



The Narrative Strategy and Identity Construction of Diaspora Literature under the Conflict of World Cultures -Take for Example, Coetzee's Autobiographical Trilogy

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Abstract. Diasporic literature stands as a unique and poignant genre within the vast expanse of literary landscapes, serving as a mirror reflecting the intricate interplay of individual experiences with broader historical and social contexts. This genre, with its roots embedded deeply in the experiences of displacement and the subsequent cultural collisions, offers profound insights into the human condition, particularly in the realms of identity formation, emotional resilience, and the quest for belonging. By delving into the autobiographical trilogy penned by the distinguished South African-born author, J.M. Coetzee— comprising "The Boy," "Youth," and "Summer"—one can discern the nuanced narrative techniques employed in diasporic literature and the ways in which these techniques shape the construction of individual identities.

Keywords: diasporic literature; Coetzee; the autobiographical trilogy; narrative strategy; Identity construction.

1 Introduction

Eleanor Byrne's article traces the themes of melancholia and impasse in postcolonial and diaspora theory. In part this sense of melancholia would appear to arise from the lack of legitimation many privileged postcolonial academics feel about their role as commentators on the Third World or as effectors of political change.^[1]

The emergence of the concept of "diaspora" provides a new way of thinking for us to understand the boundaries beyond the nation-state. It encourages a critical reexamination of the legacies of colonialism and their enduring impact on contemporary societies. Diaspora theory invites us to explore the ways in which displaced communities maintain connections to their places of origin, even as they forge new identities in their host societies. This process of cultural negotiation and hybridity is central to the understanding of diaspora, as it challenges the rigid dichotomies of "us" and "them," and instead promotes a more nuanced and inclusive vision of global citizenship. The chronicles of diasporas - those of the black Atlantic, of the Metropolitan Jewry, of mass rural displacement - constitute the ground swell of modernity.^[2]

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2 The Theoretical Framework of Diasporic Literature

The word Diaspora (originally Greek or Dispersion) originally meant "dispersion," and the term originally appeared as a historiographical or cultural concept, specifically referring to the Diaspora in which Jews were forced to leave Palestine after the two Jewish wars (70 C.E., 135 C.E.), or to the Jews in the diaspora around the world, or to the countries of the Jewish diaspora. [3] The diaspora literature formed on this basis also has the colors of immigration, exile, and war. Some scholars have defined diasporic literature: "Diaspora writers use the Chinese language of residence to write literary works about cultural situations and cultural confusion under heterogeneous cultural conditions." [4] However, this is not comprehensive, and the works of diaspora writers written in their native language in their sojourns are also an important part of diaspora literature. According to historical records, the earliest surviving diaspora literary work is the ancient Egyptian "The Narrative of Sinukh"^[5], which mainly tells the story of the protagonist who came to southern Syria from Egypt due to a coup d'état in the palace. This work contains the characteristics of diasporic literature, that is, the migration, dispersion, and repositioning of individuals in the context of globalization. In the contemporary society, where "globalization" is rampant and cross-cultural studies are on the rise, cultural exchanges between countries and continents are inevitable, and cultural differences in different regions have had a strong impact on diasporic writers, so diasporic literature and the study of diaspora literature have become increasingly popular. This literary form reveals the complex psychological and social phenomena of modern people in a rapidly changing world through the discussion of the living conditions of displaced people, cultural conflicts, identity and other issues.

3 Diasporic Narratives in Coetzee's Autobiographical Trilogy

Born in the heart of Cape Town, South Africa, in 1940, John Maxwell Coetzee embarked on a life journey that would be marked by a series of diaspora experiences, each chapter more profound than the last. From his early days in South Africa to his scholarly pursuits in the United Kingdom and the United States, and finally his tenure as a distinguished professor in Australia, Coetzee's life has been a testament to the resilience and adaptability of the human spirit.

One of his most poignant works, "The Boy," serves as a vivid and poignant memoir, not just of Coetzee's own life, but also as a lens through which the harsh realities of apartheid-era South Africa are refracted. The book is a microcosm of the social and political turmoil that defined South Africa during that period, offering readers a window into the complex interplay between personal experience and historical context.

