host to the narrative.

5.2.2.2 Power Struggle – When Characters Disobey

> 'No good pulling faces at me, Mr Rayment,' she says. 'I did not ask for this any more than you did.' 'Ask for what?' He cannot keep the irritation from his voice. 'I did not ask for you. I did not ask to spend a perfectly good afternoon in this gloomy flat of yours.' 'Then go! Leave the flat, if it so offends you. I still have not the faintest idea why you came. What do you want with me?'
>
> (Coetzee, *Slow Man* 85)

[113] See Dominik Head's entire Ch. 4, but especially the part on *Slow Man*, for details on the interconnectedness between economic migrants and the treatment of the topic of authenticity. Although I have divided authenticity, authorial design and immigration, he connects them and deserves a through reading. See *The Cambridge Introduction to J. M. Coetzee,* pp. 85-90 and *Preface*.

Various authorial techniques that account for anti-illusionism[114] in Coetzee's work, persevere in both his *autre*-biography and novels. Through the process of anti-illusionism, the author creates an appearance of realism. The illusion of realism as a technique that gives the impression of truthfulness without actually being truthful, Coetzee investigated in Beckett's and he wrote extensively about it as testified in his republished essays in *Doubling the Point*. What Hayes also points out in Coetzee's endeavors post-Beckett as his influence is the so-called "illusion of objectivity" ("Influence and Intertextuality" 157). He believes that "Beckett's play with the illusion of objectivity, or what he rather ironically calls 'the principle of the separation of the three estates of author, narrator and character'"[115] (157) interested Coetzee, and he copied it into his work. In other words, the style of representing "the consciousness of the consciousness" that points to its consciousness (158) is visible in Coetzee like a closed system pointing onto itself through metafictional commentary.

In the initial quote, one such example transpires between the imagined author and her character as they quibble over who came first – the inspiration (character)or the execution (writing), and more ironically over who should leave whom because of the tension that transpires between them. As they both utter words "[y]ou came to me" (*Slow Man* 85), such struggle points to authorial issues Coetzee pursues in other novels and *autre*-biography, particularly in the *Summertime* when he tries to supposedly leave all power to biographers and testimonies. Similarly, anti-illusionism is used in *Slow Man* to point elsewhere as in a magical trick – while both characters deny responsibility for their actions and desires, they also participate in a silent struggle to manipulate each other's behavior.

Another such intriguing relationship that transpires from anti-illusionism and self-reflexivity creates the impression in *Slow Man* that authorial power is limited in postmodern literature – so characters may disobey. For instance, Costello guides Paul to the right behavior, which implies there is a wrong one. She often nudges him and asks him to change his mind, as if he could, as if he were animate – "Reflect, Paul. Do you seriously mean to seduce your employee into abandoning her family and coming to live with you? Do you think you will bring her happiness?" (82), or "'Who are you, Paul Rayment, and what is so special about your amorous inclinations? Do you think you are the only man who in the autumn of his years, the late autumn, I may say, thinks he has found what he has never known heretofore, true love? […] You will have to make a stronger case for yourself'" (82). As if the burden of proof of his very existence lies on the accused, Paul should according to this narrative technique, explain why he should become the main character in her novel, as if auditioning for the role.

These authorial techniques, prevalent in all Coetzee's work, include anything from characters and authors calling each other out, referring to something only the reader was privy to, or breaking the illusion by metafictionally addressing the reader. Metafictional elements in both characters and writers in the *Slow Man* perpetuate the issue of enumerating possible relationships between authors and their characters, especially in breaking the bonds of common relation between authors and characters in which the author holds all authorial power.

But be that as it may, Coetzee always wonders about the future of metafiction, about what lies behind anti-illusionism, and authorial trickery has never been on his agenda per se. It is what comes after that he wonders about – "[a]nti-illusionism is, I suspect, only a marking of time, a phase of recuperation, in the history of the novel. The question is, what next?" (*Doubling the Point* 27). Coetzee uses the term illusionism to explain what used to be called realism, but in the end, he calls for such "common ploy of postmodernism" to be used for an end, not for the effect only, of as he says "in the end there is only so much mileage to be got out of the ploy" (27) as through repetition it loses its effect. Attwell sees this as skepticism towards Coetzee's terminology – "the impasse of anti-illusionism" – which is the radical metafiction represented as an end in itself ("Editor's Introduction" to *Doubling the Point* 6-7). There are too few options to radical metafiction – "Once it has shaken off

[114] The convention often found in postmodern fiction, in which the author displays the conventions of the novel, thus breaking the illusion of reading. Coetzee wrote on Beckett extensively and about his anti-illusionary techniques. See *Doubling the Point*, pp. 15-50.

[115] Since the inspiration for this section is taken from Beckett and Coetzee's essay about *Murphy* – "The Comedy of Point of View in *Murphy*," Hayes takes the quotes here from the essays published in *Doubling the Point*, pp. 36-37.

the tyranny of the real, radical metafiction has few options: it can simply bequeath a record of failed attempts at transcendence, or, in defiance, it can try to turn paralysis into a virtue by appealing to notions of play, though only at the risk of calling up the ghosts of Romanticism" ("Editor's Introduction" to *Doubling the Point* 6-7). With regards to play – both linguistically and in terms of plot, it inundates all his work.

The appearance of Elizabeth Costello in Chapter 13 creates a situation bordering on the absurd (Boehmer et al. 13). The imagined author of the novel visits her imaginary world in order to badger the main character into behaving more properly so that readers might enjoy his future story. The art and life, instead of the former mimetically representing the latter, which is the established norm – melt one into another and blend two ontological realities into one. Boehmer adds that the intricacy can be explained as "the (real) author's fictional alter ego," in this case Elizabeth Costello, "tells her creation to act more like a fictional character," (13) meaning that Paul should adopt some qualities of Don Quixote for instance, and make decisions more easily and think about the consequences because that is what makes for a great read. She says to Paul "Be a main character," and "Become major" so that "So that you may be worth putting in a book" (*Slow Man* 229).

If examined literally, the author coming from reality would in that case urge a real person to mimic fictional characters and "act more like a fictional character so that his (non-fictional) life might be redeemed" (Boehmer et al. 13), or so he would become more worthy of being placed in a book, more hero-like. "Life and art are thus reversible, and complementary: to live a fulfilling life (according to Elizabeth) is to be worthy of fictionalization, the lesson that 'major' literary characters have to impart to us" (13). What Costello does is beg the character to change, but with that behavior, she in fact begs the question as to why she does not change him as the subject?

In essence, by removing some of the power from the author, Coetzee resurrects the author completely. The illusion of powerlessness in front of the subject, the author's admission she is powerless in front of the Muse and must write out Paul Rayment as he has "come to her" is very reminiscent of Romanticism or even Greek-like inspiration from the Gods. Elizabeth says to other characters, like Drago that she dislikes Paul – "I would prefer a more interesting subject but am saddled with you, the one-legged man who cannot make up his mind" (*Slow Man* 139), but then when Drago responds, mirroring the reader's mind – "I reckon you should split up. If you don't like each other. Say goodbye" (139). When that does not take place the trickery leads the reader to believe some God-like events, something outside of themselves is pushing them towards staying together. All these dialogues return power into the hands of the real author – John Maxwell Coetzee in that the reader waits for his presence and his vailed comment to settle these interjections.

Such authorial expeditions into an exercise of writing instead of a novelistic experience sometimes draw out adverse comments on the part of critics and readers alike. By appearing at the character's front door and beginning to live with him, Costello is used as a break from the illusion of the novelistic experience. She becomes a character and a "midwife" birthing the text into existence (Wicomb 10), but in spite of the character, at times, instead of in cohesion with him. From that relationship, the power struggle arises as symbolic of the authorial struggle to create anything worthwhile from the text. Coetzee challenges the authorial power as uncontested and rather focuses on the relationship of the character and the author in the process of creation in which he positions the character as a co-author of his/her own life, rather than a by-stander. Authorial presence depicted by Costello reflects "a representation of the way in which a writer finds her character taking on a life of his own, departing from the idea from which he originated" (10).

By subverting the mimetic potential of the novel through the physical presence of the author (Hall 136), a magical illusion of the reading experience is lost, but additional authority is gained through the illusion of reality and Coetzee is fully aware of this. In Meg Samuelson, this is described as "Costello's eruption into the narrative of *Slow Man*," which in itself testifies to "Coetzee's impatience with mimesis" (42). In his entire oeuvre, metafictional commentary rendering a novel scholarly instead of a reading experience is quite common practice. The resemblance of realism is gained if we as readers imagine Paul and Costello as real personalities, providing unsolicited advice to one another. By doing something unexpected for characters, but quite life-like to people, Coetzee

testifies to Costello's "ontological reality attained by his fictional creations: this character will simply not be contained within the covers of the eponymous book in which she features" (Samuelson 42). Thus, bursts of "autonomous" behavior attest to the character's power, even if the character is playing the author, the readers constantly remain aware of the double narrative situation.

One of the ways the power struggle between the two characters, Costello as the author and Rayment as the protagonist, takes place is in the dialogues. They call each other's presence into question – Costello openly and inadvertently shows her superiority by telling him to "Push the mortal envelope" and become a character people like to read about (*Slow Man* 83). In knowing more than anyone else could, except for the writer, Costello's character is used to draw attention to her godlike features – "Magill Road, the very portal to the abode of the dead: how did you feel as you tumbled through the air? Did the whole of your life flash before you? How did it seem to you in retrospect, the life you were about to depart?" (83). She intends to manipulate Paul to change his slow mannerism, which the reader immediately picks up on, as well as his lack of understanding as to why she has suddenly appeared in his life.

By claiming that the character chooses the author, the shift of power occurs towards the character. Coetzee addresses this potential prejudice in the public as witnessed by the reader. Costello believes they are meant to wait it out if the process does not take off immediately – "Patience, I tell myself: perhaps there is something yet to be squeezed out of him, like a last drop of juice out of a lemon, or like blood out of a stone. But yes, you may be right, you may indeed be a mistake, I will concede that" (155). In the relationship between Paul and Elizabeth, the reader witnesses illogicality that both the author and character feel they are powerless, while the other holds all the power.

Attwell sums up these metafictional elements in *Slow Ma*n as methods aimed at turning "the novel into an exploration of the relationship between authorship and its creations" ("Coetzee's Estrangements" 235). Before the work of art, the author feels powerless. The process of anthropomorphism or the revival of the character from an inanimate object to a human-like entity allows Coetzee here to probe how that object, that character might feel if s/he was not aware of their power over the author.

