



J.M. Coetzee's Later Writing  
Under the Western Marxism

库切的后期创作与  
西马思潮影响

罗晓燕 著



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# 库切的后期创作与 西马思潮影响

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## Preface

John Maxwell Coetzee, one of the greatest South African writers, was born in an Afrikaans family in Cape Town in 1940. J. M. Coetzee is a descendant of the Dutch immigrants of the early 17th century, with both German and Polish descent. His father, Sanchez Coetzee, was a government employee and part-time lawyer, and a farmer. His mother Vera was a teacher. Coetzee grew up in a bilingual environment. After studying in English schools, he became proficient in both English and Afrikaans, which is the standard Dutch in South Africa. When Coetzee was eight years old, his father lost his job because of the anti-apartheid system, the family had no choice but to move to Cape Town, northeast of Worcester. At the age of sixteen, Coetzee was enrolled at the University of Cape Town. In 1960 he received his bachelor's degree in English, and the next year he received his bachelor's degree in mathematics. In 1962, Coetzee moved to London, where he worked as a computer programmer in a division of an American company. In 1963, he received a Master's Degree of Arts from the University of Cape Town with a thesis on Ford Marcus Ford. In 1965, Coetzee came to the United States as an exchange scholar sponsored by the Fulbright Foundation. He was employed by the University of Texas as an assistant researcher, and it was during this period that he began to write his first novel *Dusklands*. In 1969 Coetzee received his Ph. D. 's degree from the University of Texas at Austin with his dissertation on stylistic studies of Samuel Beckett. In 1970, Coetzee went to the State University of New York at Buffalo to teach English literature. In the same year, he participated in the protests on the

campus against the Vietnam War and was once arrested for the occupation of the building. And he was subsequently denied the right of permanent residence in the United States by the authorities in the following year. Since then, Coetzee returned to South Africa, worked at the University of Cape Town, teaching English literature until the end of the 20th century, and received the title of Distinguished Professor. In 2002, Coetzee moved to Adelaide, Australia. He obtained Australian nationality in 2006 and is currently an honorary professor and researcher at the University of Adelaide.

So far, Coetzee has published 15 novels, most of which are about the story of South Africa in the colonial era and under the apartheid system. Most of his works are well-structured and have great depth, reflecting his insightful perspectives on life. As Coetzee always acclaimed, many of his works are autobiographical. *Boyhood* reflects his youth in Cape Town and Worcester, and the story concerns with his father's political position due to early loss of job. His lonely life in London and his thinking of art and love at that time is reflected in *Youth*. In his masterpiece *Disgrace*, the protagonist David Lurie is a university teacher in Cape Town, South Africa. The heroine of *Age of Iron* is a white teacher living in the shadow of racial oppression and violence. And in *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons*, the heroine is an internationally renowned writer, and upholds vegetarianism like Coetzee himself. All these features coincide with the author's own identity. Coetzee's complex cultural identity as a white man living in South Africa, as well as many years' experience of traveling in the West, all bring unique ideological connotation to his works. South African white people, that is, the Boer people in South Africa, are regarded as alien colonial invaders by native Africans, and in Europe and America, they are considered to be South Africans who are outdated to the modern civilization. Coetzee has a profound personal experience of the cultural conflicts left by colonialism and racism, the embarrassment of reduplicate rejection to the identity,

and the oppression and destruction of human nature. Therefore, he has repeated reflection and thinking about these issues from multiple rational and emotional perspectives in his works and he explores the possible ways to solve these problems.

