

# **Panache of J M Coetzee: A Study**

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## **Abstract**

One of the most significant features of Coetzee's writing is the use of concise sentences that build a narrative in a deliberate manner. He delves into profound meaning with a measured approach. His style is difficult to define. This ambiguity has led some critics to suggest that his novels lack enthusiasm and excitement, despite the contrary being true.

**Key Words:** Racism, Discrimination

If the literary works of a novelist are a representation of his lifetime, the works of J.M. Coetzee capture an existing mirror image. From this life he originates the spirit of his thoughts and interrogations connected to the world, presence and persons. The intention of this paper is not to examine how much Coetzee and his characters coordinated, but to endeavour to read his effects and the light they bring to his novels.

During the modern era, Coetzee measured English and Mathematics at the University of Cape Town. In 1960 and 1961, he progressed with honours in both majors. Subsequently, he spent three years in Britain (1962-1965) employed as a computer programmer. During this period, he conducted research on the English writer Ford Madox Ford. In 1968, at the age of twenty-eight, he awarded a PhD in English, Linguistics and German languages at the graduate school at the University of Texas at Austin. His in-depth, ongoing academic and practical experience did not prevent him from pursuing writing.

J.M. Coetzee made a significant effort to break into the literary world. He was thirty-four years old when he published his first book in 1974. In 1977, he wrote and published his second novel, *In the Heart of the Country*. This novel quickly gained recognition in his own nation, South Africa, and internationally. It was published in Britain and the United States.

J.M. Coetzee was born in Cape Town, South Africa, on 9 February 1940. His father was a lawyer and his mother a primary school teacher. In 1963, he married Philippa Jubber and fathered her two sons, Nicholas in 1966 and Gisela in 1968. In 1980, Coetzee separated from her. She died in 1991, two years after Nicholas died in an accident at the age of twenty-three. Coetzee completed his primary, secondary and university education in Cape Town. He travelled to Britain and America to pursue higher education and became a professor, holding several positions from the beginning of 1968 until the present. He resides with his partner Dorothy Driver in Adelaide, Australia, which he moved to in 2002. He holds an honorary position at the local university. In 2006, he acquired Australian citizenship. Coetzee is a novelist and academic who engages with both local and global subjects. In 1972, he returned to South Africa after the United States refused to grant him permanent residency due to his involvement in anti-Vietnam War activities, despite being an assistant professor of English at New York University in Buffalo.

Coetzee has published sixteen novels, including *Dusklands* (1974), *In the Heart of the Country* (1977), *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983), *Age of Iron* (1990), *Disgrace* (1999), *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), *Slow Man* (2005), *The Childhood of Jesus* (2013) and other writings spanning memoir, literary criticism and essays. In 1984, his novel *Life and Times of Michael K* won the British Booker Prize. He subsequently won the Booker Prize again for

*Disgrace in 1999*, which garnered international acclaim. He was the first novelist to win the Booker Prize twice. After a year in Australia, Coetzee won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2003.

In recognition of the significance of his novels, the Harry Ransom Centre at the University of Texas Library acquired Coetzee's document for \$1.5 million in 2011. The collection comprises 155 packets of articles, texts, notes, letters and lectures by Coetzee since 1965. The document also includes nine drafts of his novel *The Life and Times of Michael K*, which centres on a simple gardener and his wife living in Cape Town when violent events commence. Coetzee's novels derive their energy and uncertainty from his tendency to employ concise sentences, a departure from the lengthy, fact-laden sentences characteristic of Colombian writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Perhaps one of the most defining features of Coetzee's writing is the use of short sentences that construct a narrative in a deliberate manner. He delves into profound meaning with a leisurely pace. His style is notoriously difficult to define. This ambiguity has led some critics to assert that his novels lack enthusiasm and excitement, a claim that is contradicted by the evidence. The brevity of his sentences conceals his indirect approach, requiring the reader to actively engage with the text to discern its meaning.

Places, life experiences and ideas are integral to the writer's career. Through various means, the writer incorporates raw elements into the literary work he creates for his characters,

allowing them to pursue their unforeseen purposes. Coetzee's life is both exciting privately and publicly. His South African heritage has provided rich material for his themes and concepts. He witnessed and lived the history of apartheid meticulously. His novel *Disgrace*, for instance, addresses and condemns this issue without succumbing to didacticism. Coetzee has learned narrative creation by economising his script style, which supports the current of events and portrays characters impulsively in challenging human circumstances. In this novel, Professor David Lurie, a Modern Languages professor, loses his job at the university after seducing and assaulting one of his students. He subsequently leaves the city to visit his daughter, who resides in the countryside. While there, three Africans attack his daughter's house, assault him, rape her and set the house ablaze. Contrary to his expectations, his daughter refuses to demand a sentence for the attackers, instead pursuing a strained relationship with her father and continuing to live as if nothing has transpired.

