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Metaphoric ramifications of the protagonists' character, language and actions in J. M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man*

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Abstract

This article examines the implications of the J.M. Coetzee's employment of metaphor and metaphoric behaviour and actions of the protagonists vis-à-vis the major thematic concerns in his two novels *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man*. Guided by Stylistics, the study reveals that the protagonists in the two novels, Elizabeth Costello and Paul Rayment, respectively, exhibit character, language and actions that are metaphorically allegorical to the South African apartheid and post-apartheid experiences and history. Significantly, the author's employment of animal imagery to characterize the underprivileged position of the oppressed blacks in the South African society through the metaphorical parallels between the mass slaughtering of animals for human consumption with the extermination of the Jews by the German Nazis in *Elizabeth Costello* stands out clearly. The extended metaphor of the dog in the two novels to characterize the humiliating position of the oppressed brings out clearly the sense of hopelessness and destitution that the non-Whites face within the context of apartheid. The study concludes that, though the novels are set in distant places from South Africa, through the employment of animal imagery and metaphorical portrayal his protagonists in the texts, Coetzee successfully links the events in the novels to South Africa's historical pain that is occasioned by the excruciating legacy of apartheid in the country.

Keywords: *Elizabeth Costello*, extended metaphor, historical pain, J.M. Coetzee, *Slow Man*, South Africa

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Public Interest Statement

Although J.M. Coetzee's novels, *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man* are set out of South Africa, the author's employment of metaphor to interpret his characters' behaviour, actions and language successfully links the events in the societies represented in the two novels to South Africa's historical pain that is occasioned by the painful legacies of apartheid and colonialism.

1. Introduction

John Maxwell Coetzee is a South African writer whose writings have been strongly influenced by his personal background of having been born and brought up in South Africa. Despite being a white writer who has lived in South Africa during the infamous apartheid era, Coetzee writes with strong anti-apartheid and anti-imperialist feelings. Thus, he can be seen as one of the dissident literary voices speaking strongly against the apartheid regime through his creative writings.

Most of his earlier writings from *Dusklands* (1974) to *Youth* (2004) have focused on the relationship between the white supremacist groups and the blacks and the perpetual historical conflicts between the racial classes. However, with the publications of *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man*, Coetzee seems to have shifted from writing novels focusing on racism and political issues to writing fiction whose central theme is the human subject. Therefore, the choice of *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man* for this study is based on the fact that Coetzee has moved away from a South African setting to dealing with the challenges and thematic issues afflicting not only the South African society but also humanity in the other parts of the world. The study is confined to the metaphorical implications of the two protagonists' behavior, actions and linguistic idiosyncrasies since the novels center more on the destiny of the two solitary characters in the texts rather than on the people about them.

Studies that have been conducted on Coetzee's writings have tended to focus of thematic issues that are prevalent in South African literary expression. For instance, according to Wanjala, (1978, pp.8-13), South African literature deals with the theme of annihilation – the psychological and cosmic peril to which the South African man is subject. He argues, for example, that South African writers portray humanity stripped of all graces due to the historical, political and racial realities in southern part of Africa. In *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man*, however, the protagonists are portrayed as characters whose psychological and physical being influence their behaviour and relationship with others rather than being influenced by the cruel reality of apartheid or colonialism. However, Coetzee's attempt to foreground the metaphorical aspects of the protagonists within a post-apartheid setting reveals a deep-seated influence of the historical issues of the South African country which he might not have wished to deal with directly.

In his essay "Codes for the Enigma of Survival", Taylor, (2005) asserts that Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* is an enquiry into the human belief systems and fervent argument about animal rights. He points out that Coetzee's characters in this novel are detached and disenfranchised to the point of destitution. Taylor emphasizes that Coetzee's true interest in this novel lies in the writing of sophisticated parables of the human condition. Similarly, on *Slow Man*, he argues that it is a novel full of the deftest psychological touches and on Rayment's memory and desire. However, Taylor does not consider the metaphorical or symbolic significance of the characters' behaviour, actions and linguistic choices vis-à-vis the thematic concerns of the two texts and to the wider South African historical realities which have shaped his perspectives on the human condition.

According to Scott, (2005), Costello's lectures in *Elizabeth Costello* resonate with multiple philosophical meanings and a humanism that makes her a resolute character portrait. He

asserts that Coetzee's characters in the novel are symbols of the wider South Africa's social and political circumstances and that the author does not load the novel with facts that describe the characters, but lets the reader discover them for himself/herself by presenting him/her with meaningful scenes of their lives. Nevertheless, there is still a great need to look further into the symbolic or metaphorical ramifications of not only the characters, but their behaviour, attitudes, relationship with others and their linguistic choices in relation to the thematic concerns which he has foregrounded in the novel.