*Disgrace*, the masterpiece of J. M. Coetzee, was published in 1999. Its theme is about the white people's sequel of South African colonialism and apartheid after the National Party took the authority. The novel reflected the struggle and confusion of human nature under historical and environmental oppression. *Disgrace* won the Man Booker Award again, and Coetzee thus become the first writer in history who has got the Man Booker Award twice. Compared with the early works of Coetzee, the novel *Disgrace* is more realistic. From the standpoint of the other, the author objectively inspects the severe social status quo of apartheid in South Africa during the period of social transformation. The long history of colonialism and apartheid and the memory of pain have left traumas which are hard to devoid in the minds of people. These traumas will not be forgotten with the newly end of the white rule. When the original relationship between the subject and the other was artificially reversed, how to understand the relationship between blacks and whites in the new era after historical changes? How can the colonial descendants of the white colonists who have lost their colonial policy coexist peacefully with the original inhabitants of the land where the blacks have gathered? How can the people of South Africa, suffering from the trauma of apartheid's history, get out of the shadow? All these questions are the focus of the novel *Disgrace*. The author takes "disgrace" as an introduction, showing the connotation of disgrace, not only reveals the individual level of disgrace but also implies the disgrace at the collective level. Coetzee not only explores the historical accounts of imperialist colonialism and the responsibility of the individual of the colonial descendants but is also trying to explore ways to solve the problem. From the subversive perspective of the "Other", Coetzee expresses his own confusion about

the fact that black culture which has replaced the white culture does not bring the progress of concepts and social harmony. Through the protagonists David Lurie and his daughter Lucy's speech and behavior, Coetzee demonstrates the new paradoxes and conflicts in South African society in the post-apartheid era, reflecting on the actions of the colonists and expressing his hope for harmony. Many commentators believe that through a variety of detailed description, the novel *Disgrace* "reveals various issues among South Africans of different races in the land of South Africa in the alternating period of the new and old era". And the novel "expresses deep concern and considerable frustration with the consequences of colonialism in South Africa against the colonial peoples and the colonizers themselves and their descendants"<sup>①</sup>(Zhang Chong, 2001: 86).

Before 2003, the domestic academic community paid little attention to South African writer John Maxwell Coetzee. The earliest critique appeared in the journal of the comment is Wang Peigen's "Sketch of South African Literature" published in 1997. In this critique, Wang Peigen puts that "After Gordimer, another important writer—John Maxwell Coetzee (1940-) appeared in South Africa. His works marked a radical break with the realism and naturalistic traditions of South Africa" (Wang Peigen, 1997: 24). Wang Lili's "A Lament of Colonialism: On the 1999 Booker Prize Winning Novel *Disgrace*" (2000) is the earliest special comment of Coetzee and his works in China. In her essay, Wang Lili points out Coetzee's critique on colonialism. The Chinese translation of Coetzee's novel *Disgrace* was published in 2002 by Yilin Publishing House, but the domestic translation and research on the other works of Coetzee was still relatively late. It was not until 2003 when Coetzee won

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<sup>①</sup> Quoted from "The Cost of Crossing the Border: Interpreting Coetzee's Booker Prize Winning Novel *Disgrace*" written by Zhang Chong and Guo Zhengfeng in Chinese. Translated by the author of this book.

the Nobel Prize for Literature that a large-scale and deep study of Coetzee which pointed out Coetzee's critique on colonial thought began in China. After Coetzee's winning of Nobel Prize, lots of domestic academic journals and newspapers began to publish introductions to Coetzee's life and his works. In one year, Zhejiang Literature and Art Publishing House had translated and published several classical works of Coetzee such as *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *The Master of Petersburg*. The research on Coetzee began to appear in a large number of academic journals. The works of Coetzee have begun to be the topic of doctoral and master's thesis. Till October 14th, 2016, when you search "J. M. Coetzee" on the Internet of CNKI, you will get 5,242 results, including 106 doctoral and master's thesis.