> The encounter between, on the one hand, the author, wilfully blind to her character's desire in her attempts to seduce him into her idea of who he 'should' be and who he 'should' desire, and on the other, the character, wilfully blind to the author's desires for him, delightfully obstructive of them, forms a veritable parody of devious desire as the muse of fiction. Under the circumstances, one prefers not to speculate as to the nature of the desire, devious – perverse, even – as it may well be, that drives the critic's will to write. (Jolly 109)

Paul, on the one hand, views Costello as omnipotent, he sees the relationship of creation as merely a process of mimicking reality – "[s]he issues instructions, we follow. Even when there is no one to see that we obey" (*Slow Man* 111). Whereas Costello propagates the notion that when inspiration strikes, authors follow despite sensible decisions they had previously made. Even if they might dislike their characters, Costello represents the role of the author possessed by his creation. As the powerless one of the two, the author losses power at the enchanting of the muse. She says – "For me alone Paul Rayment was born and I for him. His is the power of leading, mine of following; his of acting, mine of writing" (233).

On a larger scale, the comical duo of the author and character who disagree about the plot play out the theatre of the absurd. The readers ponder behind the scenes about the comments made – whether some of them maybe broadcast the (real) author – John Coetzee. Just like in *Summertime*, when Coetzee rendered his own biography "peripheral to the stories of five people who knew him in the early 1970s," (Boehmer et al. 13), he as the real author shifted the struggle between the author-character and the protagonist into the focal storyline, regardless of the plot. Both *autre*-biography and novels, *Summertime* and *Slow Man*, illustrate "a still higher struggle or agon" (13) – in *Slow Man* that between Coetzee and Costello, and in *autre*-biography that between Coetzee and John. What they all

perpetuate in their struggles reflects an entire "politics of writing and how textual authority should assert itself" (Boehmer et al. 13), and that is through the struggle the reader awards it to the "right" character.

In essence, there is an ambition to Costello's exertion of the power that fuels Coetzee's narrative agenda – which is to talk about the process of narration. Coetzee has a tendency to worry about narratives that represent realism with no metafiction, such as *Disgrace*, almost as if the whole goal of writing is represented in achieving self-reflection. Attwell mentions this quality in Coetzee's writing through the phrase in the notebooks on *Foe* that was particularly revealing – "Finally, perhaps, evidence of me" – which Attwell read as "illuminating" because "it shows that Coetzee is frequently anxious about 'attaining consciousness'" (*Life of Writing* 115). This testifies to "Coetzee's determination not to lose himself in realist narration," but "to find a way of bringing self-consciousness into the text" (115).[116] The place for the author and the existential questions must be found, otherwise, the texts do not speak for him.

In his *autre*-biography as well novels, "Coetzee puts fiction between himself and history, between himself and his mortality" (2) by finding ways to introduce self-consciousness. As if the very purpose of the whole endeavor was to find an entrance for metafiction, he says:

> The most trenchant of the purposes of Coetzee's metafiction, however, is that it is the means whereby he challenges himself with sharply existential questions, such as, Is there room for me, and my history, in this book? If not, what am I doing? The book must in some sense answer to the mystery of its author's being. Coetzee's writing is a huge existential enterprise, grounded in fictionalized autobiography. In this enterprise the texts marked as autobiography are continuous with those marked as fiction – only the degree of fictionalization varies. (2)

Only the degree of fictionality varies, according to Attwell, but the enterprises of writing novels and *autre*-biography show texts marked as autobiography are continuous with those marked as fiction – only the degree of fictionalization varies same metafictional attempts at introducing the author into the text and writing about writing as a main authorial preoccupation.

Metafiction in Coetzee, in Zoe Wicomb's words, structures around substitution as a concept that highlights the hermeneutical issues in author characters (10). All author characters ultimately participate in a double narrative situation as they have to be narrated by a real author (10). The substitution as a mechanism which discloses "normally concealed space" within a novel, such as the narrative of the "interior, normally hidden mechanisms and problems of writing a novel" that she believes represent "a key device in Coetzee's articulation of the real" (10). Thus, all other techniques participate, but the substitution as a process underlies the basic procedure of any double narrative situation in Coetzee's work. Its very presence interrupts the very narrative it is meant to create, or in other words, it is a "concept which structures the novel and at the same time admits to a problem within substitution: Costello herself has to be narrated; as a character who interrupts a narrative, she cannot replace the narrative agent employed by Coetzee, but rather, existing as she does at another level of reality" she highlights the double-narrative situation for the reader and breaks the spell of fiction (12). The same could be said about John-of-*Boyhood* or John-of-*Youth*, because all John characters come across as imaginary but link to the author whose presence outside the text makes them real in the reader's mind, all the while breaking the spell of fiction but never actually arriving at the complete realistic biography because of their referent.

Anti-illusionism and the revelations of the paint and paintbrushes next to the masterpiece, as well as all the sleepless nights and the struggles the painter must have experiences bringing the painting to its current glory – instead of disillusioning the observer – have the opposite effect in

[116] See the Coetzee Papers, Notebook, *Life & Times of Michael* K, 19 December 1980. Since these notebooks remain in archives in Texas, unattainable for regular scholars, the quotes sections I have reflected no here come from David Attwell's intellectual biography on Coetzee, see *J. M. Coetzee and the Life of Writing*, pp. 114-117.

postmodernism, which is to enamor the observer with the process and the honesty of the artist. The reader laughs at Coetzee's honesty and artistry when Marijana inquires about Elizabeth Costello and whether Paul and she were friends

> 'Not a friend at all, in fact. Elizabeth is a professional writer. She writes novels, romances. At present she is hunting around for characters to put in a book she is planning. She seems to be pinning her hopes on me. On you too, at a remove. But I do not fit. That is why she is pestering me. Trying to make me fit.' (*Slow Man* 126)

The lack of lying and pretense, quite interestingly, provides a humorous effect and a sort of complement to the reader who feels for the character as they "share" a reality. Exactly the same image has been presented to the reader, they also share fears the "reality as they know it would shatter any moment by introducing the real author Coetzee into the novel. As the power struggles become more vicious between the two characters, the reader must take sides judging who is in the right.

Usually, by involving more people in their fight, Paul and Elizabeth make snide comments that prove their oblivion and hint at Coetzee's presence because if they both lack self-reflection about their own actions that demonstrates they have a blind spot and cannot possibly be omnipotent. For instance, at the Jokićs' house, Elizabeth Costello introduces herself to Ljuba as her mother's friend (124), whereas Marijana asks Paul whether Costello is his friend (126), leaving the reader confused about who she is. Also, Costello is known as quite a busybody, so she raises a few eyebrows in the readers' minds with the statement she is "new on the scene" and does not "think […] should interfere" (124), while she proposes solutions and meddles in the plot since her arrival. Paul, naturally, becomes ever more exasperated by Costello's meddling and unsolicited advice, which leads him to ask about her intentions in a surreal sort of mid-Earth imaginary scenario if the character could talk to their creations. "*You interfere all the time*, he thinks venomously. *Why are you here if not to interfere?*" (124, emphasis his).

Such examples of lack of self-awareness propose apposition for the reader – a place to get involved because all comments seem utterly opposing. Coetzee illuminates here the fictional character's biggest fear – whether or not he (Paul) is real. Suspicious of a double narrative situation, Paul enquires of Elizabeth – "Now let me ask you straight out, Mrs Costello: Are you real?'" and in a uniquely middle position common to Coetzee, she replies without providing an answer – "'As real as you'" (233).

To the response that the two equal in reality or fiction of their character, Coetzee offers an ontological irony in which the reader must participate with knowledge superseding the text. It becomes funny to think of the two characters locked in their struggle to the amusement of the reader without anything to gain because the real author pulls the string. The reader remains cognizant of the narrative situation in which Coetzee does the same to Costello, while she remains oblivious.

Paul complains about Costello's meddling into the story of his life, which he perceives as her biggest flaw:

> 'You treat me like a puppet,' he complains. 'You treat everyone like a puppet. You make up stories and bully us into playing them out for you. You should open a puppet theatre, or a zoo. There must be plenty of old zoos for sale, now that they have fallen out of fashion. Buy one, and put us in cages with our names on them. *Paul Rayment: canis infelix. Marianna Popova: pseudocaeca (migratory)*. And so forth. Rows and rows of cages holding the people who have, as you put it, *come to you* in the course of your career as a liar and fabulator. You could charge admission. You could make a living out of it. Parents could bring their children at weekends to gawp at us and throw peanuts. Easier than writing books that no one reads.' (117)

Representing a "puppet theatre, or a zoo" (*Slow Man* 117) or some kind of an animalistic encyclopedia, Paul depicts his life as a potential character in a novel more like that of a lab rat. His existence has come to make him feel uncomfortable as he has no power to deny access to the voyeurs. The deception of reality falls harder on him than reality itself, and the concept of appearing in a book without permission he finds insufferable to the extent that it would be more honest to downgrade him to the status of an animal than to observe him with no authorization under the pretense of writing a book. In living the reality as is, with no embellishments, he goes so far as to claim that life (in a zoo) would be "[e]asier than writing books that no one reads" (117). The life of an animal, devoid of decision for its own purpose is preferable to Paul than the potential discovery that he is unreal. Coetzee's ironies multiply if we take note of how many ontological realities coexist intertwined in *Slow Man* when Paul as the fictional character begs to be turned into an animal so as to live realistically is just one of them.

Elizabeth Costello's manipulation of the plot, in turn, provides the anti-illusionist self-reflection mimicking the author in the process of writing, riddled with ethical dilemmas about how the character should pursue in order to seem more life-like. Murphet sees Costello as "capricious, novelistic interference" used to "short-circuits the opposition and obliges 'ideas' to become embroiled in the passions and excitations of embodiment" ("Coetzee and Late Style" 103), or in other words, a guidance missile advancing the plot forward. Whenever Paul seems obdurate in his erroneous choice, or unable to make a decision, she steps in with an alternative:

> 'You must think. You must *think*.' With the tip of a finger she taps her forehead. 'And if your thinking leads you where I think it will, namely to a blank wall, I have an alternative to propose.'
> 'An alternative to what?' 'An alternative to this entire imbroglio of yours with the Jokićs. Forget about Mrs Jokić and your fixation on her. Cast your mind back. Do you remember the last time you visited the osteopathy department at the hospital? Do you remember the woman in the lift with the dark glasses? In the company of an older woman? Of course you remember. (*Slow Man* 95-96)

If the fictional character of advanced age mistook care for love, Costello suggests a more suitable mate in an elderly Marianna, at least much more suitable for the reader. If Paul, on the other hand, cannot make a decision, she intervenes and takes him to the Jokićs' house to move the plot along. Costello acts as a mirror, reflecting back at Paul the implications of his actions and confronting him with the reality of his possible steps (Baasrspul and Franssen 559).