Jones (2003), points out that Coetzee, in his novel *Elizabeth Costello*, has concentrated on religious themes that juxtapose good and evil and religion and belief. Additionally, she asserts that the author has resurrected several of his previously published essays through the voice of the protagonist, Mrs. Costello. However, the question that still needs to be addressed is, to what extent can Costello's behaviour and religious or philosophical beliefs and views be taken as special metaphors for comprehending the wider post-apartheid South Africa?

Corresponding with Jones, Lodge (2006) views the character of Costello as that of a more rounded individual, with a much more complex history and one who is preoccupied with more than one ethical or philosophical issue. Lodge also raises the question of how far we are meant to identify with Costello and her opinions partly because of the similarity and difference between her and her creator, Coetzee. Lodge concludes that the novel can be viewed as a mixture of realistic narrative, myth, controversial polemic dialogue, erotic interludes and allusions to contentious thematic issues raised by other South African writers.

Strong (2005), argues that, in *Slow Man*, Coetzee confronts by analogy his own predicament, that of the absolute dissident. He points out that the problem for Coetzee, born in Cape Town in 1940 of English and Dutch extraction, has been how to write honestly as a white man about apartheid. Therefore, as a fiction writer, Coetzee generally prefers to address his nation's shame by extrapolating questions of power. Nevertheless, Strong's evaluation of the issues in the text that demonstrate the author's dilemma ignores the author's stylistic component, and in particular the metaphors that articulate this predicament concisely.

According to Wood, (2006), Coetzee's themes in *Elizabeth Costello* are imbued with a tricky camber of allegory and that the text is an intense and a loose wail of pain. He further argues that Costello's lectures about the lives of animals can also mean that she is contemplating the human animal. It is by contemplating her own death that she can enter the suffering and the millions of deaths of animals. Thus the human mortality is perceived also as animal mortality. However, Wood's analysis ignores the artistic component of the text and focuses on the didactic nature of the novel.

Kosecki (2013), investigated the role played by the image of the mutilated body in J.M. Coetzee's novels. His study employed cognitive linguistics in interpreting the metaphoric meaning of the mutilated bodies in Coetzee's writings. He argues that the image of a character's body creates meaning because of the employment of two conceptual metaphors, whereby the images of mutilated, disabled and diseased bodies of Coetzee's characters as analysed as metaphorical containers that comprises the truth about life in the societies represented in the texts. He argues that the bodies of the characters carry with them moral lessons for the reader. However, there is need to go beyond the imagery of the disfigured bodies and examine the character's behaviour, linguistic choices and actions in order to comprehend their metaphorical implications to the wider South African and global spaces. The fact that his critical study ignored Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man* calls our attention to the two texts whose settings are radically different from the South African context which is predominant in the author's early writings.

Similarly, Suthipinittharm's (2015) study focused on the examination of human

beings that are embodied in Coetzee's writings. Suthipinittharm argues that in employing the concept of the body-soul, one can help reveal the meaning of Coetzee's works. He further points out that the focus to the body-souls of the protagonists in Coetzee's works demonstrate that "Coetzee's fiction writing and the living beings within it may not always be a force for good" (p.2). He further asserts that "the truths contained in these works of Coetzee are truths of the body-soul that cannot be fully extricated from their embodiments" (p.2). However, the current study goes beyond the symbolic implications of the bodies of the characters and explores the metaphorical implications of the protagonists' behavior and relations with other characters in the texts.

Since this study focuses on metaphor as an important figurative aspect of language in Coetzee's two novels, this study utilized stylistics to examine the protagonists in the two novels. It should be noted that the language of literature is often saturated with figurative aspects of language. However, writers will normally differ in terms of their choices of a variety of figures of speech owing to their differences in idiosyncratic employment of the language of their literary expression. Therefore, writers will strive to create their own authentic metaphors in order to express their creative genius as they tackle different sociopolitical and ideological worldviews of the societies represented in their literary discourses. Nevertheless, I would like to emphasize that metaphors are created by artists or writers in order to offer different aspects of the realities they have experienced and that literary metaphors are typically less clear and richer in meaning than the common language or everyday metaphors. According to Kovecses (2002, p.64), literature "commonly makes use of unconventionalized metaphorical expressions that are based on conventional conceptual metaphors" and that "the creativity of literature is constrained by our everyday metaphorical system". Kovecses' conceptualization of metaphor in literature underscores the fact that literary criticism of a literary text cannot be divorced from the social, cultural, religious political and ideological realities of the society from which the writer extrapolates his raw materials for the construction of his or her creative output. As such, we see Coetzee's employment of metaphor in his novels *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man* as being constrained by the sociopolitical and ideological worldviews of the larger apartheid and post-apartheid South African nation with its underlying racial structures.