Through the analysis of the results, the author of this book finds that the study on Coetzee at home can be classified into the following four types:

First, interpretation of Coetzee's novels in the cultural context of South Africa. The apartheid and colonial history of South Africa are undoubtedly deeply imprinted in Coetzee's novels. In "Coetzee and Liberalism" printed on *Foreign Literature Review* in 2009, Wang Xufeng started from the liberal tradition in South Africa and then pointed out that Coetzee's writing is characterized by non-racial individualism and universal humanitarianism. Wang Xufeng puts that "But because of the politics of apartheid in South Africa, Coetzee's liberalism was incomplete, which led to the depressing of the images of the 'weak' and the 'strong' in his works" (Wang Xufeng, 2009: 113). "Coetzee and Trauma Writing" by Shao Ling in 2011 explores the features of "trauma" in Coetzee's works and points out that Coetzee's tragic narration is carried out through the historical subject of post-colonialism and the free speech of postmodernism, and the long history of apartheid in South Africa was the cause of the trauma writing.

Second, the exploration of Coetzee's novels from the perspective of



postcolonial theory. In these researching results, Coetzee's focus on discourse rights, the other, identity and marginalization in his works became another angle for researchers to explore. In "Nobel Prize Winner Coetzee Who is Concerned about Outsiders", through a brief summary of Coetzee's life and analysis of novels published before 2004, Shi Pingping exposes Coetzee's critique on the planted diseases of Western civilization such as apartheid in South Africa and his firm support to people's, especially the outsiders', struggle against oppression. In "Other and Otherness: A Study on Coetzee", Shi Yunlong focuses on the description of the other in the novels of Coetzee and points out that Coetzee's endorsement originated from his own experience and his active participation in post-modern literary experiments, which makes his works reveal a kind of strongly different from the South African literary tradition of the other. From the perspective of post-colonialism, Professor Cai Shengqin concludes Coetzee's literary theory as a kind of "the right-wing postcolonial theory" reflected in Coetzee's works as the "island consciousness". In *Island Consciousness: The Writing Situation of Imperial Diaspora Intellectuals*, Professor Cai Shengqin points out that this kind of island consciousness challenges the western-centrism theory of civilization and barbarism since the Enlightenment, opposes the tabular identity and advocates the harmonious existence of the independent nature of the concept (2011). Meanwhile, Professor Gao Wenhui also explores the post-colonial literature forms such as confused identity and marginal writing from the perspective of post-colonialism in her book *Coetzee in the Context of Postcolonial*. Wang Jinghui pays special attention to the influence of diasporic life on Coetzee's writing and theory formation. Professor Wang Jinghui wrote the book *Forever Dispersion: Biography of Coetzee* with the theme of "diaspora" as the thread, and guided by the theory of post-colonialism, the thesis excavates the inner philosophical undercurrent of the works. The International Symposium of Coetzee Study and Post-colonial Literature

Researches was held in Wuhan in November, 2010. This conference was the first academic conference of the Asian countries devoted to Coetzee, which greatly promoted the study of Coetzee at home and abroad.

Third, the author tries to explore Coetzee's writing by putting Coetzee in the history of literature. Professor Duan Feng's article "The Historical Competitor: Coetzee's Inheritance and Transcendence of Traditional Realism" begins with the inheritance relation between the novel and historical discourse, then points out that Coetzee's novel has its own unique rules of operation, and even can reveal the history of the myth structure, and then demonstrate Coetzee's transcendence of South African traditional realism. In "Soul Watching: Kafka and Coetzee", Sun Xuejing discusses the intertextuality in Kafka and Coetzee's works and the philosophic thoughts of the two writers on life noumenon from the aspects of existence, death and belief. Qin Haihua's paper "On Criticism and Novel Criticism in Coetzee's Novels" analyzes Coetzee's exploration of writer's identity, the process of novel creation, the reasons for the novel's existence and the nature of the novel in the fictional narration and finally establishes a true dialogue between the novel and literary criticism.

Fourth, the study on the artistic creation of Coetzee's novels from the perspective of narrative techniques and structure. In the paper "Study on the Experimental Features of Four Newly Written Novels of Coetzee", Chen Mudan focuses on the experimental and innovative aspects of four newly published novels (*Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons*, *Slow Man*, *Diary of a Bad Year* and *Summertime*) in the form of novels and narrative techniques. In "The Theoretical Tendency of Coetzee", Gao Wenhui analyzes the novels of Coetzee from aspects of the narration of self-examination, the problem of history and leap of theoretical fiction and the boundaries. She points out that as the works of a scholar writer, Coetzee's novels have a strong theoretical character, and linguistic theories and historical concepts enter Coetzee's writing in

different forms, and directly lead to Coetzee's experiment on narrative form.