Drago, for example, moves in with Paul after he shows the desire to have kids, only to steal from him eventually and shatter his idealistic view about children (559). At the moment Paul expresses sexual desire, Costello creates a substitute scene, reminiscent of Shakespeare, and produces another Marianna (with two ns) willing to sleep with him for money, which paradoxically acts to save her dignity. In manipulating the plot (559), including the time when she takes Paul to an unexpected visit to the Jokićs' house so he would experience their marriage and stop obsessing with his caregiver, Costello constantly acts as a device for the narrative.

What is most intriguing is when critics agree on her manipulation of the events as something paradoxical, but if she were considered the real author that would be her privilege of changing the plot and no one would argue. Thus Coetzee's ruse with the author-figure achieves its purpose – a discussion of power between the author and the character. The following lines attest to how Coetzee achieves the paradox of the character leading the author and the appearance of stripping the author of all decision-making abilities:

> You don't like me, Mr Rayment, you want to be rid of me, you make that quite plain. And I myself am not exactly rejoicing, I assure you, to find myself back in this hideous flat. The

> sooner you settle on a course of action vis-à-vis Drago's mother, or vis-à-vis the lady in black who called on you the other day, or even vis-à-vis Mrs McCord, whom you never mention in my hearing, but most likely vis-à-vis Drago's mother, since she seems to be the light of your life – the sooner you settle on a course of action and commit yourself to it, the sooner you and I, to our mutual relief, will be able to part. What that course of action should consist in I cannot advise, that must come from you. If I knew what came next there would be no need for me to be here, I could go back to my own life, which is a great deal more comfortable, I assure you, and more satisfying, than what I have to put up with here. But until you choose to act I must wait upon you. You are, as the saying has it, your own man.' (*Slow Man* 136)

Another avenue of criticism dedicated to *Slow Man*, as David Attwell suggests, is open towards clarifying *why this novel makes* it difficult for the reader to accept metafiction and it relates to the fact that its beginning is completely written in a realistic fashion ("Coetzee's Estrangements" 235). This illusion suddenly breaks down one-third into the novel. In comparison to previous novels, he finds that novels such as *Foe* allow one to "readily" accept the metafictional play because the rest of the novel already has "a good deal of pastiche and a more obviously allegorical narrative structure" (235), which is not the case in *Slow Man*. The "preponderance of realist narration in *Slow Man* makes it more difficult to accept – hence the exasperation of the novel's early reviews" (235).

Many of those reviews take note of the slight change in vocabulary when Elizabeth Costello repeats the beginning of the novel to Paul – when she recites his life back to him but incudes small changes:

> There is one significant change, though, to the first words of the novel. Elizabeth recites the words but uses the word 'tumbles' rather than 'flies' that appears on the first page of the book (my thanks to Zoë Wicomb for pointing this out). The implication of this is that Elizabeth's authorship itself is being overwritten as of course it is, by J. M. Coetzee. (Kossew, "Border Crossings" 68)

These slight vocabulary changes and other tricks may provide an answer as to why the novel reads like an exercise of authorship, still, Hayes also believes that the fact the supposed "author is a split subject" affects the reading ("Influence and Intertextuality" 155). Such experiments in writing provide a text, according to Hayes and Barthes, "that will in some sense speak against itself, be permeated by an alterity it cannot master" (155), such as a character in pretense. Also, Paul as a character provides an intriguing subject suspended between worlds – although initially, he lives the reality of his experience, he becomes synonymous with fiction after he becomes suspended between worlds.

> As he flies through the air with the greatest of ease, Rayment is well on his way to becoming a character in a story. But what makes this opening so forceful is that, in a certain sense, he is not yet one. For a split second, or the blink of an eye, he is redeemed by the fact that he is like us as we read: pinioned between reality and its metamorphic shadow, which is language or literature. (Danta xix)

In Danta's view, Paul and the reader share a space of suspended reality that only literature provides – while inhabiting the world of the text, they remain suspended between the reality of their daily lives (wherever they might be while reading) and the imaginary space of fiction they seem to be inhabiting at the moment. Such space, then, influences the reader as s/he suddenly discovers a Coetzean author such as Costello, who arrives at the scene. The world becomes shattered in minutes, and it rattles the reader to feel the "reality" might be an illusion. For the same reason, anti-illusionism

in the form of comments, metafiction, and ontological breaks with one world to the next impacts the reader.

The power play between characters and authors occurs in most of his work. In Coetzee we encounter repetitions in terms of topics of interest, but also some authorial ploys – one such repetition includes Elizabeth Costello, John, and David (*Childhood of Jesus*) as recurring characters through a series of works. Metafictional ploys of self-reference and double meaning such as: "The scribbler sleeps, the character prowls around looking for things to occupy himself with. A joke, but for the fact that there is no one around to catch it" (*Slow Man* 238) appear across his novels and *autre*-biography alike. The phrases such as these could be taken as both a reference to Costello or Coetzee himself as the only witness for the "scribbler" at work. Finally, language allusions to the time spent between characters and authors describe a love affair or longing to "possibly set up house together" (238). In *autre*-biography, the power struggle between the author and John as his other selves, alter-ego parallel lives is legendary in its solution to use "he" as a pronoun of reference instead of "I" in autobiographical discourse.

5.2.3 Authenticity on Camera and in a Story – History Recorded

> In Europe people say Australia have no history because in Australia everybody is new. Don't mind if you come with this history or that history, in Australia you start zero. Zero history, you understand? […] So is good somebody save old photographs, show Australia has history, too.
>
> (Coetzee, *Slow Man* 49)

The concept of authenticity gets reworked in *Slow Man* through Coetzee's ideas on photography and novel-writing. Snapping a photograph, on the one hand, is seen from the point of view of photography as an art form that used to require perfection and precision as it captured a moment to perfection and would be snapped only once. So to speak, the artistry of it predated digital photography. Saving old photographs, in Paul's embodiment comes to stand for history, for authenticity and truth in changeable times because the role of Paul as a photographer was meant to preserve a piece of Australia's history. As Marijana testifies, his noble desire to become a part of Australia saving its history was great as it would demonstrate that Australia had history too (49). This Coetzeean "too" juxtaposes that from the perspective of a European such as Marijana, there is a preconceived notion that Australia as a country was young and artistically meaningless in comparison to the old world.

And novel-writing just like history, on the other hand, stands for something permeable and changeable because the victors get the privilege of writing it. While writing also demands a level of authenticity despite the common belief that an author just copies someone's life in novels, this opinion is also challenged by the character of Paul Rayment who genuinely refuses to budge under the orders of the author. Coetzee develops his refusal to be subdued into a preconceived character as authentic.

The changing shape of stories versus photography that stands still long after the author has left this world allows Coetzee to develop both concepts of authenticity in different circumstances – in a sort of a clash between the old world and the new up-and-coming one. Both immigrants, Paul, and the Jokićs counterbalance each other's beliefs about authenticity – whereas Paul belongs to the old world and the almost natives, the Jokićs belong to the newly arrived immigrants with no claim to the past. They both aim to ingratiate themselves with history through the medium of photography – Paul tells himself the story that he would belong after he donates the said photographs, and the Jokićs' son Drago plans to simply doctor the photographs and place his ancestors as a simpler solution to the same "lack of roots" problem.

Due to the picture's impermeability and fixedness, *Slow Man* personifies the belief that a "still" photography captures a moment, whereas a story keeps changing. Initially, Paul believes photographs authentically stand for history because they are more trustworthy. He says:

> He tends to trust pictures more than he trusts words. Not because pictures cannot lie but because, once they leave the darkroom, they are fixed, immutable. Whereas stories – the story of the needle in the bloodstream, for instance, or the story of how he and Wayne Blight came to meet on Magill Road – seem to change shape all the time. (*Slow Man* 64)

Both immigrants of different ages, Paul and the Drago react in accordance with the times in which they were born and tell themselves stories accordingly. Paul's official immigrant story is that he does not wish to amalgamate into the society, he speaks with an accent and proudly collects photography of the olden days without actually wishing to change. Verbally, he is proud of being a misfit everywhere and seems to cling to the past in a maladjusted sort of a way, constantly begrudging something. Symbolically his refusal of the prostatic leg extends to his refusal to change and embrace technology, just like his reason for collecting photographs reflects gripping to the past.

The Jokić immigrants, oppositely, take life at face value and try to advance themselves. Once a career engineer and restorer of art, Miroslav and Marijana take what their new life has to offer – the job in a mechanic shop and nursing respectively. They adapt and survive, and learn how to transfer that to their children. So Drago doctors a photograph as a symbol of the old world and inserts himself and his family tree into it. By extension, he tries to invent his story and history despite his inheritance. With that move, *Slow Man*, essentially, "presents photography as a medium whose claims to authenticity have become somewhat antiquated in the age of digital reproduction" (Vermeulen, "Abandoned Creatures" 671), or in other words, digital photography allows for doctoring and endless reproduction to a point in which it cannot be reversed to the original photo.

As Marijana explains, after the episode in which Drago tries to insert himself in the photograph of Australian history, photography "used to have the power to produce a genuinely novel substance" (671), but that has been reversed in the new society. She opens the debate on authenticity by referring to the moral issue brought about with the concept of original versus the copy:

> 'Original?' she says. 'What is this thing, original photograph? You point camera, click, you make copy. That is how camera works. Camera is like photocopier. So what is original? Original is copy already. Is not like painting.' (*Slow Man* 245)

To Marijana, who used to restore paintings, photography symbolizes no art form as it is already a copy – "You make photograph, or this man, how you say, Fauchery, make photograph, then you make prints, one two three four five, and these prints all original, five times original, ten times original, hundred times original, no copies?" (245-246). In defense of her son's actions, she points to the absurdity of authenticity in modern society as extended to the issue of immigration – as all nations are made of settlers of some kind, the question is only in what order they all arrived. If extended to nations the conversation implies stories settlers tell themselves only testify to the order of arrival not who can be referred to as native because it opens the issue of replicating the experience – if you make a copy of the original, it is already a copy while trying to convince everyone of its originality.