A part from the conceptual linguistic metaphors, literature also utilizes metaphors that are realized non-linguistically. According to Kovecses (2002), metaphors can be expressed in forms of movies and acting, cartoons, drawings, sculpture, buildings, myths, dream interpretation, the interpretation of history, cultural symbols, politics and foreign policy, morality, "moral politics", social institutions, social practices, certain aspects of gestures and many more (p. 65). In the light of this, we can ascertain that metaphor pervades not only the literary texts but also the social, artistic, psychological, intellectual and even political lives of the characters presented in texts. It is on this background that the reader can view Coetzee's characters, their behavior, actions, relationships with one another and their transformations as metaphors of the social, economic and political realities in the societies represented in *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man*.

Therefore, a study of the various metaphorical implications of the protagonists in the two novels facilitates the reader's ability to decipher Coetzee's interpretation of the social, economic, political and even ideological realities that shape the mode of characterization and thematic concerns in the two texts. This is imperative because a critic cannot divorce a literary writer from those forces influencing his/her perception of society as underscored by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in the following:

The language of African literature cannot be discussed meaningfully outside the context of those social forces which have made it both an issue demanding our attention and a problem calling for a resolution. (Ngugi. 1986).

Emmanuel Ngara (1995), observes that by emphasizing the equality of content and form, stylistic criticism recognizes that sociological and aesthetic issues are of equal importance in literary study. Thus stylistic criticism evaluates a work of art in terms of its readability, the appropriateness of the writer's linguistic choices and the content value and aesthetic quality being seen in dialectical interaction with each other. Therefore, a stylistic interpretation of the metaphorical meaning of Coetzee's protagonists' behaviour, actions and language will accord the reader an enhanced appreciation of the author's thematic and aesthetic qualities that have been invested in crafting *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man*.

2. The Characters as Metaphors of a Nagging Historical Pain

In his 1987 Jerusalem prize acceptance speech, Coetzee lamented the importance of his writing, all writing, in the face of apartheid. He articulated his longing to leave behind the violent reality of South Africa (Head, 1997). Coetzee's hope here seems to suggest that South Africa's transition to democracy would mean a movement from the violent politics of apartheid to a focus on ethical issues. That is why probably his post-apartheid novels, *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man*, do not evince much concern on directly with political or racial matrixes that dominate his earlier novels such as *Disgrace* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*. That is also why these novels stage ethical dilemmas that confront modern man as they are constructed in the form of imaginative hypotheses that ask questions about the human condition rather than merely describing a seen or felt world. There lies much of their power, even if the readers do not take them this way.

Nonetheless, despite Coetzee's concerted effort to concentrate on universal human condition, his deliberate conviction to elevate ethical issues revolving around sexuality, passion, marriage and the aging process and his attempt to submerge the violent reality of racism in his country, South Africa, there is still a nagging historical pain and melancholic mood that pervades his two novels, *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man*. This can be seen through the metaphoric implications of the protagonists' behaviour, language, actions and their relationships with other characters in the societies depicted in the two novels.

In *Elizabeth Costello*, Costello's lecture on "The lives of Animals," at the fictitious Appleton collage in which she laments the horrors done to animals in production facilities, in abattoirs and in laboratories carry far reaching metaphoric implications hinged on the violent racial relations witnessed in South Africa during the apartheid era. In her arguments, Costello compares the mistreatment, debasement and mass killing of animals to the extermination of the Jews by the sadistic and racist Germans Nazis.

Costello's evocation of the holocaust can be seen as a metaphor through which Coetzee indirectly discourses the brutalities perpetrated against South African non-whites. The anti-Semitic feelings of the German Nazis that Costello mentions in her lecture, can be interpreted as Coetzee's reference to the activities of the Afrikaner establishment in South Africa which adopted the Nazi paramilitary forms in the early 1970s to oppress and victimize the Blacks and Jews. The Afrikaners also embraced fully Hitler's ideological paradigms and the Nazi's emphasis on the purity of the race, community and the supremacy of the community over the individual in order to promote Afrikaner nationalism and build a Nazi-style republic in South Africa. However, it should be noted that anti-Jewish prejudices in South Africa goes back to 1939 when Louis Weichardt founded a movement known as the Greyshirts to

promote Nazi-style anti-Semitism (Omer-Cooper, 1994, p.182).

The Jewish Holocaust that Costello talks about can be viewed as metaphorically referring to the genocide against the Blacks and non-Whites such as the Asians and the Jews in South Africa during the apartheid era. For example, the Sharpeville massacre of March 31st, 1960 in which the police of the Afrikaners' National Party's government killed sixty-nine blacks, the killing of black school children protesting against the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in 1976 and General Magnus Malan's complicity in the KwaMakhutha massacre involving Inkatha militia members in Kwazulu-Natal in 1987 (Omer-Cooper, 1994, pp. 209-232).