Except for the four types of research mentioned above, domestic scholars also interpret the works of Coetzee from the perspective of ecological criticism, feminism, social politics in South Africa, biographic writing and other aspects.

Coetzee did not receive much attention at the beginning of his literary career. It was not until 1981 found his publishing *Waiting for Barbarians* and in 1983 when his *Life & Times of Michael K* won Man Booker Prize, the highest prize for English literature, that Coetzee began to obtain an international fame in the world literary arena. It was not until then that Coetzee's works became the focus of scholars. According to the academic journals and book reviews in EBSCO Humanities and Social Sciences Database from 1977 to 2016, a total of 594 articles about Coetzee are found, and the perspectives of research are diversified. According to a search on the Western Journals of JSTOR full-text database, a total of 4,577 articles including a variety of book reviews, interviews and academic papers which are relevant to Coetzee's works are found. Through summary of the researching results, the author of this book finds that most of the articles on the evaluation of Coetzee in the 1980s appeared in newspapers or magazines, with a distribution of a very fragmented, incomplete system. And there are only two complete monographs, which are *The Novels of J. M. Coetzee: Lacanian Allegories* written by Teresa Dovey in 1980 and *Countries of the Mind: The Fiction of J. M. Coetzee* written by Allen Richard Penner in 1989. The 1990s can be described as a productive decade of the study on Coetzee. The major literary journals published a lot of papers on Coetzee. In addition, five monographs on Coetzee were published. Susan V. Gallagher's *A Story of South Africa: J. M. Coetzee's Fiction in Context* (1991) mainly analyzes the social background of Coetzee's novels. In *J. M. Coetzee: South Africa*

and the Politics of Writing published by University of California Press in 1993, David Attwell points out that as man himself is an animal in political life, Coetzee's novels cannot be separated from the influence of political factors. Historic colonialism and the apartheid system still exist, which is more or less deep into the writing of Coetzee. In addition, *Critical Perspectives on J. M. Coetzee* by Graham Huggan and Stephen Watson, *J. M. Coetzee* by Dominic Head and *Critical Essays on J. M. Coetzee* edited by Sue Kossew are some important works studying on Coetzee. Following these researches, more and more critics began to study on Coetzee's works from the post-colonial perspective. In "Speech and Silence in the Fictions of J. M. Coetzee", Benita Parry puts that "Coetzee breaks the colonial discourse and the Western cognitive system based on the binary opposition, and through the middle discourse, he makes the silent people have their voice which belongs to themselves only being heard" (Benita Parry, 1996: 38). In "Oppressive Silence: J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* and the Politics of Canonization", British scholar Derek Attridge points out that by rewriting *Robinson Crusoe*, Coetzee's novel *Foe* overthrew the hidden hegemony and its ideology. In addition to post-colonial interpretation of Coetzee's works, some scholars analyze Coetzee's gender view in his works from the perspective of feminist criticism. In "Women's Words: A Reading of J. M. Coetzee's Women Narrators", Sue Kossew points out that Coetzee's novels reveal the current situation of women who have lost their voice in patriarchal society, and they are eager to make their voices against patriarchy (1998). Josephine Dodd, the author of "The South African Literary Establishment and the Textual Production of 'Woman'", indicates that at the beginning of *Foe*, the heroine Susan has a clear discourse advantage, which is a subversion of male discourse hegemony. But in the fourth part of the text, Susan's voice vanishes, which shows that Coetzee has deprived her of her voice. As a result, Josephine Dodd holds the opinion that *Foe* criticizes male discourse hegemony but at the same time

the novel itself repeats it.