Coetzee wrote *Disgrace* in 1994, during the decline of apartheid in South Africa. Some interpret the daughter's approval of the events as an acknowledgement of the change in South Africa's condition. However, is the daughter's rape accurately comparable to her father's violation of the sacredness of education and his attempt to seduce his student? Again, Coetzee's novels appear ambiguous and invite multiple readings. Time has passed, and this novel

endorses that the condition in South Africa has changed. Discrimination is ultimately condemned as events unfold.

The limited number of characters in *Disgrace* is a positive aspect. An excessive number of characters could have disrupted the novel's sense of loneliness. This may be a deliberate control imposed by the author's own isolated nature. While it is inappropriate to judge a writer's life and assume their creative work reflects their experiences, it is undeniable that personal qualities are often incorporated into writing. Coetzee is renowned for his love of solitude. To avoid any misinterpretation, it is important to note that the profound roots of a genuine writer are artistically revealed in their work as a result of persistent introspection. Literature, isolation, introspection and distance are a set of influences that demonstrate qualities that cannot be overlooked in many of Coetzee's novels, including *Disgrace*, *Slow Man* and *Elizabeth Costello*.

In 1984 and 1999, the years when Coetzee won the British Booker Prize twice, he declined to accept the awards. He is as enigmatic as his novels' characters. He is often labelled as an introverted ascetic recluse who is reluctant to attend public events. These traits are particularly evident in most of his characters. Even at the level of literary events, Coetzee rarely interacts with other writers or seeks to gain closer proximity to critics. However, his works have ultimately stood on their own merits and achieved significant distinction. He abstains from alcohol, tobacco and meat

and maintains his physical fitness by cycling daily in Adelaide. It is noteworthy that Paul Rayment, the solitary protagonist in *Slow Man*, also resides in Adelaide.

The central incident in this novel is a bicycle accident that swiftly results in the amputation of Paul Rayment's leg. In this narrative, Coetzee draws upon his own experience as a cyclist to imbue the character of Paul Rayment with greater credibility. The cyclist serves as the core and foundation of the novel. From that point, Coetzee employs his literary prowess to establish Paul Rayment as a sovereign character with distinct qualities. Paul Rayment subsequently departs from Coetzee and pursues his own life. In this context, lying is associated with expansive imagination in contrast to rigid reality and the mundanity of everyday life, which does not inherently signify objectivity, namely morality or truth. The phrase also lends itself to another interpretation: human souls tend to exaggerate and distort facts. Consequently, they adopt masks to conceal their authenticity, resulting in the alteration and misrepresentation of the human principle. This philosophical and existential struggle is a recurring theme in Coetzee's works.

Therefore, the confidentiality of the characters' deeds is a leading psychological element in some of Coetzee's novels. Uncertainty, misperception and introspection are cautious tools required by characters to realise their lives. Thus, we find that Paul Rayment in *Slow Man* is anti-social and does not allow his friends to get closer to him, particularly after suffering a shocking event

that altered his life and forces him to review his past. He is in an indescribable melancholy: blankness, wilting and unimportance. In short, he gradually expires. Chasing Coetzee's characters draws the reader's attention to how they connect with his own life experiences. In the meantime, it certainly sheds light on the writer's unique ability to distinguish his characters from himself and grant them free will and their own human potential. Coetzee is able to review the innermost thoughts of an unhappy, unsocial human who suffers from the insignificance and illogicality of life. Coetzee's works present literature as a crucial element of his life. It is well-known that although Coetzee is a university professor, he does not speak! However, he makes Elizabeth Costello, his novel's epic protagonist, travel around the world, lecturing and lecturing gibberish to the point of nausea.

*Elizabeth Costello* is almost devoid of events and emphasises the internal battle occurring within the complexities of its characters: a male novelist and Costello, a critic. It is about the battle of the thoughts and the boundless misperception that arises from inconsistencies and a lack of confidence in anything. This novel is a good example of the connection between the writer's life and his characters, as one of its main heroes is a writer, whom Elizabeth Costello attacks and powerfully criticises for writing about human sin, oppression and domination. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish Coetzee's characters from his authenticity. His life and literature are a cheerful testament to the refusal of

oppression, prejudice and oppressive governments. His novels disclose human confusion, weakness, evil and flaws and have allowed him to take a noticeable place in literature and become one of the greatest novelists in the world.

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