Although Coetzee just hints at the brutalities perpetrated against the Blacks, and non-Whites in South Africa through the metaphors of mass killing and mistreatment of animals and the extermination of the Jews by the German Nazis in *Elizabeth Costello*, his earlier fiction captures vividly the horrors of oppression and murders extended by the White regime in South Africa. For example, in *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), the extermination of the Blacks - referred to as the Barbarians - is depicted through the capture of twelve men by Colonel Joll and his soldiers. When brought to the torture camp, the Black captives are tied neck to neck, are stark naked and a wire runs through each man's hands and through the holes pierced in their cheeks. Four of the men are tied to a post using the loop of a wire that is pierced through their cheeks. Colonel Joll writes the word 'ENEMY' on each of their backs using a stick of charcoal. Then the white soldiers whip their backs and buttocks till sweat and blood wash away the writing on them. A small girl is also given a cane and forced to whip them before the crowd is set upon them.

In lesson six, "The Problem of Evil", Costello's lecture which is titled "Witness, Silence and Censorship" in which she protests at Paul's West's graphic description of the execution of Hitler's would-be assassins in his novel, *The Very Rich Hours of Count Van Stauffenberg*, can be interpreted as Coetzee's attempt to veer away from the violent realities of the apartheid regime in South Africa. Costello, in this context, invokes the Platonic view that literature corrupts society if it portrays bad/evil characters and heinous/horrific incidences. She terms Paul West's description of the execution of the plotters of the assassination of Hitler "obscene" and asserts that his novel is "a black book" with "scenes that do not belong in the light of day, that the eyes of the maidens and children deserve to be shielded from" (Coetzee 2003:159).

Costello's conviction is that by exposing horrific reality in works of fiction, writers aid in spreading the evils depicted in their works rather than stopping the contagious effects of those evils exposed in the texts. This is underscored in her question: "can anyone... wander as deep as Paul West does into the Nazi forest of horrors and emerge unscathed?" (Coetzee 2003, p. 161). This rhetorical question is meant to emphasize the impact of literature on the reader as well as the writer. That is why Costello argues that whatever writers write has the power to destroy or build psychologically both the writer and the reader as demonstrated when she confronts Paul West and tells him:

.... what I contend, is that we must be wary if horrors such as you describe in your book. We as writers. Not merely for the sake of our readers but out of concern for ourselves. We can put ourselves in peril by what we write, or so I believe. For if what we write has the power to make us better people then surely it has the power to make us worse. (Coetzee, 2003, p. 171)

Costello's act of censoring the portrayal of such acts as the execution of people in literary texts can be perceived as an aspect of the Whites' guilty consciousness for the evils

they have committed against other human beings or other races. Therefore, there is a strong desire in the Whites' consciousness for the repression of the horrific activities done to non-Whites. However, Coetzee seems to be sending a strong message to the reader and writers equally by emphasizing that history cannot be ignored by being galvanized in carefully-manipulated language.

Lesson Eight, "At the Gate" in which Costello finds herself before a panel of grotesque Judges in Kafkaesque conceptualization of the afterlife is almost a replica of the post-apartheid South African experience witnessed through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's activities. The confessions that the tribunal demands from Costello about her beliefs can be interpreted as Coetzee's allegorical reference to the confessions of the victims of vicious violence and painful experiences during the infamous apartheid regime in South Africa. Specifically, important in this section, is reference to the extermination of "Old Tasmanians" by Costello's countrymen, her ancestors. When she insists that as a writer she does not have beliefs, one of the judges wonders:

Atrocities take place, violations of innocent children. The extermination of whole people. What does she think about such matters? Does she have no beliefs to guide her? (Coetzee, 2003, p. 202)

The allegorically metaphorical reference to the South African Whites' guilt for having oppressed and killed many Blacks and non-Whites is also expressed by the following rhetorical question that is connected with the extermination of "old Tasmanians" by Costello's ancestors: "Is that, finally, what lies behind this hearing, this trial: the question of historical guilt?" (Coetzee, 2003, p. 203)

Costello's failure to write a convincing statement of her beliefs and her determination and insistence that there are "matters about which one talks about and matters about which it is appropriate to keep ones peace" and that "beliefs are not the only ethical supports we have" and that "we can rely on our hearts as well," alludes to the Whites' reluctance and the unwillingness of some White South African government officials to own up to their participation and guilt in the atrocities committed during the apartheid regime in South Africa. Therefore, their message to the truth and reconciliation commission was that the crimes of apartheid era should be buried and forgotten in order to attain a peaceful healing process in the post-apartheid South Africa.

In Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello*, Costello's dilemma of being compelled to fill in application forms and confess her beliefs in order to be allowed to pass through a heavily guarded gate may be seen to metaphorically allude to the scenario at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Reparations Committee's activities. The Amnesty Committee of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission undertook the reviewing of the applications for reparations. The band playing music outside the stuffy and dirty dormitory where Costello is staying as she continues to review the statements of her beliefs symbolically alludes to the quasi-religious opening ceremony of the public Human Rights Violations hearings in East London City Hall in April 1994 where there was an overture of hymn singing as Archbishop Desmond Tutu prayed and named those who had died and disappeared and the subjects of the day's hearings. The evocation of the Christian Liturgy at the hearings was meant to create conducive atmosphere for honest and truthful confession of people's sins and crimes that is normally witnessed in Christian religious settings.

In Lesson two, "The novel in Africa", Emmanuel Egudu's passionate defence and elevation of what he calls an "oral novel" of a true African "oral culture" and Costello's

dismissive arguments against him can be perceived as alluding metaphorically to a racial contestation of hegemonic power relations between the Whites and the Blacks. Egudo, who is described as a famous Nigerian writer of novels, plays, poems, and the winner of a Commonwealth Literally Award (African Division), praises the oral nature of African Literature as being alive and dynamic and true to the sensibilities of the African experiences. He, on the other hand, castigates the Western novel which is dead and inert on the printed pages. Additionally, he asserts that the African “oral novel is a critique of the Western novel, which has gone so far down the road of disembodiment” and identifies European writers such as Henry James and Marcel Proust as examples of authors of the dead and inert Western novels (Coetzee, 2003, p. 45). Egudu defends and glorifies the Negritude movement which he defines in the following complimentary language:

...is the essential substratum that binds all Africans together and makes them uniquely African - not only the Africans of Africa but Africans of the great African Diaspora in the New world and now in Europe. (Coetzee, 2003, p. 43)

Egudu laments that the time has come to stop privileging the writing culture, which he associates with the imperial Western culture that has resulted in “political and industrial imperialism” in Africa. The applause of his audience at the end of his talk is described as “loud and spirited” because he has stood up not only for himself, but also for his calling and his people. However, Costello’s criticism of Egudu and his arguments, which is heavily laden with racial overtures, can be seen as whites’ anti-African prejudices. She dismisses Egudu’s Negritude’s ideas as a form of pseudo-philosophy and also thinks of Egudu as a poseur, a derogatory terminology that implies someone who is trying to be what he is not. (Coetzee 2003, pp.36-40). On Egudu’s talk about an oral novel, she dismisses it as “just another way of probing up the mystique of the African as the last repository of primal human energies” (Coetzee 2003, p. 53). Costello’s arguments here can therefore be seen as the residue of White racial hegemonic ideology in the post-apartheid South Africa. The Juxtaposition and analysis of the contrastive views of Egudu and Costello brings out Coetzee’s confession of the impossibility of total eradication of racial prejudices in post-apartheid South Africa despite the country’s transition from apartheid system of government to that of democracy.

Coetzee’s novel *Slow Man*, just like *Elizabeth Costello*, echoes the inherent racial conflict and guilt in the post-apartheid south Africa. To begin with, Paul Rayment’s reference to Drago and his friends as “Croatian gypsies” which derogatorily translates to “backward nomads in the modern world,” amounts to racial prejudices that are witnessed in South Africa and which Coetzee explicitly portrays in the images of the “barbarians” and the savagery Blacks in his novels *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) and *Life Times of Michael K* (1983). Thus, Rayment’s relationship with his nurse, Marijana Jokic, a Croatian emigrant creates the image of the relationship of the colonial master and his servants. The master-servant relationship presented here portrays Rayment as being at an economically advantaged position that makes his desire to become a “godfather” and a “benefactor” to the Jokics family. The position of economic advantage he occupies also makes him to seek sexual favour from his nurse. Coetzee, in this context, is portraying sexism as a metaphor of exploitation just like those prejudices that are associated with racism. This is because sexism and racism come from the same root of biases against those different from oneself, the willingness to see them as less human and the desire to enslave and use them.

Coetzee also portrays sexism as a ground not just for the sexual exploitation of women but also as a power game that sets the concepts of manhood and womanhood as a

psychological contest. Whereas men are seen to use their patriarchal status as a position of advantage and as a means of exploiting and oppressing women sexually, the women, on the other hand, can be seen to use sex as a weapon to humble and subjugate the patriarchal psyches and stereotyped men. Costello's act of undressing and exposing a nude body to the ailing and sexually crippled Mr. Phillips (Coetzee 2003, pp.147-149); Marijana's resistance of Rayment's sexual advances despite his pledging of financial aid for her son; Costello's act of restraining Rayment from sexually pursuing Marijana and her stress that he should pay for his sexual liaison with Marianna (Coetzee, 2005) can be seen to metaphorically attest to the masculinist-feminist power contest that carries with it far reaching political ramifications associated with racism in post-apartheid South Africa and even in our contemporary world at large. This is because the psychological foundation and bolster of oppression is the use of power even in the most intimate aspects of life; so that if one can oppress even those that one can claim to love the most, then one can oppress anyone else.