Anglo-American ecocriticism became a research genre in the 1990s. Therefore, Derek Wright interprets Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K* from the perspective of ecocriticism and published "Black Earth, White Myth: Coetzee's *Michael K*" in 1992. In this article, Derek Wright puts that *Life & Times of Michael K* fully embodies Coetzee's strong critique to the selfishness of human in destruction of nature. Since the begging of the 21st century, Coetzee has published four novels, which are *Youth: Scenes from Provincial Life II*, *Elizabeth Costello*; *Eight Lessons*, *Slow Man* and *Diary of a Bad Year*. Research on him abroad is richer and more diversified. In his monograph *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event* published in 2004, Derek Attridge points out that Coetzee's novels belong to the works with higher achievement, and it is not easy to realize the artistic value of them. Derek Attridge holds the opinion that if readers want to comprehend the uniqueness of Coetzee's novel, they must have an intensive study on the text. They should not only find out what the novel describes, but also try to understand how it is described. Only by doing so can the readers appreciate the shocking power of the novel and be influenced by the ethic thoughts of Coetzee expressed in subtle in his novels. This is actually a high demand for the readers. Jane Poyner is the chief editor of *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual* published by Ohio University Press in 2006, which mainly discusses the intellectual's sense of morality and responsibility. In the introduction of the book, Jane Poyner puts that in almost every novel of Coetzee there is "a painful intellectual or writer-like character", and through portraying such conscience-stricken people, Coetzee explores his own ethic as an intellectual and the power that the identity of a writer gives him. Coetzee's novels are all-encompassing, his writing techniques are unpredictable, the narrative perspectives are ever-changing, and his ideological stand is wandering. Therefore, almost all kinds of literary

criticism, including postcolonial theory, feminist theory, psychoanalytic theory, ecological criticism theory and so on have been used in the research of Coetzee's works. In the analysis and evaluation of the works, the literary criticism theories are enriched themselves. Both Coetzee's novel and his literary theory are full of epochal characters and research value. It is worthy for scholars both at home and abroad to thinking and analyzing them.

International Conferences of Coetzee Studies also precipitated the studies and researches among the international worldwide scholars. After the former conferences in Sydney, Wuhan, Amsterdam and Adalaide, as far as the topic concerned, Monash University Prato Center held the fifth International Coetzee studies "Reading Coetzee's Women" in September 2016 in Italy, which has become another peak of the international scholars' focus on Coetzee's works.

There has been enormous international scholarly interest in J. M. Coetzee's writings in recent years. Since 2009, five major international conferences have been held and two literary biographies, 10 monographs and over 300 articles have been published about his work. Despite this, very little has been written about his female narrators and characters or about the women writers who have influenced him.

In "Reading Coetzee's Women", a three-day conference held at Monash's Prato Centre, preeminent and emerging scholars were asked to bring their attention to the topic of "Coetzee's women" as well as possible reasons for the lack of engagement with this theme. Except the 4 keynote-speakers Carrol Clarkson, David Attwell, Elleke Boehmer and Derek Attridge, some other 95 attendees from 23 different countries attended, including Professors Cai Shengqin and Wang Jinghui from China, other scholars from Turkey, Britain, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Poland, Cyprus, Canada, Belgium, Thailand, Spain, Macedonia, Portugal, Germany, China Hong Kong, South Africa,

India, and Sweden. The conference was an opportunity to explore a rich but under-discussed area of Coetzee studies. Professor Sue Kossew says the sheer number of fascinating papers submitted demonstrated the importance of this area of study, and were part of what made the conference such a triumph.

