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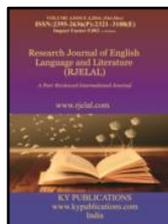
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## A POSTCOLONIAL STUDY OF THE IMAGES OF "THE OTHER" IN J. M COETZEE'S *SUMMERTIME*

WANG MIAOMIAO<sup>1</sup>, MA QINGLING<sup>2</sup>

Associate Professor<sup>1</sup>, Student<sup>2</sup>

College of Foreign Languages, North China Electric Power University, China



### ABSTRACT

John Maxwell Coetzee is a contemporary novelist and the recipient of the Nobel Prize in 2003. *Summertime* is his third autobiographical fiction which contains five interviews with five people from different cultural backgrounds and a set of journals dated or undated. On the basis of Edward Waefie Said's definition of the Other, the thesis firstly analyses three images of the Other in *Summertime*. The binary opposition of cultures between East and West creates the ambivalence and uncertainty of the Easterners' cultural identity. Therefore, in the second part, through textual analysis based on the theory of Homi Bhabha's mimicry, the thesis discusses the issue of Easterners' quest for self-identity. The conclusion part of the thesis is that instead of opposite or interior to the Westerners, the Orientals can help the white people liberate from their narrowness and know themselves better. People of different race or color should respect and live in harmony with each other in the clash of civilizations.

Keywords: the Other, J. M Coetzee, *Summertime*, identity

### Introduction

John Maxwell Coetzee (1940- ), a recipient of the 2003 Nobel Prize in literature, is the third South African writer who wins this supreme achievement and the first writer to be awarded the Booker Prize twice. his paper aims to analyze his third fictionalized autobiography *Summertime* (2009), successive of the other two, namely *Boyhood* (1997), *Youth* (2002). The three books are all subtitled with "Scenes from Provincial Life" and they all tell the story of the same protagonist named John Coetzee.

*Summertime* contains a set of interviews and elaborations allegedly collected by a young British academic, Mr. Vincent, framed by notebook fragments. The impression we absorb as readers of Vincent's interviews and transcripts is of the young Coetzee as a scraggly failed romantic, a man whose

overly cerebral awkwardness clashes with his ambitions to be a physically gifted sexual partner and manual laborer. It is necessary to notice that in the novel the discussed protagonist John Coetzee is supposed to be dead.

This paper focus on the three images of the Other, namely, the non-white people, Afrikaners and the protagonist J.M. Coetzee as the Other because of his origin of South African. And the goal of this paper is to convince that the Orientals are not opposite or interior to the Westerners or the white people. In contrast, they can help the white people know themselves better. The white people can feel human kindness without prejudice on the race of people and get uplift in the actions of the colored people.

### WHAT'S "THE OTHER"?

Orientalism is an academic discipline by which the Orient is approached systematically. It describes the styles of thought by which Europeans came to know the Orient, and it constructs and dominates Orientals in the process of knowing them.

The concept of the Orient is a set of colonists' discourse system. Discourse, according to Michel Foucault, is a set of "rules" which determines the sorts of statements that can be made, "a system that defines the possibilities for knowledge (Foucault 27)," or the criteria for truth. In Said's opinion, the Orient is a place created by Europeans based on their geography imagination. From ancient times to now, it has represented romance, exoticism, beautiful scenery and extraordinary experiences. These words reflect westerner scholars' first impression on the East. The Orient has raised westerners' great interests for study and exploration. Because the development of the West is earlier than the East, the Orient can only be watched and represented by the West. Everything in the Orient is completely described and controlled by the West. And the studies of the European scholars all operated within certain parameters, such as the assumption that "western civilization was the pinnacle of historical development (Bill 53)." The real purpose of them is to build the ruling authority and show that they are superior to the easterner.

In the westerners' works, easterners are all depicted as the images of "the Other" in politics, economy, religion or ideology. With the development of capitalism, European powers invade most areas in the world with their advantages in military, economy and culture strength. In the process of expanding, easterners are described as inferior both in the aspects of psychology and culture. They live in extreme poverty and are unable to get to the civilization by themselves. In contrast, the Europeans have the advanced and incomparable civilization and deserve the core status in all aspects of the social life. The Easterners need white men to save them and only can live a marginal life. Orientalism as a "discourse" is used to confirm the "primitive", "originary", "exotic" and "mysterious" nature of Oriental societies. As Bill Ashcroft put it,

"The creation of the Orient as the Other is necessary so that the Occident can define itself and strengthen its own identity by invoking such a juxtaposition (Bill 64)."

