



# J.M. Coetzee's Experimental Creation and Modernism Writing

论库切写作的实验性创新与现代主义表征

Bill Shengqin Cai

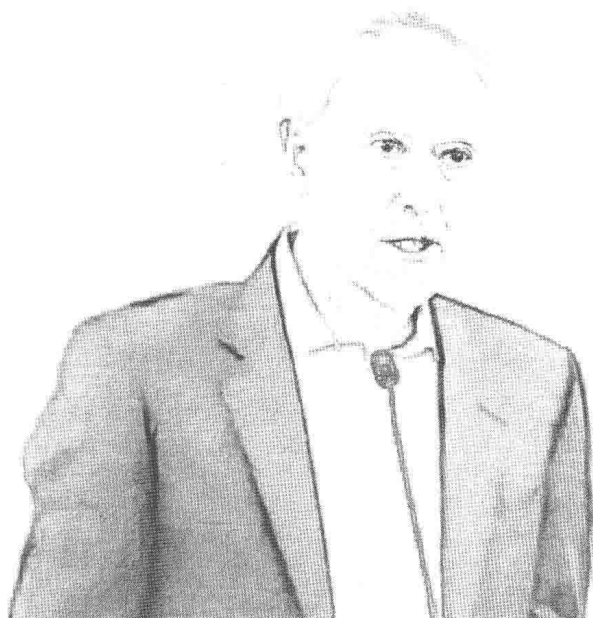
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I . Author and J. M. Coetzee



II . Interview Coetzee



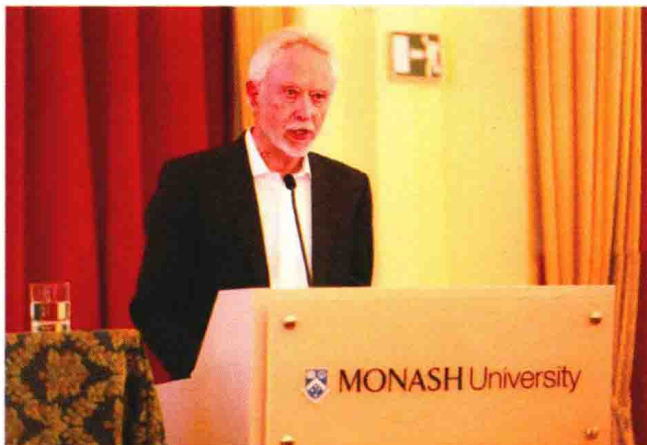
III. Dong Liang, David Attwell and Author



IV. Carrol Clarkson, Elleke Boehmer and Author



V. Author and Sue Kossew



VI. Coetzee Speaking

# Preface

John Maxwell Coetzee, the laureate of the 2003 Nobel Prize in Literature, is a renowned South African writer (who moved to Australia later). He is the first person who was awarded twice the Booker Prize, the most significant literature prize in the United Kingdom, so far. He has been prized as one of the most important writers in South Africa, Australia, as well as in the world literature field.

J. M. Coetzee was born on February 9, 1940 in a Dutch immigrant family in Cape Town, in South Africa and he spent most of his early time here. His father was a lawyer and his mother was a teacher. He was admitted to The University of Cape Town in 1957 and obtained his Bachelor of Arts with Honours in English and Bachelor of Science with Honours in Mathematics in 1960 and 1961 respectively. Two years later, he went to London to work as a computer programmer in IBM. In 1965, Coetzee went to the United States for further study and received his PhD from the University of Texas at Austin in 1969. After his graduation, he chose to teach in the State University of New York. As he failed applying for the United States Permanent Resident Card for several times, he gave up and went back to South Africa, then became a teacher in The University of Cape Town in 1972. In 2002, Coetzee relocated to Australia and became one of faculty members in The University of Adelaide. In 2006, he officially became an Australian citizen.

The life experiences above are not enough for us to analyze

the characteristics of Coetzee. If we want to understand Coetzee, the first thing we should know is his background, the environment in which he grew up. As mentioned before, Coetzee spent his childhood in South Africa, where apartheid was strictly applied. As a white people living in South Africa, Coetzee was revolted by the black people as an “enemy”. Meanwhile, his motherland defined people like him as “the other” because they are the descendants of colonizers who have been living in the colony as the high level people all the time. Therefore, Coetzee, as well as other white people who live in South Africa, was the other kind of the “marginalized”. Coetzee had experienced the frustration and suffering due to his marginalized identity since he was young, which drove him seeking for his home for long.