This entire episode opens the debate on reality and fiction, a repetitive in Coetzee, and this time broached from the perspective of photography (Samuelson 41). This so-called "faux-real", according to Samuelson, transfers "the substance of the South" because it reflects the novel's "ability to render a credible and authentic fictional world capable of both indexing the real and pointing southward (41). If only to raise the question about "who is included in the Australian national community" (43), Drago adapts Paul's Fauchery prints. The product of this action advances the

question of how come the immigrant Paul comes to fit in Australia, and the "Croatian family members" of Drago Jokić from the Balkans do not settle the "Anglo-Irish Australian scene" (Samuelson 43) comfortably?

The one who calls attention to the forgery is Elizabeth Costello, signaling its importance for the plot and Coetzee. In that way, she alludes to the real author and the "issue of authenticity" as "one of Coetzee's chief metafictional concerns in this novel" (Head 87). In an omniscient way, Costello seems to know one of the Fauchery photographs has been tempered with and Paul realizes "[b]ut for Costello's prompting he might never have noticed it" (*Slow Man* 218). Her comment breaks the spell of reading a novel and acts as an introduction for the author into the text. It breaks the spell of simulacra or faux-real necessary for the reader experience. It creates, furthermore, a discontinuity from enjoyment in the fictional representation of the novel. The jump leaves the reader confused and in need of answers, especially because the topic moves to authenticity as indicated by Costello, the reader must understand both Paul's motivation for possessing such expensive photographs and Drago's motivation for doctoring them to introduce his father's face into the miners' suits and helmets, while replacing an actual Australian miner with a Croatian refugee.

Just like John plans to become important and immortal through writing in *Youth*, Paul mirrors the idea in his adoptive country of Australia. He wishes to become remembered as a collector of history and in time, participant in national history through its salvation from the passing of time. In his desire to insert himself in the Australian cultural heritage, Paul uses art as a method of belonging. Similar to Coetzee's "civil" realism (Attwell, *Life of Writing* 212),[117] Paul belongs nowhere, just like Drago – they are suspended between locales waiting for the country to show itself. Mirroring each other's motivation, both Drago and Paul desire to leave a mark in the history of their adoptive country. Whereas Paul would like to inscribe himself in the museum, Drago just doctors the photograph as an easy, boyish solution to the identity conundrum, appropriate for his age perhaps. To echo Elizabeth Costello's words on made-up stories – "'I couldn't care less if you tell me made-up stories. Our lies reveal as much about us as our truths'" (*Slow Man* 203), and Drago reveals he lacks continuity in history and assessorial presence just like Paul or John do.

Also in relation to continuity, Paul represents a man in search of a son, no less than Drago is a man/boy in search of a father – not literally to both of them, but rather generationally. Since "Rayment is a foreigner in Australia; he has no family in Adelaide; he has lost contact with his relatives in Europe" says Clarkson ("Countervoices" 163), the need to change someone's life and become a godfather if the position of the father is filled, has to do with his desire to leave a legacy, but also draw roots from Europe. Vermeulen points to the same parallel and sees Paul as someone who "perpetuates the cliché of the Balkan as Europe's interior exotic other" ("Abandoned Creatures" 668) but also desires to incorporate himself in the other as part of his own lost European identity. Upon hearing Drago Jokić's name for the first time, Paul calls it "Drago Jokić: a name from folk-epic. *The Ballad of Drago Jokić*" (*Slow Man* 69, emphasis his), perpetuating ideas that the boy must be a "handsome youth, bursting with good health" (69).

The trope of the child in *Slow Man* offers the "prospect of continuity through new beginnings," but also the revision and correction of the past (Elmgren 105). Again the hint remains emulated in Paul and Drago alike, not only the child but the elderly man wishes for permanence through a lineage in history. Despite the fact that Paul shows the photographs to Drago claiming they depict their shared history as a way of bonding with the boy, nothing could be further from the truth as both of them represent outsiders and immigrants, albeit from different periods. Paul's explains that an image "records" and potentially connects the two of them – "the little boy from Lourdes" and "Drago, son of Dubrovnik" like a "mystical charm" (117), but that reflects only wishful thinking. The sense of continuity that he lacks in himself, Paul may neither gain in retrospect or in the future in Coetzee's position of the world, as no character before or after has found a way to belong.

[117] Both Boehmer and Attwell mention this concept in connection with Coetzee's Australian novels. The setting of the novels is realistic enough to evoke the scene for the reader, but an Australian national would notice the idiosyncrasies differ or make no sense in how he describes roads in Adelaide, or scenery. See Attwell's *Life of Writing* pp. 212, and Boehmer's "Coetzee's Australian Realism" pp. 5-17 for more information on Australia as the place in Coetzee's novels.

The closest Coetzee himself in *autre*-biography, and his characters in novels have ever come to transcending their circumstances and inscribing themselves in history remains through art from. It is "through the act of cultural recuperation" that Coetzee ties in "the question of the authorial role" (Head 89) in *Slow Man*. But these images represent more than mere influence through the ages to Coetzee, it is quite relevant all adult characters are artists as a form of belonging. Paul dabbled in photography, Marianna restored old paintings, Miroslav was a technician in restoration in the "Art Institute in Dubrovnik," and Costello writes (as does Coetzee). Mehigan views this peculiarity as a demonstration of "European sensibility that holds artistic traditions in high regard" (Ch. 12). It is Coetzee's vailed attempt to "instinct to elevate the spirit through acts of (cultural and spiritual) restoration in a "peculiarly European" manner (Ch. 12). So the metaphor holds that his attempts at meaning something also occur through photographs, not only to amalgamate his identity but perhaps also as spiritual elevation.

The European "image" as an ancient locale the Jokić family bring into *Slow Man*, also juxtaposes the idea that there is a common belief Australians possess "zero history" (Samuelson 40) in comparison. The staged topic of immigration in this way provides an in for the theme of provincialism or at least the sentiment of "provincial condition" (39), just like its development in *Scenes from Provincial Life*. Australia, through the symbolism of photography, introduces a broader point of reference with *Scenes from Provincial Life* in that both protagonists consider the South as opposed to Europe, even the Balkans as the European Other, becomes cosmopolitan in comparison to provincial Australia.

Meg Samuelson views the Australian period as clearly marked by Coetzee's ongoing attempt to write out the real South in his prose continuing all the way from *autre*-biography. Bearing in mind Summertime is written after *Slow Man*, she continues that

> the novel is part of an ongoing project of writing the 'real South' in which setting is neither tromp d'oeil nor exotic local colour, neither blank screen nor empty frame, but instead that which conveys the very substance of the real: the sun that 'beats down in a certain way' on Paul, Elizabeth Costello and the miners arranged before Fauchery's lens, as it does in Coetzee's subsequent narratives such as *Summertime* and the *Jesus* novels. (43)

Coetzee sets novels in Australia as an homage to his adoptive country, but many agree the sense of place feels perfunctory. The same concept of "civil" realism is noted in many critics claiming that Australian novels possess the air of realism but not realism itself (Attwell, *Life of Writing* 212), or s Samuelson calls it "the very substance of the real" (43). Boehmer sees this restricted realism as a reflection of Coetzee's ultimate disinterest in Australia, but also as a casual attitude to its realism in general ("Coetzee's Australian Realism" 5). Following his newly gained citizenship, and especially with the view that he had previously attempted to remain in England and the States, all eyes were on Coetzee and his first novels set in Australia. The *Slow Man* provided just that, an inspiration for attachment to the new country but in Sue Kossew I encounter that the critics were disappointed ("Border Crossings" 63). She argues that the motif of migration superseded any topographic references (63), and at the same time introduced once again the idea of faux-real in Coetzee's oeuvre once again.

The sparse sense of place (Samuelson 41) provides the feel of faking reality instead of representing it. In connection to *autre*-biography and John's constant feeling of unbelonging, Samuelson also believes the handicap helps curtail the overall plot to the Coniston Terrace and acts as another "nod to […] John's sense of himself suffering a 'handicap'" (41). Viewed also as a self-conscious nod to Australia and an attempt to "relate his fictional preoccupations to his own position as an immigrant to Australia," the novel's main concern circles back to authenticity (Head 18). The way that a sense of place, belonging, and eventually national identity all loop back to authenticity is through the route of Paul as a character attempting to insert himself in the national history of Australia (18). As a stark contrast, Drago puts authenticity in question when he tries to achieve the very same

goal of belonging in national history through the means of forgery. What photographs eventually come to stand for in *Slow Man* refer to the whole world of simulacra enacted by technology and the digital era "hovers" over the exchange between Rayment and Marijana. The whole argument "threatens the perception of identity on a human scale. It is not just a traditional notion of national identity that is impossible to sustain, but any stable record of historical change" (Head 87) if Drago's intended path becomes possible in the digital age. If the simulacrum replaces reality and fake photos replace history, the sense of national identity and pride it occasions become notions of the past. By extension, Paul becomes obsolete in keeping track of history as without authenticity history is rendered mute.

5.2.4 The Mutilated Body as a Sign of Defiance

> Once, briefly, he comes back. The body that had flown so lightly through the air has grown ponderous, so ponderous that for the life of him he cannot lift a finger.
>
> (Coetzee, *Slow Man* 1-2)

Not a lot of criticism has been dedicated to disability in Coetzee's work in general, and to *Slow Man* in particular (see Attridge 2004; Boehmer 2009; Hall 2012; Pellow 2010; Wilm 2016; Ergin and Dolcerocca 2017). Even if the body was highlighted, most criticism was dedicated to the narrative experiments. But the body in *Slow Man* is used as a narrative technique and merits special discussion – both old age and the mutilated body represent a technique of disillusionment, especially in that the protagonist refuses the prosthetics and declines to partake in the illusion of making one whole. In *autre*-biography the body is a source of pain sexually, for its disobedience, for the want of someone while the main character attempts to isolate himself his body still desires company and women. In *Slow Man*, age had made the body "ponderous" (1), lacking, a disturbance that never recovers from the beginning of the story. For that reason, Paul turns his aging body into defiance by shunning the prosthesis. In that way, he refuses to partake in the imposed societal norms aimed at making others feel better by looking "normal" as soon as possible post-injury. In turn, his refusal comes to stand for the character's denial of authorship in his story as well.

After the initial mutilation of Paul's body, his missing limb continues to hurt in a metaphor for old age and victimology. As an extended metaphor for the limits or borders of the body, the mind, and textuality (Kossew, "Border Crossings" 65), it continues to ache of absence. Paul has lost the dream of ever feeling whole again, and the reader might have to give up the dream of having the right protagonist, "the hero." A limb no longer a part of the protagonist, and the protagonist no longer interested to complete his own body again (wear a prosthetic leg) both speak of the ill-adjusted advance of age and an unwillingness on the part of the protagonist to become a willing participant, a hero in his life once again and rise from the ashes of his injury. According to Sue Kossew, the "trope of the body threshold is a useful one to suggest the boundaries, real or imagined, between bodily and mental states" (65), or in other words the lack of willingness to continue a healthy mental inner life once the body has been damaged.