Marriage being an institution that is normally seen as a powerful medium of unity among people in our societies, in the contrary, has been portrayed as a springboard upon which male-female power contests and racism are expressed in Coetzee's novels *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man*. For instance, Rayment's failure to marry a Moroccan girl while living in France because her family made it impossible for him and her, can be seen as a metaphor of the South African racial polarities that saw the apartheid regime declare sexual relations between Whites and non-Whites "illicit" (Coetzee 2005, p. 197). For example, the National Party government took the principle of making illicit sexual relations between Whites and Africans as criminal and outlawed inter-racial marriages by the 1949 Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act. In 1950, the Immorality Act was amended to enforce the prohibition of sexual relationships between Whites and Coloureds in South Africa. To achieve the racial separation envisaged by the theory of maintaining the purity of the White race, it was necessary to divide the whole population into water-tight compartments that saw the legislation of the pass laws (Omer-Cooper, 1994).

In *Slow Man*, Coetzee has metaphorically employed Rayment's feelings of alienation and homelessness to express the psychological torture that most emigrants feel in their adopted countries. Rayment's homelessness and feelings of alienation come out succinctly when he recounts his painful experience as an immigrant to Costello as follows:

I had three doses of immigrant experience ... so imprinted itself quite deeply. First when I was uprooted as a child and brought to Australia, then when I declared myself independent and return to France; then when I gave up on France and came back to Australia. Is this where I belong? I asked with each move? Is this my true home? (Coetzee, 2005, p. 192)

Rayment's dreadful sense of alienation is worsened by his uneasy feelings and attitude towards his use of English rather than his mother tongue, French language. That is why he laments: "It is not I who speak the language; it is the language that is spoken through me. It does not come out from my core, mon Coeur" (Coetzee, 2005, p.198). Through Rayment's dilemma with respect to the language he uses, Coetzee is pointing out a very crucial proposition: that human beings are bound together by a common linguistic factor and that language is an important cultural aspect and a defining yardstick that can be used to place a person in his in bona fide social and geographical locale. Ngugi wa Thiong'o has underscored the central role that language plays in, not only defining an individual, but also as a tool that can be used to articulate hegemonic character of a race over others (Ngugi,

1981).

Coetzee, through Rayment's linguistic rootlessness, seems to suggest that White characters who migrate from their home countries or are socialized in different cultural constructs experience what Mungai, M. (1997:25) describes as a "persistent desire and desperate effort to remain connected to European values". Therefore, White characters are seen to be privileging and elevating their value systems such as language and other cultural aspects of not only their race but also of their countries. This accounts for Rayment's feelings of alienation since he feels that he has not actualized his social and personal goals. In this context, therefore, Coetzee can be said to be castigating strongly the thinking of some people who undermine the cultural constructs of those they perceive as being of a different ethnic or racial category. Coetzee is suggesting that by embracing a multicultural experience, people are likely to live in harmony and attain a level of self-actualization in their lives.

3. It's A Dog's Life: Life's Wretchedness

The representation of Costello and Rayment in Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man* respectively proves that a writer has the intellectual and linguistic resources to describe a human condition larger than his own, and indeed to convey it in fictional forms to his readers or audience. In the two novels, Coetzee has striven to show how man's life or existence is largely influenced by the impact of the nature of the society in which one is living, the relationship of one to the people about oneself, the age and status of one's health and the psychological disposition of an individual. Coetzee's interest in this perspective, therefore, can be seen to be more of a question of ethics, touching on the morality of making people up, and taking them through a hellish experience of trials and torments that are designed to expose and test their deficiencies and ultimately their human condition.

In the two novels, Coetzee has presented the lives of his protagonist as being in a state of disconsolation. The author has portrayed the wretchedness of the protagonists through the extended metaphor of a dog. The multiple connotations which he has ascribed to the term "dog" seem to apply extensively to the nature of existence or life that the protagonists exhibit and experience. Most of the expressions that include "dog" are based on the old and traditional times when dogs were not cosseted, but were kept as watch dogs or hunting animals, not as pets. They often were not allowed in the house, but were kept in kennels, fed scraps, overworked, and they often died disgracefully. Expressions such as "going to the dogs", "dog tired", "to die like a dog", "dog's dinner", "dog body", "dog eat dog", "a dog's life", "a dog chance", and "put on the dog", all refer to a state of affairs that should be best avoided. Specifically, a dog's life was first recorded in the sixteenth century and it seems to have remained in the language with the sense of a life of misery or of miserable subservience and deplorable servitude. In 1808, the English poet Byron expressed his thoughts about dogs in his famous poem "Epitaph to a Dog":

But the poor dog, in life the
Firmest friend,
The first to welcome,
Foremost to defend,
Whose honest heart is still
His master's own,
Who labors, fights lives,
Breaths for him alone,
Unhonoured falls, unnoticed

All his worth,
Denied in heaven the soul
He held on earth –
While man, vain insect! hopes
To be forgiven,
And claims himself a sole
Exclusive heaven.