Coetzee’s works are undoubtedly excellent. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2003 because “his novels are characterised by their well-crafted composition, pregnant dialogue and analytical brilliance.” (*The Nobel Lecture in Literature*, 2003)

In 1974, Coetzee published his first novel *Dusklands*, to expose the cruel crimes of the colonial settlers imposed on the indigenous people. The novel won the South African Mofolo-Plomer Prize. Then, in 1977, Coetzee published his second novel *In the Heart of the Country*, which depicts a woman who has been oppressed by her family due to her gender and her rebellion to the patriarchal society. This novel brought Coetzee his first Central News Agency Literary Award. It was his first novel adapted to a movie titled as *Dust* in 1985 (playwright by Marion Hänsel).

Coetzee gradually reached the summit of his writing career by publishing one novel every three or four years. *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) brought him his second Central News Agency Literary Award, *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983) received his first the Booker Prize. *Foe* (1986), *Age of Iron* (1990) was awarded “The Sunday Express Book of the Year Award”, and *The Master of Petersburg* (1994) was awarded The Irish Times International Fiction Prize in 1995. *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life* (1997) and *Disgrace* (1999), which brought him the second Booker Prize, which was become a popular movie in 2008 with the same title, the screenplay adapted by Anna Maria Monticelli, directed by Steve Jacobs. Since 1999, quite a number of

scholars have taken Coetzee's prize-winning novels, especially *Disgrace*, as their research object. After that, Coetzee published *Youth: Scenes from Provincial Life II* (2002), *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons* (2003), *Slow Man* (2005), *Dairy of a Bad Year* (2007), *Summertime: Scenes from Provincial Life III* (2009), *The Childhood of Jesus* (2013) and newly published *The Schooldays of Jesus* (2016).

In his post-Nobel Prize time, Coetzee was shortlisted by the Booker Prize for *Summertime: Scenes from Provincial Life III* in 2009 and longlisted for three times for *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons* in 2003, *Slow Man* in 2005, and *The Schooldays of Jesus* in 2016 respectively. It reveals the fact that Coetzee has been devoting himself into writing and keeping producing quality works even that he had already awarded the most significant literature prize among the world. Coetzee never writes novel with similar characteristics with his previous work so that his every single novel is a unique work of art. Coetzee's new novels *The Childhood of Jesus* and *The Schooldays of Jesus* have been highly recommended by the prestigious critics, such as David Attwell, Elleke Boehmer, and Wang Jinghui, Xu Zhiqiang in China.

Since 2003, an increasing number of readers and scholars have got to know him and his works in China. Before 2003, a paper published by Wang Lili as an introduction "An Elegy for Colonialism-Evaluation of Booker Prize Works *Disgrace*" (Wang Lili, 2000), Zhang Chong, the first Chinese translator of Coetzee's novel *Disgrace* published "The Cost of Crossing the Border-Analysis of Booker Prize Works *Disgrace*" (Zhang Chong, 2001) embodied that scholars in China had already noticed Coetzee. In 2002, The Chinese translation version of *Disgrace* was published by Yilin Press, which grants more readers to know Coetzee in China. After 2003, all kinds of academic journals have published research findings about Coetzee from different aspects and perspectives. In 2010, an international symposium concerning Coetzee was converted and organized by my colleagues and me since I was the one of the earliest critics to study J. M. Coetzee in China, where some 150 scholars from all over the world came to China together to communicate and discuss Coetzee's works specially, boosting the development of the research in China. In 2013, Zhejiang Literature and Art Press attained the right to publish his whole works in Chinese,

*Dusklands*, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Life & Times of Michael K*, *Foe*, *Age of Iron*, *Elizabeth Costello*; *Eight Lessons*, *Slow Man*, *Diary of a Bad Year*, *The Childhood of Jesus*, providing more material for scholars (*The Schooldays of Jesus* is forthcoming in 2017). All of these have been stimulating scholars to embark on research about Coetzee.