### THREE IMAGES OF THE OTHER IN *SUMMERTIME*

#### 1 Non-White Africans as The Other

##### 1.1 Colored people in South Africans as the Other

In the novel *Summertime*, there are five interviews with five people of different identities and from different backgrounds. In the first part of interview, the interviewee Julia, who is an offspring of "Central-Europeans" (Coetzee 71) and the lover of the protagonist John Coetzee, regards the colored people as the Other. She expresses her relax and comfort without any concealment when there are not many colored people within her sight. It is a pleasure for her in an environment without the colored people. Why should she put on a performance before the people of color? Because the white people consider themselves to be superior to the non-white men. As Said points out in the *Orientalism*, "the knowledge of Orientalism was self-serving, and existed to prove that the Westerners were superior to other kinds of people (Said 57)." Under the apartheid, the colored people could not lead a normal and pleasurable life like the white Africans. They had to have a marginal life and became marginal Other while the white Africans stood at the core of status.

The Colored people are also the Other in Carol's eyes, which is evidenced by her biased opinion of the Colored children in her description of John Coetzee writing poems that is an imaginary situation:

And the little colored children clustered around him, pestering him with questions. Wat maak oom? -Nee, oom maak gedigte...What is sir doing?- Sir is making poems. On his old banjo sir is making poems. This world is not our dwelling-place (Coetzee 128).

In this imaginal situation, she describes the colored children in stereotypes and she harbors prejudice against them. The Colored children are described to be poor, innocent and annoying by Carol who had been married to a wealthy German man and was planning to settle down in the United

States. Carol is not free of the influence of the Eurocentric discourse.

### 1.2 Black South Africans as the Other

The black Africans are looked as the Other by the white Africans. They are considered to be especially good at manual labor. In the white people's mindset, it is the black people who should do the tough manual labor in service of the white men. This perception of black Africans derived from European settlers of the seventeenth century who hierarchized human beings on the grounds of their physical characteristics, with white Europeans at the top and black Africans at the bottom to justify their notion that black Africans are their slaves (Ashcroft 181). The primitiveness and animalistic nature of native Africans have run through the Western representative narrative of them. They have been constructed the Other to accentuate the European colonizers' superiority and justify their colonization. In this sense, the perception of native Africans by the white colonizers, like the Orient in Said's *Orientalism*, is an European invention, and it is an integral part of Eurocentric discourse. The distorted perception of native Africans is also "a Western style for dominating, reconstructing, and having authority over them (Said 3)".

The protagonist John Coetzee, a descendant of European settlers, a white African, also looks upon the native Africans as the Other. He described an image of the Other when he and his cousin Margot saw a bunch of children once they entered the café. The children outside the café are described to be a group of poor, dirty, innocent and annoying just like a "fly" which often upsets the people and is always driven away by them. This description of the local children might be faithful to the then reality of the black Africans' behaviors and living conditions, but still, they are described in stereotypes.

### 2 Afrikaner as The Other

"Afrikaners are a Southern African ethnic group descended from predominantly Dutch settlers first arriving in the 17th and 18th centuries (Wikipedia)." Julia, a South African, looked on the Afrikaners as the Other. For Julia, the white Jewish men "are cunning, unscrupulous, resilient, running close to the ground, hated and envied by the tribes

they ruled over" while the Afrikaners "were not tough, they were not even cunning, or cunning enough" and "they were babes in the wood, a tribe of babies looked after by slaves (Coetzee 54)." It is clear that the Afrikaners are regarded as uncivilized people who looked after by the black and fall into the Other.

Klaus, a Westerner, Carol's husband, appeared to be arrogant in face of the troop of Coetzee kinsfolk whom he had acquired by marriage and felt superior to them in a unquestioned way. In his eyes, the Afrikaners were poor to the point that they could not pay for the air fares. When his wife Carol invited her sister to bring their mother to America for a visit if their mother got well, Klaus said: "We will help with air fares (Coetzee 143)." And he told the stories of the times he and Carol had gone skiing in Zermatt in his loud baby-Afrikaners, of which he was "not in the slightest ashamed (Coetzee 102)."

As an Afrikaner, Carol has for years been trying to get her husband and her out of South Africa and into the United States. She has made it plain "she does not want it to appear in her dossier that she is related to a man who, whether or not he is technically a criminal, has in some way fallen foul of American law (Coetzee 90)." Carol's gingerliness for her personal dossier and obsession with becoming an authentic American citizen is obvious here. What she has been trying to do for years, including keeping a romantic relationship with a German, developing a modish way of dressing, leading a luxurious way of life like the rich Europeans and so on, is to separate herself with other Afrikaners. In this sense, Carol has become a mimic woman and her identity mimicry leads her to an ambivalent position that is described by Homi Bhabba as "almost the same, but not quite (Bhabba 86)".