The motif of a dog that pervades Coetzee's *Slow Man* can be interpreted as reflecting on the miserable existence of Rayment and its impact on his behaviour, actions and relationship with other characters. Rayment's accident and ultimately the amputation of his leg plunges him into a circumscribed, humiliating life. To him, a circumscribed life is not worth living. That is why the narrative voice comments on the loss of his leg and his altered course of life in the following way:

But in his case the cut seems to have marked off the past from future with such uncommon cleanness that it gives new meaning to the word new. By the sign of this cut let a new life commence. If you have hitherto been a man, with a man's life, may you henceforth be a dog, with a dog's life. That is what the voice says, the voice out the dark cloud. (Coetzee, 2005, p. 26)

The expression "may you henceforth be a dog, with a dog's life" in the above excerpt sounds like a curse brought down upon Rayment and condemning him to an unworthy and miserable living. The voice that pronounces this damning fate to Rayment is said to come from a "dark cloud" which can be interpreted as a metaphor of doom. True to the meaning pronounced here, Rayment's life after the accident becomes characterized by solitude, frustration and several incidences of humiliation. For example, because of his inability to do anything without being assisted, he is humiliated by one of his nurses who calls his bedpan "the potty" and his manhood "his Willie". He also has to be washed like a child, making him ashamed because of the exposure of his nakedness. That is why he sometimes averts his eyes from Marijana when nakedness cannot be helped "so that she will see that he does not see her seeing him" (Coetzee, 2005, p.32).

While in a state of being humiliated and desperation, Rayment recalls a miserable and sick dog they had when he was a child in Lourdes. His father took the dog to the woods and shot it dead. The memory of the dog and its disgraceful death is brought to his mind by the thoughts and meditation on the possibility of his own death. This makes him even to contemplate committing suicide though he lacks the will power to execute it.

Costello also conceptualizes Rayment's life and incapacitated state in form of the metaphor of a dog. Because of his being in a humiliated state, Costello encourages him to have a sexual liaison with an equally devastated and frustrated blind woman, Marianna. And when he fails to establish a permanent or serious relationship with the blind woman, Costello urges him to accept her as an appropriate companion and partner as both are old and ugly. She even suggests that he should quit his house and go with her to Melbourne. She argues that because of his wretchedness, a decent woman like Marijana will not accept him as a lover as demonstrated when she prods him:

Forget about Mrs. Jokic, you don't stand a dog's chance with her. Take a chance on me. I'll be your best copine, the copine of your last days. We will share our

crusts while we still have teeth. (Coetzee, 2005, p. 234)

Rayment's attitude towards sexual intercourse is derogatorily expressed in the metaphor of the dog. He perceives acts of sexual experiences in terms of indecency and filth which he associates with dog sex: "Dogs in the grip of passion coupling, hapless grins on their faces, their tongues hanging out" (Coetzee 2005, p. 46). This mentality makes him to feel embarrassed when a dog trots to where he is seated with Costello and sniffs both of them. The narrative voice describes his discomfiture:

Always embarrassing when a dog pushes its snout into a woman's crotch. It is reminding itself of sex, dog sex, or is it just savoring the novel, complex smells? He has always thought of Elizabeth as an asexual being, but perhaps a dog, putting its trust in its nose, will know better. (Coetzee, 2005, p.194)

In *Elizabeth Costello*, the protagonist's efforts to go through a guarded gate in the Kafkaesque portrayal of the afterlife of a writer are frustrated when she fails to present the required and convincing statement of her beliefs. While being in a state of total exhaustion and disillusionment, partly due to her advanced age and partly her frustrations, she has a vision of an old dog. The narrative voice recounts her vision:

She has a vision of the gate, the far side of the gate, the side she is denied. At the foot of the gate, blocking the way, lies stretched out a dog, an old dog, his lion-colored hide scarred from innumerable mangling. His eyes are closed, he is resting, snoozing. Beyond him is nothing but a desert of sand and stone, to infinity. It is her vision in a long while and she does not trust it, does not trust in particular the anagram GOD-DOG. Too literary, she thinks again. A curse on literature. (Coetzee, 2003:224)

The image of an exhausted old dog whose skin is extensively damaged may metaphorically be Costello's perception of herself as she is also old and so ugly that she does not like to look into a mirror for fear of confronting the ugly image of her old self. The desert and stones she sees in her vision are metaphors of a barren, meaningless and wretchedness of one's life, while the inversion of GOD to form DOG in the anagram "GOD-DOG" metaphorically suggests disillusionment and the impossibility of any form of salvation from wretchedness. The fact that Costello links her vision to "a curse on literature" points to her own disappointment at her feelings of emptiness and the dissatisfaction she experiences as a writer.