In the book, Coetzee depicts him strolling along the farm on a summer twilight. The afterglow of the setting sun sprinkled on the vast grassland, the fragrance of grass overflowed, and the cattle and sheep were flocked. He indulges in the gifts of nature and becomes one with nature. At the same time, he also described in detail the changing grasslands of the four seasons, the tender greenery of spring, the lush greenery of summer, the golden yellow of autumn and the gloomy winter as if he had written on the

page. However, the good childhood did not completely hide the shadow of racism in South Africa. At school, Coetzee suffered racial discrimination and social pressure from his peers. He was forced to endure unfair treatment, and his heart was full of helplessness and resentment. This experience not only gave him a deeper understanding of racism, but also prompted him to constantly explore his family history in the hope of finding a way out of his difficult situation.

"Youth" recounts Coetzee's life in London as a young man. From South Africa, "the wind blows all the time, and ochre clay dust whirls in through the cracks in the doors, seeps in through the cracks in the windows, leaks in under the eaves, and creeps in through the seams in the ceilings." After a day's storm, an inch of dust accumulates on the windward wall. The office building "to London" was a featureless glass-concrete edifice that seemed to emit a gas, colorless and odorless, that kept drilling into his bloodstream and numbing him. "London is bustling, but it's oppressive and grey. Geographical migration, foreign cultures and atmospheres, and differences in living environments all show the rivalry between the old world and the new world. Not only did he face language and habits, but he also had to deal with new social relationships and identities. His loneliness and confusion, as well as his anticipation and fear of the future, are common psychological states of the displaced. Becoming a marginal person in London is also the result of his difficulty in getting along with the collision and integration of Western colonial culture and South African native culture."^[6]

The book "Summer", published after Coetzee's death, reveals the literary giant's journey back to Cape Town, South Africa, after many years of wandering in a foreign land. The symbolic title of "Summer" is a metaphor for Coetzee's journey back to his hometown in his thirties, full of antiquity and apprehension. His feelings for this land are complex and contradictory, with a sense of intimacy and belonging, as well as a sense of strangeness and alienation. He received a U.S. education in a foreign country, which made him particularly out of place when it came to the local education system in South Africa. When applying for a position at the University of Cape Town, his American graduate degree did not give him an advantage, but instead made him feel that there was an insurmountable gap between himself and the locals. This state of insecurity and self-isolation caused Coetzee to wander alone in dark corners for a period of time after returning home. However, as Coetzee continued to experience more and more diaspora experiences, he gradually grasped the unique charm and depth of various cultures, and was no longer satisfied with the original narrow vision. He gradually jumped out of the original framework and bravely experienced the differences and conflicts of various cultures, so as to achieve the integration and understanding of different cultures at a higher level. Coetzee recognizes that while there are differences and conflicts between cultures, there are also commonalities and the possibility to learn from each other. He began to try to think and write from a global perspective, integrating elements and concepts from different cultures into his works, presenting a diverse and harmonious cultural scene. Looking at the world from a higher level, Coetzee gradually grasped a cultural concept that transcended geographical and ethnic boundaries.

4 The Construction of Identity in Coetzee's Work

Coetzee had long been confused and confused about his own identity. Coetzee is a descendant of the Boers and the Dutch in South Africa, and although the Boers lost colonial control of South Africa after the defeat of the Boer War with the British, their sense of national identity was greatly enhanced. The Boers finally formed the Afrikan nation.^[7] However, in Coetzee's mind, there was no identification with the Afrikan culture, but more with the English culture. Obviously, English culture is stronger than Afrikan culture, and it is easier to dominate one's mind, so Coetzee would have been more willing to receive an English education and choose to write in English. When he was in South Africa, he was affected by his family, school education and social environment, because of his white skin, he could not speak Afrikan fluently, and Coetzee was ostracized and suppressed by the locals. In a society where power and status are determined by skin color and caste, Coetzee cannot escape the gradual marginalization of his identity.