The arrogance from the European white people for the Afrikaners and Afrikaner's admiration for the European reveal their belief in the superiority of European people and culture in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures. Judging from this, the Afrikaners inevitably fall into the category of the Other.

Judging by the Eurocentric discourse, the white people not only see the easterners as the despicable Other, but also their country and culture. When it comes to the language of the Afrikaans, by which Breytenbach wrote poems, the French journalist directly understood the "volksmond" as a dialect. He said English is "une vraie langue (a proper language)" while the Afrikan language is "an obscure dialect (Coetzee 237)." As a matter of fact, just like John Coetzee said, English is just a kind of one among various languages. Here we can see the influence of the Eurocentric discourse. "The elaborated and detailed examination of Oriental languages, histories and cultures were carried out in a context in which the supremacy and importance of European civilization was unquestioned (Bill 51)."

South Africa, which belongs to the Orient according to the discourse of Orientalism, is likewise considered to be the Other. Klaus, a German, had never been shy of expressing his verdict on South Africa. "Beautiful country, beautiful landscape, rich resources, but many many problems. How you will solve them I cannot see. (Coetzee 144)." He just considered South Africa to be a place with beautiful scenery and so many problems to be solved by them, the Westerners. He is like an observer and administrator of the South Africa. He comments on a whole country "generally" with the airy condescension. From his judgment we can feel his arrogance and sense of superiority to the Easterners. The Westerners have the notion that "imperial nations have not only the right but the obligation to rule those nations 'lost in barbarism' (Bill 86)".

Here what lies behind Klaus's biased opinion of South Africa is his Eurocentrism. Said points out that "the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of Europe identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures (Said 7)."

### 3. The Protagonist John Coetzee Being as the Ethnic Other

Although John Coetzee is not a member of the dominated people in South Africa, he, too, was perceived as the ethnic Other by the people from the dominant white society because of his Afrikaans

origin. Being a descendant of Dutch settlers, John is ethnically an Afrikaner. Adriana, the dancer instructor, felt much resentful about the fact that her daughter's English teacher was not an English person but an Afrikaner. She rushed to school to ask for the change of her daughter's English teacher because she has a pressing hope for her daughter to "learn proper English (Coetzee 157)," even though John Coetzee was over qualified. And she prohibited her daughter having links with him and said that John Coetzee was "a weak man (Coetzee 168)". In the discourse system of Orientalism, the Orientals are always considered to be irrational, primitive and impulsive. Her daughter Maria Regina responded to her saying "Mr. Coetzee is not an Afrikaner. He writes poetry." Here what lies Maria Regina's words behind is that she accepted that being an Afrikaner is a shame and an inferior ethnic status.

Adriana's unreasonably hysterical overreaction to the fact that her daughter's English was taught by an Afrikaner man is comprehensible under the influence of Eurocentric discourse. As a matter of fact, settlement means a number of things: the displacement of native populations and the inculcation of a European worldview on them; the exile of white settlers; and the transplantation of other non-native peoples. These forms of diaspora hinges around cascading levels of marginality and perceptions of the relations between center and periphery. For instance, while white settlers felt rejected and inferior to their kin in the motherland, they retained alternative hierarchical structures in their colonies based on racial and class divisions.

### THE PROTAGONIST'S CONFLICT IN SELF-IDENTIFICATION IN THE MIXED CONTEXT

Identification is "a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the nature closure of solidarity and allegiance established on his foundation (Hall 2)". It is natural that a man would identify himself with people of the same ethnicity, race, culture, nation and so on. This is what the protagonist John Coetzee endeavors to do but failed. John Coetzee feels resentful to be one member of Afrikaners because he upholds different political visions with the authorities, and is neither accepted by the troop of Afrikaners because he

received real English education since youth, nor by the white Europeans on account of his identity of South African. He finds himself in a marginalized position both in South Africa and in the white context.

On the one hand, John shows resentment for the politicians in South Africa and some Afrikaners for what they did to the citizens. *Summertime* opens with a journal entry, dated 22 August 1972, in which Coetzee records, in characteristic third-person prose, his response to news of covert killings of African National Congress members by the security state, which flatly denies responsibility. Coetzee "reads the reports and feels soiled." As an Afrikaner, he feels filthy to be the same to them in the ethnic origin.