With reference to Paul's dead limb that performs signs and sends him sensations from the removed leg, or as he sees it "obscure signals" (*Slow Man* 4), Brian Macaskill concludes that a cross-wiring took place between signifier and sign. The dead sign has stopped working, and "the sign must mysteriously live: it must sing, in lament and celebration; it cannot afford to be a dead sign; it must promote what Coetzee calls 'living reading' rather than 'dead reading'"[118] ("I am not me" 404). If the character refuses to create the plot, then, the reading is rendered mute, and the character cannot move from the original lack.

[118] This concept originates in the series of essays with Arabella Kurtz, *The Good Story*, p. 17.

At the same time, Coetzee draws parallels between the idea of the *Slow Man*'s protagonist as a damaged body and the damaged self he explored in *autre*-biography. The mutilated body is used so that the Coetzee can slow down action and plot, allowing for slow reading to take place. In a slow reading, the authorial techniques take precedence over the plot. Whereas in *autre*-biography, Coetzee used to explore the effects of theories on the bodily perceptions of sex (in *Youth* for example), he similarly extrapolates ideas of the damaged self on the damaged body and vice versa. His ideas on trespassing into the body of another through sex coordinated with music in *Youth*, or denial of any luxury to the body in *Summertime* (he eats soup and the same ingredients as if calculating the bare minimum), by the same token develop this indication that the body is to be denied. In *autre*-biography, the damaged self dictated denial of any luxuries such as food or sexual pleasure.

In *Slow Man*, Coetzee develops the notion that the missing limb affects the self towards becoming less self-reliant and more impotent in an inadequate response to circumstances. The self-sabotage of the protagonist who refuses to live a full, unassisted life and become the main character works with the metaphor of the whole novel – the inability of the "imagined author" to finish a novel because the character is unwilling to participate. "The struggle to tell the story becomes the story itself" (Ergin and Dolcerocca 220) because the character's refusal to behave in a customary manner, a manner beneficial for him, takes center stage. *Slow Man* is a novel about story-telling and about the inability to write the novel an author intends to. As Ergin and Dolcerocca note, the body defies the text just like the character defies the author so that "[t]he struggle to tell the story becomes the story itself" (220). The disability of the protagonist relays to the "prevailing feeling of disability in the text symbolically starting with amputation of Paul's leg" (220):

> But at the same time, it is a symbol of the failure of telling a story. In this sense, the old age here also symbolizes failure of seduction, failure of an erotic relationship between the text and its reader. Moreover, the theme of disability allows for the examination of fictionality, subverting the power of the writer and exposing the inner workings and problems of fiction writing. It cuts the story open, centering it on its lack – its incapacitated state and on its excess – its transgressive intrusions. Disability gives the novel a mode of structural freedom while violating the modes of fiction and bringing it to the point of collapse. (220)

Not only does the textual failure to continue the narrative after the opening of the novel and the bodily harm disable the protagonist, but it disables the invisible synopses in the novel between the reader and the text. The reader becomes impatient as the "subverting of the author" takes place (220). Essentially as the "[d]isability gives the novel a mode of structural freedom while violating the modes of fiction" the novel is revealed as a disillusionment technique, opening the novel for Costello and narrative authorial trickery in the form of metafiction. Essentially, the body as a disillusionment allows *Slow Man* to turn into an exercise in narratology rather than a novel.

The disability, as they claim here, provides the device to "collapse the novel" (220), or at least the novelistic structure. Vermeulen and Wicomb agree on this because of the emphasis on the presence of the stump, versus on the absence of a leg. "The stump is a fleshy, physical excess generated by the palpable inability of novelistic devices to cover it up" ("Abandoned Creatures" 659), and that metaphorically speaks for how Coetzee uncovers the author and the protagonist in the discussion of devices used in the narrative. The narrative devices uncovered and even metafictionally drawn out from the shadows of authorial trickery become emphasized to explain the failure of the novel and the appearance of Elizabeth Costello. It is the protagonist's "disability and insistent refusal of prosthesis" that expose the "central metaphor for narrational impairment" and elaborate on the novel's allegory (Ergin and Dolcerocca 211). Because of the stump between them, because of Paul's maladjusted reaction to his predilection and inability to rise to the occasion and become an excellent character, Costello must appear from the shadows to nudge the plot along for the reader. In a way, the stump is the reason "the imagined author" comes out and demonstrates the trickery behind writing a novel.

As always, Coetzee delves into the body as the container of soul, and their interconnectivity if one is injured how that affects the other. Paul Rayment does not solely fight to win over Marijana, but because his bodily injury has befallen him, he on a higher note is also trying to save his soul and prove himself worthy of love. Unfortunately for him, his is a tragic flaw of misinterpreting care for love. Coetzee develops in Paul the idea that the character's pathological need to prove to himself he is loveable after the injury to his body, leads him astray and renders him obsessed with a woman in charge of caring for his injured body. To Rayment, the salvation of his soul is dependent on finding love in Marijana, which may shed some light on his obsession with the young nurse who does not reciprocate in any way. As the obsession is depicted, her love, but only her as the guardian of his mutilated body, would prove his soul worthy of salvation – if he were worthy of her, his soul would transcend.

The body holds the spirit according to *Slow Man* so that if something is wrong with the body, the conclusion is drawn that the soul has fallen away from God.

> Before the Fall, said Augustine, all motions of the body were under the direction of the soul, which partakes of God's essence. Therefore if today we find ourselves at the mercy of whimsical motions of bodily parts, that is a consequence of a fallen nature, fallen away from God. (*Slow Man* 186)

The interpretation of the mutilated aged body in *Slow Man* must be seen in the light of the interconnectivity between the impairment of the body as a result of a fallible soul, and a codependent love and care as the salvation of that soul through the body. Paul misconstrues Marijana's job of caring for his wound with love and affection for loving his soul – and by extension himself. As his tragic mistake, the loneliness and bodily injury make him blind to the effects of care on him, and care is not love (Bradshaw 194). Elizabeth Costello warns Paul of the misinterpreted love that he is projecting from his injury and urges him to rectify his course and fall in love with someone else. She points to much of the same – "[c]are is not love. Care is a service that any nurse worth her salt can provide, as long as we don't ask her for more" (*Slow Man* 154). The "tortoise character" Paul (228) is rendered slow by the discrepancy between his desires and reality. Such "a man dogged as well by a pronounced temperamental reserve" emphasizes the tragic nature of his "head that is slow to follow the promptings of a deeply sensitive heart" (Mehigan Ch. 12).

Coetzee has dealt with age and dereliction of the body before, and intertextually I encounter such ideas in other works, but never has age been the main preoccupation of a protagonist. Coetzee establishes in this novel the ornate development of notions on old age, all the way from *Age of Iron*, *Master of St Petersburg*, Disgrace, and *Elizabeth Costello* – highlight elderly characters and the problem of old age but that somehow gets overshadowed by the South African problem. So after moving to Australia, finally *Slow Man* receives the right amount of intended deliberation on the problem of old age. Elizabeth Costello as the *Slow Man*'s imagined author perpetuates Rayment as someone confused between care and love because she explains the elderly do not need the kind of love he searches for. She single-mindedly pesters him to change – "[w]hat we need is care: someone to hold our hand now and then when we get trembly, to make a cup of tea for us, help us down the stairs. Someone to close our eyes for us when the time comes" (*Slow Man* 154). Paul becomes an unfit protagonist when he fails to conform to that norm perpetuated about age.

An unfit character to be a protagonist, Paul refuses to cure the body in any other offered way such as prosthetics or dance, except for with Marijana's love. While he is given a lifeline, a quite common prosthetic leg that would replace the old one to an extent, for Paul "whatever love he might once have had for his body is long gone. He has no interest in fixing it up, returning it to some ideal efficiency" (32). By reprograming his body to its old efficiency, he believes himself artificial and fake – opposite notions to authenticity he aspires to preserve.

The idea of using dance to recover muscle memory similarly appears in *Youth*, when the character of John tries to rhythmically have sex with his lover by using music. Whereas in *Youth* John

fails also miserably because it appears too robotic for his sensual partner, in *Slow Man* the failure of his instructor Madeline is tied to Paul's inflexibility. The process does work on other injured people, but not on him because of his premade decision to fail at recovery. "'Listen, and let the rhythm take charge of you,' says Madeleine. 'Let the music run through your body, let it dance inside you'" (*Slow Man* 60), she urges Paul. I find this repetition of rhythm coursing through the body to represent Coetzee in some way since it repetitively attempts the same idea in both novels and *autre*-biography. In an attempt to teach him how to dance again and re-establish the connection to the body, Madeline tries to focus Paul on the future instead of on the past. In her dance class, she teaches "to balance all over again,' since the body we once had is no longer available, we do it "with our new body" (61). "That is what she calls it: our new body, not our truncated old body" (61). But he refuses to budge, stuck on the ideas of himself as

> *Unstrung*: that is the word that comes back to him from Homer. The spear shatters the breastbone, blood spurts, the limbs are unstrung, the body topples like a wooden puppet. Well, his limbs have been unstrung and now his spirit is unstrung too. His spirit is ready to topple. (27, emphasis his)

Paul Rayment refuses to be healed, he prefers resignation to his "new body." As a person, he has a sense of being a soul with an undiminished soul-life; as for the rest of him, it is just a sack of blood and bones that he is forced to carry around (32). The mutilated body underlines Elizabeth Costello's mutilation of the narrative and the story by introducing unnatural devices in the narration. "The narrative prostheses," as Ergin and Dolcerocca call this procedure, "remain extrinsic, disabled and imperfect through and through (212). The spirit of a man, once unstrung, according to these ideas is ready to topple over at the slightest further predilection. Paul furthers these ideas on maladaptation to life by obsessing also with only one woman who can presumably provide that healing life that connects the body and soul in a re-programming kind of way. So not only is he shown as stubbornly trying to control his recuperation in a self-sabotaging way, without listening to the professionals, but he is also equally inflexibly refusing to be healed by love unless it is with his chosen obsession.