Firstly, from the academic achievements, according to China National Knowledge Internet (CNKI), until 2016, there are about 750 papers in journals, about ten doctoral dissertations, as well as about 150 master's thesis on the topic of Coetzee's works. Secondly, 2003 is the watershed for research about Coetzee, it has become more influential after 2003. Thirdly, from literary criticism perspectives and research subjects, the academic achievements are roughly divided into following kinds:

In terms of research subject, most of research achievements centered on Coetzee's one piece of works. Maybe due to its various motifs, *Disgrace* was in particular. From 2003 to 2014, there are about 114 papers analyzing *Disgrace* in journals. As one of the earliest researchers in China, I published "Realism Echoing Civilization Conflict Theory Through *Disgrace*" in *Foreign Literature Studies*, presenting theory construction in it (Cai Shengqin, 2004). Dr. Wang Jinghui from Colonialism elaborated on the relation between Coetzee's life and his writing skills, to produce her doctorate dissertation *Foreigner Forever on Post-colonial Diaspora Perspective in J. M. Coetzee's Writing* (Wang Jinghui, 2006). In 2008, I published my doctoral dissertation *Island Consciousness: The Writing Situation of Imperial Diaspora Intellectuals — On Coetzee's Literary Theory of Right-Wing Post-Colonialism*, presenting the Post-colonial theory constructed by Coetzee based on his oeuvre (Cai Shengqin, 2008). Wang Xufeng, based on V. Naipaul, J. M. Coetzee and Nadine Gordimer, illustrated their different attitudes on decolonization to formulate his doctoral dissertation *Liberation Politics and Postcolonial Literature* (Wang Xufeng, 2009). He Weihua published *Disgrace: Temporal and Spatial Conflicts in Historical Narration*, with the purpose of illustration its narrative techniques (He Weihua, 2009). As for doctoral dissertations, to be frank, all of them involved Coetzee's whole works. Miao Yongmin accounted Coetzee's life attitudes in *Refusing Compromise—A Study of John Maxwell Coetzee's Fictions* in which almost the

whole works were analyzed (Miao Yongmin, 2010). Tang Xiaoyun discussed Coetzee's linguistics skills and ethical choices in *To Speak in His Own Voice—On J. M. Coetzee's Linguistics Choices and Their Ethical Value* with the whole works were roughly explored (Tang Xiaoyun, 2013). Zhang Yong formulated his own ideas about discourse, gender and body from J. M. Coetzee's whole works in his dissertation (Zhang Yong, 2013). In comparison with doctorate dissertations, master's theses get used to narrow down the research subject, mainly focusing on the sole works. For instance, "A Writing of Power—A Reading of J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*" by Yu Xiaohong, just centering on one piece of works (Yu Xiaohong, 2007). Wang Yang made inter-textual relation between *Foe* and *Robinson Crusoe* in the master's thesis (Wang Yang, 2012). Wang Nan depicted cultural identity crisis in *Disgrace* (Wang Nan, 2012). In conclusion, there are very few of scholars who divide Coetzee's works into different periods and picks up some pieces of works as the research subjects, which are the illuminated idea.

The adopted literary perspectives are divided into three kinds. Post-Colonial perspective ranks the first on the list. Research from post-colonial perspective is exceedingly profound. Taking perspectives doctoral dissertations into account, most of them lingered on this. Wang Jinghui's *Foreigner Forever on Postcolonial Diaspora Perspective in J. M. Coetzee's Writing* was from the post-colonial perspective, which is the first doctoral dissertation about Coetzee works from the the perspective (Wang Jinghui, 2006). Besides mine in 2008, Wang Xufeng's *Liberation Politics and Postcolonial Literature* combined three postcolonial writers to analyze their different attitudes towards postcolonial literature (Wang Xufeng, 2009). In addition, Coetzee was introduced as a postcolonial writer to China, which generated that many scholars have been pruned to analyze colonial phenomena in his oeuvre.

The second perspective is post-modernism. Coetzee is a writer influenced by different kinds of trends of thought, especially, post-colonialism, Western Marxism and modernism even post-modernism, whose dissertation was about Samuel Beckett who influenced him profoundly. J. M. Coetzee has already mixed writing techniques of realism and modernism into his works. Nowadays, there has no doctoral dissertation from this perspective. However, it has been

exploited roughly by a master's thesis. Yang Xuemei explored post-modernism writing in Coetzee's works ( Yang Xuemei, 2006 ), but it is just a general introduction to this subject.