Method of the research on Coetzee are diversified at home and abroad and the results are quite abundant, however, few people study on the works of Coetzee from the perspective of Western Marxism, the newly emerged theory in the twentieth century. When search “Coetzee” in Chinese and “Western Marxism” in the database of CNKI, nothing can be found. And when search “Coetzee” and “Alienation”, only 3 papers can be found, that is “The Alienation of Human’s Nature in Coetzee’s *Disgrace*” (Zhou Bolan, *Coetzee Study and Postcolonial Research*, 2010), “Alienated Self: Multilateral Analysis of Protagonist of Coetzee’s Autobiographic Trilogy” (Chen Ya. Master Dissertation of Hefei University of Technology, 2011) and “Alienated Self: An Analysis of Lurie in Coetzee’s *Disgrace*” (Pang Qiong, 2014(7): 55-56). When search “Coetzee” and “alienation” in the database of EBSCO, JSTOR and ProQuest, nothing can be found. This book attempts to analyze the alienation of human nature in Coetzee’s novel *Disgrace* from the perspective of Western Marxist criticism theory, using the theory of alienation of Erich Fromm. No one has studied these novels from this perspective neither at home nor abroad. Therefore, this book is very innovative.

Western Marxism is a new emerging trend in the 20th century. It is outside the main stream of Marxism, but closely related with the classic Marxist theory in the form and the pursuit of human’s liberation and comprehensive development and other objectives. It is a new interpretation of Marxism by some Marxist-influenced frontier scholars in the West combined with the characteristics of the times. The content of

Western Marxism is quite complex. It is generally believed that Western Marxism “is not a unified ideological trend, but a polymorphic theoretical movement with complex contents”<sup>①</sup> (Liu Tongzhou, 2010: 39). Faced with the increasingly serious spiritual crisis, Western Marxist scholars have focused on the cultural level, hoping to save the estranged and distorted subjectivity and human nature through aesthetic and cultural criticism. As Perry Anderson indicates in “Considerations on Western Marxism” that since the 1920s, “economic or political issues is no longer the main theoretical focus of Western Marxism” (Perry Anderson, 1976: 213), instead, more and more attentions have been paid to culture. And in the field of culture itself, art is “the largest consumption of Western Marxists’ main intelligence and talent” (Perry Anderson, 1976: 213).

In the early developmental stage of Marx’s thought, the concept of “estranged labor” which firstly appeared in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* is the core. In *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Karl Marx further criticizes the estrangement of labor in capitalist society, making “alienation” (“Entfremdung” in German) the central thesis of this work. Marx believes that alienation is a kind of relationship which is antagonistic to material society. In Marx’s opinion, the alienation means not only that “the labor becomes an object, an external existence”, but that it “exists outside the worker, independently, as something alien to him”, and that it “becomes a power on its own confronting the worker”; it means that “the life which the worker has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien” (*Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, 1988: 72). Marx believes that alienation is the metamorphosis of the material

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① Quoted from “The Theoretical Nature of Western Marxism and Its Significance in China” written by Liu Tongfang in Chinese. Translated by the author of this book.



life itself, as the manifestation of human life, from “affirm himself” to “deny himself”. It is the material confrontation of the subject of human and his object, namely “objectification as loss of the object and object-bondage” (Karl Marx, 1988: 71). Marx’s understanding of the nature of alienation is that alienation not only shows the real domination of human beings, but also, more importantly, emphasizes the antagonism of man to the society dominated by man. Because of this profound substantive regulation of alienation, Marx further proposed four kinds of alienation:

First, the alienation of the relationship between the worker and the product of labor. The product of labor becomes an alien object exercising power over the worker. As Marx puts in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, it is clear that the more the worker spends himself, the more powerful the alien objective world becomes which he creates over-against himself, the poorer he himself—his inner world—becomes, the less belongs to him as his own. The objects of worker’s production become something hostile and confronting him.

Second, the estrangement or alienation of the act of production—the producing activity within labor process. In *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx shows us the fact that labor is external to the worker, for example, it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefor, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. Thus, as Marx puts, “labor is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it” (*Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, 1988: 74).

Third, the alienation of man’s species being. The whole character of a species is contained in the character of its life-activity; ad free, conscious activity is man’s species character. However, the estranged labor estranges the species from man. It turns for him the life of the species into a means of individual life. As Marx puts, the estranged labor