By denying the story a protagonist, Paul also denies himself happiness and a new body. Instead, he fixates on the one significant event in his life – the accident. Coetzee provides the reader with an imagined author Costello who is also a prosthetic to the story – an attempt to plaster two stories into one – the story of Paul Rayment with the leg and without one. After the arrival of Costello ("arrival" from where?), Coetzee also fails to unify the story – the novel begins to read as criticism on writing. His attempted prosthesis in the form of Costello fails to connect seamlessly the story before and after her entrance so it would feel cohesive. The stump remains visible. In the end, both the story and the body of Paul Rayment provide no unified device and fail at adaptation to the rules of life and novel writing.

As Ergin and Dolcerocca emphasize, additionally, the topic of disability allows for the examination of subversion of power of the writer through the metaphor of prosthesis (220). Paul's defiance to be made whole goes against all instincts of survival and ends up pointing to the "multiple ways of being imperfect, disabled, aberrant or deformed" (212), as opposed to normal and frivolous the society need one to behave for the status quo to be reestablished. The prosthesis also introduces alternatives to the text, such as the scene of substitution and the love replacement offered to him:

> In our view, however, the trope of substitution, and along with that the allusions to the Shakespearean pre-text, are not merely metafictional – though they are also that – but they also relate to the book's ethical concerns: images of substitution point at the need for Paul Rayment to accept substitutes, in this new phase in his life as a disabled and ageing man. (Baasrspul and Franssen 557)

Mehigan considers that both for the story and Paul, "the way forward for this physically and emotionally unaccommodated central character" could be replacements as restorations of the subject's functionality (Ch. 12). It is his stubbornness to conform, to change, or accept substitution that unnerves the reader. If Paul were to succumb to the age-appropriate mate, Marianna, the author and his reflection – the reader, could rest assured the equilibrium would be restored. An aging character of a deteriorating body and a defect "must" accept care as a substitute for love as that is societally appropriate. In spite of the societal pressure to conform to what Baasrspul and Franssen call "something less" (563), all Paul "longs for is the modern equivalent of the bourgeois ideal of romantic love and marriage" (561).

Perhaps, in this way, Coetzee interacts with societal expectations and moves the lines for aging characters by juxtaposing the established norms with personal desires. Paul stands for the refusal of substitutions despite age, his is an

> obsession with equality, equal worth, is echoed in the passages of *Slow Man* where the value of Paul's ideal of love (affection, desire, care, and family) is measured against that which is currently on offer (companionship, prostitution, paid help, and godfatherhood), and where, by Paul's measure, the latter is always found wanting, as "something less" than the love he desires. (563)

To be fair, Paul does enjoy a sexual encounter at the arrangement of Elizabeth Costello and he does try the tricycle as a replacement for his bicycle towards the end of the novel. What he repetitively refuses are "the illusion of a complete body" and Costello's interferences in creating assimilation of his story (Hall 133). Paul's refusal "becomes symbolic of his wider resistance" (133), and I agree with Hall but would like to add that the resistance reflects a broader urge to comply with arbitrary rules that an aging man does not deserve. His meager list, made small due to ageism in all societies points to the unfairness of it all as options such as "affection, desire, care, and family" end up becoming so dire and replaceable with "companionship, prostitution, paid help, and godfatherhood" (Baasrspul and Franssen 563) if he is to conform.

At one point in the narrative, somewhere towards the end, Paul begins to open up and accept how his entire sense of the newfound disability affects his "sense of identity" as he becomes mediated by "his own stereotypes of disability as a condition of inferiority, a wasted opportunity" (Hall 108). This addresses the issue of self-loathing in the language when Paul refers to his amputated leg as "le jambon" which he should keep "at a nice contemptuous distance" (*Slow Man* 29). Such phrases dehumanize him and what had happened to him (Hall 103). To Alice Hall's mind, this suggests engrained alienation from one's own body and the inability to adapt to the idea of "the damaged limb as a part of himself" (103).

Aside from *Slow Man*, Coetzee in general is known for his detached style of writing about the body as a foreign object. In other words, "the physical presence of the body exposes a corresponding lack of language through which to articulate corporeal experience" (103). A*utre*-biography, just like his novels, testifies to the treatment of the body with utter impartiality in both the protagonist and the people around him. Reflective distance is aided by the third person singular, but also the vocabulary and the treatment of subjects like lab rats help the overall impression. Bear in mind all the unsuccessful sexual encounters John experiences in *Youth*, when he tries to prove sex and creativity go hand in hand, or play music to catch the rhythm of his sexual encounters as if his partner was a play doll.

Slow Man differs in the struggle inflicted upon the protagonist – Paul Rayment has simply decided to embrace his misconceptions about an aging and injured body without struggle. The only chance for change, as it might happen but painstakingly slowly, according to Coetzee's definition of expectations from the *Slow Man*, is the potential acceptance of the tricycle as a symbol of his changing identity. In the words of Baasrspul and Franssen, the tricycle stands for the substituted bicycle which Paul was riding when he had his accident (Baasrspul and Franssen 557). Although they judge this as

a positive sign Paul's "half-hearted acceptance of this gift might be a first sign that he is slowly beginning to accept his new condition in life, as a person of a certain age with physical limitations" and his new identity (Baasrspul and Franssen 557), Coetzee leaves this in guidelines only. Despite the announcement he doubts he would ever come to use it, Paul gives the tricycle a spin as a symbol of hope for another ending in the storyline.

Alice Hall compares Coetzee's other work on people with disabilities such as *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Foe* and emphasizes a postcolonial reading because both those novels from an earlier period establish characters unable to be depressed – essentially in survival mode after injuries were inflicted upon them (95). The reason Paul can dwell on his injuries is that he is white and privileged, even as an immigrant at the end of the day he is white, unlike Friday. "In this context, the expectation of living to an old age and the provision of high-quality care, as well as the critical space to reflect upon these issues, are luxuries that only certain racial groups and sections of society are afforded" (95). However bigger his privilege, Paul reflects on his loss with utter despair, and in that way, Coetzee opens up an array of possible subjects he never dealt with regarding the body of the African continent, such as availability of care.

> The focus of Coetzee's novels written after his move to Australia reflects the particular preoccupation with issues of care and ageing in a developed, Westernized country in his later writing. This exploration of the ethics and social construction of care is not, however, a new concern in Coetzee's writing. His earlier novels, written under the Apartheid regime in South Africa, also explore complex experiences of ageing and disability but in the quite different context of the brutal aftermath of empire and a rapidly changing and developing country. (95)

The boundaries get blurred for people like Rayment in that the expectancy of care he would like to receive and believes himself entitled to does not correspond with what the immigrant Marijana is willing to be paid for – such as late-night calls, godfatherhood to her children, or declarations of supposed love. What Hall suggests about care is that Paul wishes to extend and reciprocate it. But as soon as he is provided any, unfortunately, the urges to "transgress the conventional carer/patient boundaries" (112) occur. Having potentially the purest of intentions, Paul still reads as overcompensating for his bodily issues in that he crosses all possible lines between professional and personal in his attempts to demand more than he is entitled to. In defying societal norms, he trespasses into white privilege after he fails to realize his body also provides no excuse to misinterpret right with obligation. The body as defiance, after he refuses the prosthetics, toes the thin line into white male privilege and the position of oppressing because it had been injured.

5.2.5 Concluding the Slow Reading of the *Slow Man*

> 'What case would you prefer me to make?' he says. 'What story would make me worthy of your attention?' 'How must I know? Think of something.'
>
> (Coetzee, *Slow Man* 83)

Finding the real Coetzee and his authentic authorial voice requires more than a mere browse through his *autre*-biography. His most well-known habitat is within novels, essays, critiques, and *autre*-biography respectively as he has, to date, remained infamously reserved about his private persona. Not that any author invites interest in the personal if the work is available, but Coetzee's controversial stand on privacy and denial of interviews has landed him in the arena of infamy with journalists. To be fair, he has fueled the feud by using it to further his agenda on authorship when, for example, he became inspired with the interviews from real life which led to the creation of a

character resembling Attwell and Kannemeyer in his *Summertime* afterward, or when he purposefully used semi-truths and authorial tricks in the supposed writing about his life such as the play with his name in many characters (Costello, J. C., Señor C, and John).

Despite autobiographical details scattered through his oeuvre, I argue it would be a shame to boil down Coetzee's extensive authorial trickery and metaphors to biographical readings only, but as researches we should aim for honesty in the most unlikely of places. Like anything else with Coetzee, his is a postmodern world of honesty in fiction and fiction in truth. Thus novels, such as *Slow Man* and *Elizabeth Costello* testify to his ability to develop complex subjects in novels and include himself in the process. It is through the repetition of his authorial interests and their reworking in various novels that we encounter the authentic Coetzeean voice. In the words of Coetzee himself ventriloquizing through Paul in *Slow Man*, his entire writing begs the question of – "'What story would make me worthy of your attention?'" (*Slow Man* 83), and "Is there room for me, and my history, in this book?" (Coetzee qtd. in Attwell, *Life of Writing* 2). The latter sentence, taken from his notebooks, testifies to the autobiographical nature of his novels and other works, in topics rather than facts presented.

David Atwell classifies Coetzee's Australian novels (*Slow Man*, *Diary of a Bad Year,* and *Childhood of Jesus*) as his third stage in working out his authorial interests (*Life of Writing* 209). To a linguist and critic of his caliber, the most essential in Coetzee is the metafictional voice speaking to the process of creation, but other topics related to authorship politics also apply. As opposed to being in the "background" of earlier work, authorship post-Barthes' authorial death makes a comeback, and authority becomes "the fabric and substance" of these late novels (Attwell, "Mastering Authority" 217). What connects Coetzee's *autre*-biography and Australian fiction may be summed up as a variant of the same topics in implicit and explicit ways. For instance, the trope of the writer as agent appears in *Summertime* in a "ghostly sort of way" (Danta xvi), but not before it is done in the form of Elizabeth Costello in *Slow Man* first.

In essence, *Slow Man* is a novel about frustrated story-telling and "the inability to write the novel an author intends to" (Ergin and Dolcerocca 220) because of the push back from the character. The disability as a major theme becomes the symbol of the author's inability to write the story s/he had originally intended. Through the imagery of the rejected prosthesis, Coetzee develops a grumpy elderly character Paul as a frustrated individual determined to frustrate the story in revenge for his less than an ideal turn of events in life. Alice Hall investigates ageism and disability in *Slow Man* as a metaphor for power and powerlessness, which speak to Coetzee's ongoing commitment to the representation of unsightly and disruptive bodies" ("Dialectics of Dependency" 144).