On the other hand, he is ready to embrace the identity of being Afrikaner, but not many real Afrikaners would accept him as one of the tribe. He felt there was no way in which he could separate himself off from the Afrikaners while retaining his self-respect. But "he had been rebuffed by the Afrikaners too often, rebuffed and humiliated (Coetzee 238)." He felt himself to be an outsider and he was happiest in this role. He shared an attitude toward the South Africa with Martin, the other candidate for a job at the University of Cape Town. They both feel their "presence there was legal but illegitimate". They have an abstract right to be there and feel rootless. "We thought of ourselves as sojourners, temporary residents, and to that extent without a home, without a homeland (Coetzee 210)."

Different his kinfolks, John moved to Cape Town and received real English education in English schools and an English university. He is fond of English culture. He and his father devoted to an English game that they are not good at. He looks up to Northerners, particularly the English who are "with their good manners, their well-bred reserve (Coetzee 54-55)." However, in his application for permanent residence in the US, he was rejected. The protagonist's hope of being accepted by the dominant society blanks and he has to accept the fact that he is from the colony and is in an inferior position of the ethnic hierarchy constructed by the

dominant white. This gives an impetus to him to build a new identity by leading an imitating life.

#### **IDENTITY MIMICRY**

Stewart Hall points out that identification in the modern context is "a construction, a process never completed-always 'in process' (Hall 2)." He directs our attention to the fluidity and multiplicity of identity instead of seeing it as fixity. For one who has the desire to become a real English person, the ways of the identity construction can include the acquisition of all the qualities to signify an Englishman, like physical appearance, personality, lifestyle, etc.

When John Coetzee are going to have an job interview at the University of Cape Town, he changes his hairstyle and mimics the English way of dressing. Besides imitating the physical appearance of the Europeans, John Coetzee mimics the lifestyles of the artists, thinking he can become an European by living like them. And one aspect of John's life that is greatly romanticized is love life. His French lover Sophie wanted their relationship to grow and develop, but he just wanted it to remain the same. He was the kind of man who is convinced that "supreme felicity will be his if only he can acquire a French mistress who will recite Ronsard to him and play Couperin on the clavecin while simultaneously inducing him into the mysteries of love, French style (Coetzee 241)." Except Sophie from France, John has other two European women as his lovers. The fact that he makes a fetish of these European women suggests his Eurocentric mentality. And his selection of women corresponds to his selection of geographical location. John Coetzee left South Africa in 1960s for United States and then finally decamped to Australia and died there. Having an English or French girlfriend means an essential part in the construction of his Westerner identity.

John Coetzee's quest for a pure American identity leads him to a sense of loss. John's identity mimicry ends in failure. We have to question the essentiality of identity: can identity be signified by visible signs or tangible formality?

Actually, the American identity John has been trying to obtain represents the dominating power of the colonizers. The concept of *identity* is how we define who we are. Literally identity means

“same as,” but Frantz Fanon, one important postcolonial critic, tells that this identity, created in the past, sustained to the present and remade in the future, is “an ideological construct designed to uphold and to consolidate imperialist definitions of selfhood.” So the sense of self is an illusion, requiring a constant interaction with the not-self or non-identity: “The colonized are constrained to impersonate the image the colonizer offers them of themselves; they are commended to imitate the colonizers version of their essential difference (Fuss 144).” John Coetzee thinks his identity mimicry can change his original identity and uplift him to the superior culture, lifestyle and so on, but he has fallen into the trap of cultural dominance constructed by the imperial discourse.

Facing the cultural imperialism and hegemony of western countries, Said put forward the theory of cultural resistance. The cultural resistance is explored by Said in terms of the capacity of the colonized to “write back” to empire, a process that reconstructs the relationship between the self and the other. This conscious effort to “enter into the discourse of Europe and the West, to mix with it, transform it, to make it acknowledge marginalized or suppressed or forgotten histories”, is a powerful transformative movement of resistance that he terms “the voyage in” (Said 261). And Oriental literature “may once again perform its historical function, and assist us to liberate ourselves from the narrow and oppressive conceptions which would limit all that is significant in literature, thought, and history to our own segment of the globe (Gibb 209).”

#### CONCLUSION

Compared with the white people in South Africa and Europe, the non-white people in South Africa and the Afrikaners fall into the category of the Other. They are the victims of the hegemony of colonialism and the discourse of Eurocentrism. Their depressed and distorted images of the Other make them marginalized in the social life. However, the Orientals are not born to be inferior to the Westerners or the white people. In contrast, they can help the white people know themselves better. Therefore, people of different race or color should

respect and live in harmony with each other in the clash of civilizations.

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