However, despite Coetzee's choice of English culture as a dominant choice to integrate into this global cultural center, he was not accepted by London. On the contrary, he was met with cold eyes and misunderstanding in the metropolis of London. The locals saw him as just a silly young man from a distant colony, whose cultural background, ideology, and way of life were alien to them. Located in the heart of the empire of London, Coetzee is in the midst of a vast cultural melting pot. He tries to understand and integrate into this vibrant and multicultural city, however, he soon discovers that this integration is not an easy task. He felt the strong culture shock, as well as the hypocrisy and arrogance of Western imperialism. He saw the contradictions and problems behind Western civilization, as well as the injustices and prejudices that existed in London society. In the process, Coetzee gradually became a marginal man. He was neither native to South Africa, nor could he fully integrate into Western colonial culture. In the collision and integration of the two cultures, he felt at a loss, and even had self-doubt and confusion. He began to re-examine his cultural identity and values, trying to find his place in the world.

Faced with a social environment that has changed dramatically, his identity and self-perception have also undergone profound changes. Back in his homeland, South Africa is no longer what Coetzee remembers. The changes in society, the integration of cultures, and the changes in the political environment all made him feel strange and uneasy. He tries to find clues from his past memories and understand his place in this new world. In the process, his identity went through a process from blurring to clarity. He came to realize that his identity could be influenced by multiple factors such as family, culture, history, and geography. He began to try to accept and understand these complex influences, integrating them into his diaspora work. As a diaspora, Coetzee has a unique perspective and experience that allows him to transcend different cultural boundaries and understand and respect different values and lifestyles. This cross-cultural understanding and identity became an important part of his identity.

Through his life experiences, Coetzee delves into how diasporas find balance between different cultures, how they maintain themselves in the face of displacement, and how they redefine their identities in the context of globalization. He sheds light on the

culture shock and identity crisis brought about by globalization, while also demonstrating the courage and wisdom of humanity in the face of these challenges.

Coetzee's work not only allows us to see the plight and challenges of the displaced, but also makes us think about how to maintain ourselves, find our belonging, and define our own identity in the context of globalization. Under the wave of globalization, there are more and more diasporas around the world. They have no permanent residence, are discriminated against, and even lose their voice, a phenomenon that has attracted widespread attention. By exploring Coetzee's autobiographical trilogy, we can offer these diasporas the possibility of constructing discourse and identity, while contributing to the development of colonial culture.

5 Conclusions

In an era characterized by unprecedented interconnectedness and globalization, it is imperative that we not only preserve and honor our cultural heritage and historical legacies but also foster a profound respect for the diverse cultures and values that enrich our global community. This dual commitment serves as a compass, guiding us through the intricate tapestry of the modern world, enabling us to carve out a meaningful niche and contribute to the tapestry of human experience.

Cultural identity, deeply rooted in our history and traditions, is the bedrock upon which our sense of self is built. It shapes our worldview, influencing our values, beliefs, and behaviors. By cherishing our cultural background, we maintain a connection to our roots, ensuring that the wisdom and experiences of our ancestors continue to inform and inspire us. This heritage, whether manifested in language, art, customs, or cuisine, is not merely a collection of artifacts but a living legacy that enriches our understanding of humanity.

Simultaneously, recognizing and appreciating the cultural diversity that surrounds us is crucial for personal growth and social cohesion. It broadens our horizons, exposing us to different ways of thinking and living, thereby enhancing our empathy and understanding. This openness to other cultures not only breaks down barriers but also promotes peace and unity. By engaging with the traditions, languages, and histories of others, we enrich our own experiences, fostering a global community that values inclusivity and respect.

In the globalized world, where ideas, goods, and people flow across borders with increasing ease, finding one's place and value becomes a complex endeavor. It requires navigating the delicate balance between maintaining a strong cultural identity and embracing the opportunities for learning and growth that diversity offers. By doing so, we can harness the power of globalization to our advantage, using it as a platform for personal development and social harmony.

Moreover, this approach encourages us to see ourselves as both global citizens and custodians of our cultural heritage. It empowers us to contribute positively to the world, leveraging our unique perspectives to address global challenges and foster a more equitable and just society. Whether through promoting cross-cultural dialogue, participating in international exchanges, or advocating for policies that respect and cele-

brate diversity, we can play an active role in shaping a future that honors the past while embracing the potential of the present.

In conclusion, in the dynamic landscape of globalization, it is essential to hold our cultural background and historical memories dear while extending the same reverence to the cultures of others. By doing so, we not only preserve our own identity but also enrich the collective human experience, paving the way for personal growth, social harmony, and a more interconnected and understanding world.

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