In a way, the concept of old age in *Slow Man* "also symbolizes failure of seduction, failure of an erotic relationship between the text and its reader" (Ergin and Dolcerocca 220), because Coetzee's story is self-referential rather than novel-like or realistic to any degree. Through a metaphor, Coetzee progresses the idea that inspiration comes uninvited in a state of receptiveness and expectance, and the "writer could be described as becoming host to an unknown visitor" (Marais 281). One would think the writer must have a predilection towards being possessed because s/he needs to be receptive towards the unexpected visitor or to inspiration. Marais, in the end, sees the metaphor of inter-dependence between author and character as a mode of involuntary possession on the part of the character/visitor. To write or to act, one must surrender authority and becomes susceptible and possessed by the authority of the Other (282).

Another reference to authorial trickery comes from Jane Poyner's focus on the disruption of the genre in Coetzee's early work, as well as in the Australian period specifically (*J. M Coetzee and the Paradox* 169). The toll of being deemed a public intellectual disrupts potentially the practice of creation with the public's expectations, which Coetzee resolves with the creation of Elizabeth Costello. She becomes the spokesperson for his views, and to varying degrees. Critics will never be able to determine accurately where Costello ends and Coetzee begins as it is "the slippage between the two, between author and author-protagonist, that energizes questions about the relationship between public intellectuals and the truths they promote" (169). Whenever he feels cornered, Coetzee addresses the criticism by overemphasizing the critic's criticism – in this case by calling out genre

tropes Coetzee focuses on authorship questions and expected roles of the public intellectual he has grown to into over the years. The confines of autobiography never completely hold Coetzee in place even if he officially engages in a project of autobiographical discourse, let alone in a novel such as *Slow Man*. But, "autobiographical concerns" do inform *Slow Man*" (Mehigan, Ch. 12).

The so-called "obsolescence of the novelistic illusion" (Vermeulen, "Abandoned Creatures" 669) is responsible for the impression of falling from grace as a punishment on the immigrants – Marijana holds a degree in Restauration, but dedicates herself to nursing and Miroslav, like so many immigrant workers becomes a mechanic, while he used to be a technician in an Art Institute. In other words, despite the fact Coetzee is no fan of disillusionment and metafiction for their own sake, he makes use of them to prove a point as long as there is a need for self-referentiality. Such self-referentiality like the one in *Slow Man* can destroy the "narrative pleasure (and I'm not so ascetic as to wish to dismiss narrative pleasure)" and "writing-about-writing hasn't much to offer" (*Doubling the Point* 204) in terms of the said pleasure, but remains necessary if a postmodern author is to make a point. In this novel, Coetzee develops several arguments by writing about writing: Costello trespasses and is used to advance the border trope, reality turns into fiction when the character refuses to progress the plot, the reader's mind is explored as it becomes the convergence of the text and reality, and the text ultimately becomes slowed down.

John Coetzee's overall writing requires a slow and deliberate reading and a specific reader. The reader must be open to frustration, multilingualism in the middle of sentences, retardation of the plot, unusual graphic representation of different languages, and wordplay. Be it in *autre*-biography or novels, the readers have to be prepared to engage with the text and finish it in their minds. The bit that requires finishing and rewriting of sorts is sorting out multiple meanings until they come up with the one that satisfies them the most and that depends on the reader. What all of them must be is intellectual and engaged with the text if anything Coetzee writes is to make sense.

Numerous researchers have tried once and again to grasp the overall intertextual allusions Coetzee's extensive work provides. Patrick Hayes tries to compute all Coetzee's influences following relevance and affinities and cross-referencing them to various periods in which Coetzee wrote ("Influence and Intertextuality" 153-154). One important intertextual reasoning his article points to is that Coetzee's eclectic reading and professorship further leads to a confounding web of influences in his authorship because of, on the one hand, "European and American novelists, philosophers, and theologians" and "South African writers and literary traditions" on the other (Hayes 154). Junction of such influences provides for his eclectic styles, especially in this third period.

Temporally, this third period includes everything post- *Disgrace* (209), and structurally novels devoid of the weight of the home. As Attwell assures, "[t]he third stage, then, is the stage at which that self-control is no longer desirable or necessary" (214), and I would add it refers to especially the feeling of necessity to represent the real, or rework the weight of one's country until it makes sense finally. Written in between *Elizabeth Costello* (2003) and before his Nobel prize, the notes mentioned refer to early 2003, and based on the topics in his notebooks at the time of writing the *Slow Man*, in "realist terms, *Slow Man* is appropriately about migration and belonging" (*Life of Writing* 218). The plot generates several interesting "global themes" important for Australian society and the world. They encompass but are not limited to "the treatment of economic migrants and the related question of national belonging" (Head 85), as well as "crimes against humanimality" as Macaskill terms them ("I am not me" 394). Here lies the connection of African and Australian novels, as the same crimes "haunt Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello*, haunt 'JC' from *Diary of a Bad Year*, and haunt the John Coetzee of *Summertime*" because they "haunt J. M. Coetzee himself" (394).

Slow Man shares numerous points of exchange with *autre*-biography "not only obvious elements like the cycling and the photography, but the interest in the body and its vulnerabilities, the crisis that brings the character face to face with mortality, the transnationalism, and the sense of being cut off from one's past and from the future" (Attwell, *Life of Writing* 219). Both protagonists in the mentioned books "are at their happiest when cycling" (Kannemeyer 428) and I note "much of Coetzee" in them (Attwell, *Life of Writing* 219). In the end, even though Coetzee broaches the same subjects he ends up innovating them and approaching them from a different standpoint.

In the end, this novel in particular moderately approaches all previous problems Coetzee dealt with as part of his African saga. It deals with immigrants of two generations in Australia, a diverging point from previous Coetzee's work, but similar in that it still explores "the question of belonging to a new country, at a time of life when, in most middle-class lives, the primary concern is superannuation and its consequences" (Attwell, *Life of Writing* 219). It provides an answer to its author's struggle to prove history as a story and reality as a fictional representation of winners in the struggle. The deficiency of the body is seen as an act of defiance towards the establishment as the last resort one is left with to solely decide on in modern times – the body purposefully hurt outside the slave/owner paradigm may refuse unwanted help as the solution to the power paradigm. Though themes that get breached for the first time also include similarities with *autre*-biography, but maybe read separately as well such as the visitation trope in light of economic migration and care and caritas as solutions that in Africa were not even offered become plausible solutions in this novel.

V

Conclusion

VI THESIS CONCLUSIONS

6.1 *Autre-biography* and Coetzee's Selected Novels: Summary

Over time, a number of scholars have extensively revised *autre*-biography and Coetzee's most famous collection of essays, predominantly focusing on the biographical and postcolonial readings of these works (see Van Zanten Gallagher (1991), Spivak (1998), Marais (2008)). Initially, the consummately private John Maxwell Coetzee had managed to shock everyone with a sort of autobiography and revelation of the self that everyone was quick to accept it as read, equaling his public and private personae in the process. Recent criticism (see Kossew (1998), Attridge (2004), Poyner (2006), Clarkson (2009), Attwell (2015), Effe (2017), Kusek (2017)), however, has begun to note this discrepancy in the accumulative tendency in Coetzee to hide in openly autobiographical writing, which led to re-investigations of his authorial egos and characters of authors as protagonists in both fiction and non-fiction. Special attention was paid to alternatives of his name, such as characters of John, JC, Elizabeth Costello, and other less open connections - the protagonist Elizabeth Curren, and John Costello's son as another John. Nevertheless, as outlined in the previous chapters, a gap remained in the understanding of Coetzee's treatment of topics of interest in both novels and non-fictional work, especially in connection with playful identity dialogism and roles these varied characters performed for Coetzee's public persona.

By positing the hypothesis that Coetzee playfully tends to highlight factual similarities with his characters, all the while hiding his true self, arguably a clearer image of that practice arose from a comparison of his *autre*-biography as a locale for various facets of his self to the chosen novels *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man*. The novels were used to provide a controlled sample of fictional work versus supposedly non-fictional, and they were elected because of their condensed metafictional practices, which made the analysis easier to establish. A juxtaposition of Coetzee's authorial practices in non-fiction versus fiction was delivered to verify whether the same tendency to hide his true self in the places he points to, such as family in *autre*-biography or his intellectual views in an openly established academic alter ego Elizabeth Costello – could be noticeable. Another hypothesis at the beginning of this thesis was whether Coetzee purposefully, like a magician, points the reader in the wrong direction – which is biographical reading – and, if so, what possible gains this authorial trickery provides. It was tentatively concluded that Coetzee created *autre*-biography as a sub-genre of personal writing in order to hide and unveil his private persona on demand, realizing that personal writing, as long as factual, provided a postmodern twist – which reflected itself in detective-like participation on the part of the reader. Such authorial technique not only allowed for open-ended quests for the truth but also the appearance of truthfulness without being truthful, as was the effect of *autre*-biography eventually. The reader was tasked with finishing the "writing" in their minds with the knowledge about the author extending from the world outside the text.

The second premise I have tried to validate refers to whether Coetzee repeats his subjects of interest, rather than merely elderly characters, writerly protagonists, and ventriloquists for his ideas, across both non-fiction and fiction in similar ways. This thesis has extensively dealt with repetitive topics of interest and authorial trickery employed to achieve them in each of the chosen works, carefully following the similarities and differences in the repetitive themes from one work to the other. It was found that Coetzee appears in his intellectual autobiography represented in the collected treatment of his topics of interest such as authorship politics, the quest for the truth in personal writing, dialogism within one individual in the process of telling one's story, extrapolation of one's story to the story of nations, identity over time and in writing, sense of place in his writing, inhabiting the "Other" – the frail, the damaged, the elderly, and the marginalized, rather than in one particular protagonist.

Through the depiction of his process of writing, which entails writing autobiographical work simultaneously with novels, it was concluded from his notebooks that he constantly attempts to include "himself" through metafiction and that if one topic does not fit in one piece of writing,

Coetzee simply rewrites it as a part of the next one he is writing in chorus with the rest. Because of this procedure to work on several novels and quasi-biographies simultaneously, sometimes even over decades, a conclusion was drawn that Coetzee's intellectual autobiography presents itself in a postmodern manner – spread semi-chronically over multiple works instead of neatly placed in the ones under the name *autre*-biography. Coetzee's true authorial self is a dialogic conversation of all his characters, not just protagonists commonly thought of as ventriloquists for his ideas, such as Costello or John from *Scenes from Provincial Life*. It is the chorus of all their voices, even the characters who negate each other's thoughts that participate in the diachronic imagination of the author. In summary, in Coetzee, only an intellectual autobiography of the author is ever possibly residing in the cross-section of all the voices in his *autre*-biography and novels, the rest merely stands for authorial trickery aimed at unveiling and hiding the self on demand.