Diversified perspectives of different disciplines are applied together in analysis. It has ever been under the mixture of criticism methods. A few scholars have changed research routines to emphasize common points in Coetzee's works from different theories. Dr. Shao Ling discussed Coetzee's political thoughts in his writing ( Shao Ling, 2010 ). Shao Ling also mentioned trauma writing in Coetzee's writing ( Shao Ling, 2011 ). These recent research are not confined to limited literary criticism any more. In other words, it means that scholars at home have begun to broaden criticism theory to analyze Coetzee's works.

At abroad, research about Coetzee started in 1980s, *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Life & Times of Michael K* as the main research subject. In 1990s, scholars regarded Coetzee's works as an exclusive research subject. Teresa Dovey, *The Novels of J. M. Coetzee: Lacanian Allegories* in 1988 (Johannesburg: Ad Donker), Susan V. Gallaher published *A Story of South of Africa: J. M. Coetzee's Fiction in Context* (Gallaher, 1991), David Attwell published his PhD dissertation *J. M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing* in 1993. Moore published *J. M. Coetzee and South Africa*, for the purpose of exposure apartheid writing (Moore, 1993). Sue Kossew published *Critical Essays on J. M. Coetzee* (Kossew, 1998). It shows that Coetzee has caught academic attentions from all over the world where many scholars have been embarking on do researching about his works, with the appearance of many treatises.

After 2003 when Coetzee won the Nobel Prize for Literature, many research findings have sprung up. Research about Coetzee has been more profound, exclusive and well-rounded than before. Nowadays, the overseas academic circle has already run out of all kinds of literary theories from different aspects to analyze.

Firstly, Coetzee's special diaspora identity and anti-colonial thought in his works have inspired scholars from postcolonial perspective to analyze. Therefore, most of treatises and journals were from this perspective. In 1980s,

the preliminary stage for research, scholars exploited colonialism to analyze Coetzee's works where apartheid writing was addressed. Barnett argued the merciless racial apartheid in South Africa (Barnett, 1999). The colonialism perspective has been employed by many scholars to complete their treatises. Sam Durrant published *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning: J. M. Coetzee, Wilson Harris and Toni Morrison* in 2003 (Sam Durrant, 2003), finding their common and different colonial writing style.

Secondly, ethic literary criticism is also applied to analyze Coetzee's work. Yeoh once examined Coetzee's ethic thoughts and found how he delivered truth-telling under the influence of Samuel Beckett (Yeoh, 2003), which may be the first research concerned with ethic values of Coetzee. Dereck Attridge published *J. M. Coetzee and The Ethics of Reading* to evaluate Coetzee's ethic choices (Dereck Attridge, 2004). Since then, Coetzee's works became the subject analyzed from ethical perspective, referring that research from ethical perspective was becoming more and more mature and abundant. Lear tried to explore Coetzee's ethical thoughts with the indication of his complex literary form in *Diary of a Bad Year* (Lear, 2008).

Thirdly, feminism, formalism, narratology, psychological perspective and eco-criticism have already been used to analyze Coetzee's writing. Wright Laura published *Displacing the Voice: South African Feminism and J. M. Coetzee's Female Narrators*, to summarize feminism writing in Coetzee's works (Wright, 2008). In addition, Coetzee delineated various scenes about women, for instance, the heroine, a great mother in *Age of Iron*, an aged writer Elizabeth in *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons*. Caracciolo interpreted his works from cognitive psychology which belongs to the linguistic field (Caracciolo, 2012). It symbolized that research has been involving different disciplines. Anthony Vital wrote a paper titled *Toward an African Ecocriticism: Post-colonial, Ecology and Life & Times of Michael K.* which combined with eco-criticism and post-colonialism to analyze Coetzee's words, without confinement in one literary criticism method (Vital, 2008).

Last but not least, Some important biographies of Coetzee help a lot of the research. J. C. Kannemeyer published biography titled *J. M. Coetzee: A Life in Writing* in 2013, which was translated into Chinese by Wang Jinghui

(forthcoming in 2017), especially David Attwell published *J. M. Coetzee and the Life of Writing* in 2015 (Oxford University Press), which was translated into Chinese by Dong Liang (forthcoming in 2017), both are very informative to the readers and scholars. Research on Coetzee has been broadened in literary criticism method as well as in the research subject. All of these pushed the research on his writing to a peak.