The metaphor of the dog vis-à-vis the wretchedness of man's existence in the context of societal and social disengagement is a motif that permeates Coetzee's earlier fiction as well. For instance, in *Disgrace* (1999), reference is made of a male dog that gets excited at the sight of a bitch and as a result their owner would beat it until it develops self-hatred due to its sexual desires. This metaphor alludes to Professor David Lurie's sexual immorality that eventually lands him in suffering. There are also Lucy's dogs that are killed by three black men in what Wahome, (2006) calls "reciprocal justice" (p.26) since their attack on Professor Lurie and his daughter carry racial overtones. The sickly dogs whose lives are perceived as wretched and, therefore, are killed by Bev Show also contribute to the metaphoric ramifications of the wretchedness of Professor Lurie and other victims of the violent apartheid regime in South Africa.

In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the Magistrate's debased state after being subjected to torture and starvation by the agents of the oppressive Empire is likened to that of a "dog" and a "beast" living a bestial life (Coetzee 1980, p.80). Just like the Magistrate, Michael K, the protagonist in Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K* is described by a medical officer as "a simpleton" who has gone off like "a dog" to die in a corner due to his starvation (Coetzee, 1983, p.212).

Notable about Coetzee's protagonists is an aspect of disfigurement of their bodies that becomes a source of humiliation and ultimately their self-hatred and self-sabotage. For instance, Rayment's amputated leg and Costello's physical deterioration due to her advanced age in *Slow Man* and *Elizabeth Costello* respectively evokes feelings of shame and self-hatred in the two characters. However, the protagonists are not interested in any form of cosmetic or medical rehabilitation of their bodies. Instead, Rayment rejects completely the use of a prosthesis since he loathes anything fakery about his life and body. He is like Michael K who also refuses to have his disfigured nostrils and mouth reconstructed because a reconstruction will distort his true self or original and natural self.

Coetzee's novels thus can be said to testify to the suffering of victims of historical consequences and accidents. The disfigured characters, each personify the material history of suffering and can be perceived as being objects of, not subjects in history, and that their bodies' resistance to healing and rehabilitation signify the inability to societal recovery from the historical pain experienced during colonialism and apartheid in South Africa and other countries with similar experiences.

In Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello*, Africa is portrayed as a place of traumatic experience, death and poverty. This is evinced through Costello's encounter with the HIV/ Aids children at Marianhill, her sister's hospital in Zululand, South Africa. The wretchedness of the children's lives is exemplified by the terribly emaciated and diseased bodies: "the stick limbs, the bloated bellies, the great impassive eyes of the children wasting away, beyond care, beyond cure." The impact of the traumatic sight of these children is so acute that Costello psychologically quails: "Let this cup be taken from me! I am too old to withstand these sights, too old and weak. I will just cry" (Coetzee 2003, p. 133).

In *Elizabeth Costello*, Africa is portrayed as a place not of any straight forward political and economic integration but rather of violence, intimidation and economic apathy. Egudu's arguments about Africa in Costello's Lesson Two, "The Novel in Africa," attest to this assertion. He disparages Africa as the home of poverty where people do not have money to buy novels written by their great writers. He argues that great writers with serious ambitions have no place for Africa, hence, "must look elsewhere for salvation" and that story telling provides a livelihood neither for publishers nor writers. He further says that his own literary books are published, read, reviewed, talked about and judged for the most part by foreigners. He reveals that in his own country, just like many African writers, he is less than welcome and is labeled a dissident intellectual (Coetzee, 2003, p.42). Egudu, in this context, can metaphorically be seen to represent the various African writers such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Wole Soyinka whose creative works have caused them unwarranted suffering and rejection by their countries.

4. Conclusion

J. M. Coetzee's novels *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man* can be read as the author's metaphorical portrayal of the post-apartheid South Africa's realities which cannot be easily divorced from the historical injustices occasioned by colonial and apartheid systems in the country. It should be noted that Coetzee's two protagonists in the two novels are in a state of disconsolation.

Costello's and Rayment's wretched and diminished nature has been captured through the metaphor of the dog that pervades the two novels. Therefore, although the novels are distanced from the time and place of their production, it is accurately in this special context that they are best able to narrativise the history of racism and the human condition in not only South Africa but also in other parts of the world with similar social, ideological and historical experiences.

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