6.2 Research Findings

The main body of this dissertation has embraced personal writing as an attempt to regain authority over one's story from the clutches of history and that of other biographers. In consideration of the primary hypothesis that an author so well-versed in critical theory would not have easily relented authority over his own story but would rather find methods to reinvent autobiographical discourse, *autre*-biography was treated as a marriage between autobiography and autofiction. It was tentatively searched whether Coetzee used the same authorial habits in both non-fictional and fictional work to juxtapose and explain his methodology, with a thorough overview of his practices in the selected works here – *Scenes from Provincial Life: Boyhood, Youth, Summertime*, *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man*.

In the introduction, a revision of the terminology of personal writing was delivered with special care to the notions of scope, appeals, and potential problems with personal writing and, in particular, *autre*-biography (Chapter 1).

Following that, the hypothesis that Coetzee only provides an entrance for his intellectual autobiography in the confluence of topics he reworks in every piece of writing was researched for merit. Rather than employing any biographical reading, a close reading of his major works of critical essays (non-fiction) and novels (fiction) was employed in order to extrapolate the topics of interest I would be the focus on in the selected works afterward. Both Chapters 2 and 3 provide an insight into the most relevant subjects of interest in all of Coetzee's work with personal writing elements.

In particular, the discussion is taken to authorship politics and the quest for the truth as a larger umbrella for identity discovery in the process of writing. With that in mind, Chapter 2 has examined how Coetzee revived authorial authority in *autre*-biography after "the death of the author," and in detail, his procedures of rewriting the masters and creating the numerous character who are authors themselves as an extension of this practice.

Whereas Chapter 3 reveals that the body of Coetzee's work focuses on the fluid truth in personal writing, or in other words, his claim that the truth is fiction as a variation of a story of the self told differently over time. Such concepts, alongside memory and identity, were established in these chapters as primary avenues for research in the selected works, with a particular attempt to prove they similarly appeared across Coetzee's work, be it *autre*-biography or novels.

Chapter 4's analyses of *autre*-biography's diachronic perspectives gave legitimacy to the previous assumptions and revealed Coetzee's attempts to keep certain private aspects of his life in personal writing that a biographer would not have done. This gives credence and aligns with the initial premise that the only autobiography of this author possible to locate is the intellectual one, situated in the convergence of his topics of interest, authorial trickery, and methods of authorial employment to achieve these goals. Divided into three sub-sections, each one dedicated to one part of the trilogy, the three parts of the chapter provide insight into the similarities and differences in the depictions of the author or employ the same techniques to hide and reveal the writerly self across time.

Stimulated by topics of interest extrapolated from *autre*-biography, Chapter 5 has delved into the presumed difference between fiction and non-fiction, principally pointing to Coetzee's essays on the process of writing fiction and autobiography to juxtapose differences and highlight the similarities between the selected works. Overall, *Elizabeth Castello* was analyzed to clarify likenesses between herself and Coetzee as a possible alter ego, but from his other essays on similar topics, it was explained that just like in *autre*-biography, Costello represented one of the devices as the outlets for Coetzee, but other characters stood for his other voices. It proved impossible to believe only Costello was reflecting his views, just like the character of John in *autre*-biography shifted over time, so did her views, and she confirmed to be only one of the authorial devices, not the one. In the same chapter, *Slow Man*, finally provided the discussion about crossing boundaries in the literature between fiction and non-fiction in Coetzee. It also opened up conversations about faking reality in which a further step was noticed – that Coetzee demands a fictional character not to behave more realistically but more unrealistically because he is a character, by which procedure he closes the hermeneutical circle of the quest for truth as a fictional story of the self across time.

Across all chapters, the diverging, as well as converging points with the established topics of interest, were cataloged and mentioned per piece of writing, finally cautiously concluding that Coetzee's truth in postmodern times resides more in fiction than in carefully constructed *autre*-biography aimed at public consummation.

6.3 Scientific Contribution

The value of this dissertation overall can be located in the re-evaluation of the concepts in autobiographical works in Coetzee, such as the search for the truth, the value of personal writing, morbid appeals of it in narcissistic self-obsessed modern societies, and contemporary twists to its more historical understandings. It opens a new conversation in critical theory about the possibility and impossibility of autobiographies aimed at public consumption, but also its inevitable value in the revised form of *autre*-biography. Coetzee, as the confluence of all the theories on this genre – applied to his work in both fiction and non-fiction, stands for a successful merge of autobiography and autofiction. In more narrow terms, this analysis provided, hopefully, a worthy collection of more recent critical theories on Coetzee's work, with original discussion and exceptional attention to his own words on his process of creation, instead of interpretation from other critics. Ultimately, the thesis expectantly bridges a gap in critical theory in terms of discussing fictional and non-fictional bodies of work together, instead of constantly separately and in different terminologies, especially in postmodernism. If read the way it was intended, the thesis affords an insight into the return of the author in personal narratives and provides a close reading of J. M.C.'s selected works.

6.4 Future Research Avenues

Over the course of this research, a number of promising directions for future studies have been identified, most specifically, the research potential of an author's body of work as his/her intellectual biography versus the more common avenue of autobiographical and fictional comparison. To better understand the implications of these methods applied in Coetzee's work, future studies could address a wider array of subjects of interest, like the ones in this thesis and catalog them. Also, this thesis has not dealt with the varied identities employed in each character Coetzee embodies as a facet of his self, and that is the implication of dialogic voices noted in his works. Additionally, on a more speculative note, the project challenged ideas on autobiographical discourse and classified fiction as a more freeing method of expression for authors, in Coetzee's own words, and that might need further clarification in both his oeuvre and other authors' work.

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Works consulted

Прилог 1.

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Изјављујем

да је докторска дисертација под насловом

"PERSONAL WRITING IN THE WORKS OF JOHN MAXWELL COETZEE: *BOYHOOD*, *YOUTH*, *SUMMERTIME*, *ELIZABETH COSTELLO* AND *SLOW MAN*"

- резултат сопственог истраживачког рада;
- да дисертација у целини ни у деловима није била предложена за стицање друге дипломе према студијским програмима других високошколских установа;
- да су резултати коректно наведени и
- да нисам кршио/ла ауторска права и користио/ла интелектуалну својину других лица.

Потпис аутора

У Београду, _____

_____

Прилог 2.

Изјава о истоветности штампане и електронске верзије докторског рада

Име и презиме аутора: Марија Мишић

Број индекса: 13044, д

Студијски програм: Језик, књижевност, култура

Наслов рада

*"*PERSONAL WRITING IN THE WORKS OF JOHN MAXWELL COETZEE: *BOYHOOD, YOUTH, SUMMERTIME, ELIZABETH COESTELLO AND SLOW MAN*"

Ментор: Др Александра Јовановић

Изјављујем да је штампана верзија мог докторског рада истоветна електронској верзији коју сам предао/ла ради похрањена у **Дигиталном репозиторијуму Универзитета у Београду.**

Дозвољавам да се објаве моји лични подаци везани за добијање академског назива доктора наука, као што су име и презиме, година и место рођења и датум одбране рада.

Ови лични подаци могу се објавити на мрежним страницама дигиталне библиотеке, у електронском каталогу и у публикацијама Универзитета у Београду.

Потпис аутора

У Београду, _____

_____

Прилог 3.

Изјава о коришћењу

Овлашћујем Универзитетску библиотеку „Светозар Марковић“ да у Дигитални репозиторијум Универзитета у Београду унесе моју докторску дисертацију под насловом:

“PERSONAL WRITING IN THE WORKS OF JOHN MAXWELL COETZEE: *BOYHOOD, YOUTH, SUMMERTIME, ELIZABETH COSTELLO AND SLOW MAN*”

која је моје ауторско дело.

Дисертацију са свим прилозима предао/ла сам у електронском формату погодном за трајно архивирање.

Моју докторску дисертацију похрањену у Дигиталном репозиторијуму Универзитета у Београду и доступну у отвореном приступу могу да користе сви који поштују одредбе садржане у одабраном типу лиценце Креативне заједнице (Creative Commons) за коју сам се одлучио/ла.

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5. Ауторство – без прерада (CC BY-ND)

6. Ауторство – делити под истим условима (CC BY-SA)

(Молимо да заокружите само једну од шест понуђених лиценци.
Кратак опис лиценци је саставни део ове изјаве).

Потпис аутора

У Београду, _____

_____

1. **Ауторство**. Дозвољавате умножавање, дистрибуцију и јавно саопштавање дела, и прераде, ако се наведе име аутора на начин одређен од стране аутора или даваоца лиценце, чак и у комерцијалне сврхе. Ово је најслободнија од свих лиценци.

2. **Ауторство – некомерцијално**. Дозвољавате умножавање, дистрибуцију и јавно саопштавање дела, и прераде, ако се наведе име аутора на начин одређен од стране аутора или даваоца лиценце. Ова лиценца не дозвољава комерцијалну употребу дела.

3. **Ауторство – некомерцијално – без прерада**. Дозвољавате умножавање, дистрибуцију и јавно саопштавање дела, без промена, преобликовања или употребе дела у свом делу, ако се наведе име аутора на начин одређен од стране аутора или даваоца лиценце. Ова лиценца не дозвољава комерцијалну употребу дела. У односу на све остале лиценце, овом лиценцом се ограничава највећи обим права коришћења дела.

4. **Ауторство – некомерцијално – делити под истим условима**. Дозвољавате умножавање, дистрибуцију и јавно саопштавање дела, и прераде, ако се наведе име аутора на начин одређен од стране аутора или даваоца лиценце и ако се прерада дистрибуира под истом или сличном лиценцом. Ова лиценца не дозвољава комерцијалну употребу дела и прерада.

5. **Ауторство – без прерада**. Дозвољавате умножавање, дистрибуцију и јавно саопштавање дела, без промена, преобликовања или употребе дела у свом делу, ако се наведе име аутора на начин одређен од стране аутора или даваоца лиценце. Ова лиценца дозвољава комерцијалну употребу дела.

6. **Ауторство – делити под истим условима**. Дозвољавате умножавање, дистрибуцију и јавно саопштавање дела, и прераде, ако се наведе име аутора на начин одређен од стране аутора или даваоца лиценце и ако се прерада дистрибуира под истом или сличном лиценцом. Ова лиценца дозвољава комерцијалну употребу дела и прерада. Слична је софтверским лиценцама, односно лиценцама отвореног кода.