J. M. Coetzee has usually been regarded as a post-colonial writer. This label limits the new readers and researchers a lot. Actually Coetzee is an excellent modernism writer and he is trying all his creation, which shows his very experimental techniques in all his works. Such as the stream of consciousness in *In the Heart of Country*, anti-heroes in *Disgrace* and *Life & Time of Michael K*, montage technique in *Diary of a Bad Year*, the third person narrative in *autobiography trilogy*, utopian setting in *Jesus Series*, spatial narrative is also broadly employed as well as the linear narrative.

Coetzee is a great writer who pays a lot of attention to the writing techniques. He always tries on various different literary forms and writing techniques in his works. Narrative techniques in the literature are the priori principles or norms of narrative set by the author to achieve a pre-set text effects. The choice of narrative strategy is of great importance to the novel itself. Coetzee gives a lot of concerns to the identity of marginalized group, in constructing their identity, what kinds of writing techniques will he choose? This thesis believes that there are three similarities of narrative techniques used in *Foe* and *In the Heart of the Country*, which include first-person plus third-person narrative points of view, use of stream of consciousness, anti-hero, and open ending, even montage techniques in text media. The following paragraphs are some brief descriptions of those techniques, and then especially how those techniques serve to construct the author's modernism representation.

### **Stream of Consciousness of White Female in *Foe* and *In the Heart of the Country***

Through his works, J. M. Coetzee not only concerns the position of the colonized, but also the issue of female's identity in the colonial system. This book will combine the theories of identity in feminism and post-colonial theory,

taking *Foe* and *In the Heart of the Country* as the texts, to analyze white female's double identity as the Self/Subject and the Other/Object respectively in different binary relations ( In man/woman binary relation, the white females belong to the Other/Object; while in white/black binary relation, the white female belong to the Self/Subject ), thus to reflect their confusion and pursuit of their cultural identity.

The white female as the Other is presented in man/woman binary relation: Susan and Magda's submission or subversion to the patriarchal society in *Foe* and *In the Heart of the Country* respectively. The roles of white female as the Self in white/black binary opposition is also been presented: Susan and Magda strive for controlling the colonial discourse in *Foe* and *In the Heart of the Country*, while at the same time the Other (Friday and Hendrik) in the binary relation subvert and fight against their colonial discourse in those two novels respectively. The narrative techniques used in these two novels are constructing white female's double-identity, which will be explained mainly from three parts: narrative point of view, stream of consciousness and forms of the open ending. The above analysis thus tries to bring space of thought and discussion on the confusion of the double-identity for readers through reading these works.

Stream of consciousness is a writing technique used in modern Western literature and art, especially in modernism novels, which is an important type of modernist fiction. Stream of consciousness first appeared in the writings of psychology, put forward by U. S. psychologist William James, referring to the continuous flow of human consciousness activities that human thinking activity is a flow of water that can not be cut or chopped. James believes that human's thinking activity is not composed of separate parts, but a continuous flow of thoughts. The conception of stream of consciousness emphasizes the uninterrupted thinking, that there is no blankness, but always in flow, and it also stresses the nature of trans-time and trans-space, which means that it is free from the shackles of time and space, because consciousness is a kind of pure subjective reality, which can make the present and the past inseparable.

Stream of consciousness is not a single literary genre, and there is no generally accepted definition for it. Unlike the traditional mode of novel whose story plot is occurred in the order of time, and whose structure is single and

linear, the main characteristic of stream of consciousness is that it is narrated and organized with the activities of human consciousness, through free association and imagination. Novel of stream of consciousness gives a lot concern to the thinking activities of the characters, focusing on the description of psychological feelings, to dig deeper to expose the hidden sense of soul and the inner world. The way of description includes monologue, free association, consciousness migration, stream of consciousness language and so on.

As to the stylistic features, since the stream of consciousness novel demonstrate the continued flow of feelings and thoughts structured in the center of character's thinking activity, and often complete the narrating by free association, so they tend to break the normal temporal order of the traditional novel, to achieve a large span of past, present and even the future. The changes of psychological thoughts, crossing of paragraphs, multiple presentations of feelings, memories and longings, all of these make the narrating complicated and confusing. The most widely used technique in the stream of consciousness writing is inner monologue, which shows its consciousness directly to the readers.

In both *Foe* and *In the Heart of the Country*, we can find there are descriptions of stream of consciousness, especially in *In the Heart of the Country*, which is totally an inner monologue of the female narrator Magda; also in *Foe*, in the part of Susan's letters to the writer Foe, on the surface it seems to be her conversation with him, but actually it can also be regarded as a kind of inner monologue, and the audience can be Foe or the readers of the book, so it is also a description of stream of consciousness. Inner monologue is the sole and silent psychological language, and it is the character's inner thinking, includes memories of past, consideration of present, and imagination and arrangement of the future. It not only reflects the shallow, clear mental activities, but also the deep and vague mental activities. Through the detailed description of the inner monologue, the mental activities and personality traits of the character are reflected vividly.

Although *Foe* is a clear narrating of Susan's experience according to time and place; the first part is her experience on the island with Cruso and Friday; the second part is the letters she writes to Foe when she arrives in England; the

third part is her direct contact with Foe; and the last part is an unnamed narrator's narrating. If we scrutinize her narration deeply, we can still find some of her description belongs to a kind of stream of consciousness, especially the first-person inner monologue. In her letters to Foe in the second part, the female narrator Susan always tries to revise her identity through inner monologue, as she says to herself, "... I seem to exist only as the one who came, the one who witnessed, the one who longed to be gone: a being without substance, a ghost beside the true body of Cruso" (Coetzee *Foe*: 51), which shows her reluctances of being as the other identity.

Also, fantasy is another trick the stream of consciousness works when the author uses imagination to integrate the reality and illusion, thus to show the internal mentality. For example, when Susan wishes Cruso writing down her story as soon as possible, she even imagines Foe's behavior in her monologue, "in the mornings, lying in my warm bed, I seem to hear the shuffle of your footsteps, as draped in a rug; you climb the stairs to your attic. You seat yourself, your breathing is heavy, you light the lamp, you pinch your eyes shut and begin to grope your way back to where you were last night... Closing my eyes, I gather my strength and send out a vision of the island... with birds and fleas and fish of all hues and lizards basking in the sun..." (51). Through her imagination and her monologue, we can find how badly Susan wants to construct her identity through Foe's writing her story, thus to show her uncertainty of her self identity.

Compared to *Foe*, the writing technique of stream of consciousness is used more directly in *In the Heart of the Country*, the whole story of which is the female narrator's inner monologue to show the narrator's self-examination, past memories, future vision, emotional fluctuations, and fantasy dialogues and so on. The psychological language manipulated by "I" alone expresses the scope of activities in "my" consciousness. From the very beginning to the 35th paragraph of the story, the narrator show us a picture of her father's marring a new bride, and the process of their contact in the family, and at last her killing both his father and the new bride. But then when we read the next paragraph, we suddenly find the above descriptions are just the narrator's imagination. Through those imaginative descriptions, the female's distress is vividly depicted that she

is just an absence in the family and her reluctance of being the Other. Also, the whole novel is her monologue, includes her self denial — “an old, ugly spinster”, “forgotten black widow”; as well as her self affirmation — “I am myself”, “I want my own life”, “my language creates my self” and so on. The whole story uses imagination and inner monologue, making the readers can not identify which are facts and which are not. We can only go into the deep heart of the narrator to hear their voice and to know that they are anxious about their identity and want to change their situation. Through the technique of stream of consciousness, the confusion and pursuit of the female’s identity is clearly demonstrated.

In the process of expressing character’s mental activity, stream of consciousness is a very important means, especially through monologue and imagination. Through those techniques, the author shows the readers a much more complicated but true inner world of the white female, letting the readers better interpret the psychology of the characters. Through the technique of stream of consciousness, we can find the female characters in Coetzee’s two works are both uncertain and confused about their identity, and that they want to pursue a new identity psychologically.

### **Open Ending: Modernism Strategy**

Through open ending, the novel can never end. It will be a new beginning of a new story, from one world to another. We long for an ending when reading the novels, but we are more eager to see a whole new world before us. It is exactly what Coetzee wants to express, who wishes to leave more space for the readers to think, to consider. In the open ending, he seems to tell us that the identity of white female is an uncertainty, maybe he himself feels a kind of confusion that at one hand he wants to deconstruct patriarchal discourse through female’s perspective of view, thus to subvert female’s Other identity, but still a failure; at the other hand, their Self identity in the white/black binary relation is still a failure because of the resistance of the black. Maybe this is a question Coetzee has been thinking, and also wants the readers to consider. As readers, we have to find the answer in the labyrinth set in the stories.

Jesus series also show their open ending. When the first book *The*