

Conference Paper  
(Doctoral Research, English Literature, University of Cape Town)  
**Emigration, Photography, and Writing in J.M. Coetzee's  
*Slow Man***

*Donald Powers*

---

Of the four fictions J.M. Coetzee has published since emigrating to Australia, *Slow Man* (2005) most explicitly explores the dimensions of the experience of emigrancy<sup>1</sup>. Emigration is in the first place a spatial event, but as *Slow Man* illustrates, its consequences and effects are soundly historical, cultural, and linguistic too. These dimensions are all present in the representation of Rayment's bicycle accident at the outset of the novel. This bicycle accident occupies the foreground of the narrative, and the effects of Rayment's and Marijana's emigration the middle ground; Coetzee's emigration to Australia and its consequences for him as a writer forms the novel's subtext. Elizabeth Costello sponsors the metafictional turn of the narrative: as an avatar of Coetzee-the-internationally-acclaimed-writer, she provides the link between the fictional lifeworld of Rayment and Marijana, and the implications of emigration for the writer Coetzee.

In this paper I examine the nature and significance of the link Coetzee develops in *Slow Man* between emigration and writing<sup>2</sup>. I argue that photographs consolidate this link by focusing such questions as the relationship between a personal and a collective history, the status of an original human subject against a fictional copy, and the truth-value of photographic images and fictional narrative. In my discussion of photographs I refer to the work of Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes, and W.G. Sebald. My argument traces an arc from the first-order displacement of Rayment's bicycle accident through the larger topic of Rayment's and Marijana's experience as emigrants to Australia, to the figure and function of Elizabeth Costello. My priority is to demonstrate how Costello's role in the novel connects Rayment's concern with authenticity with

Coetzee's larger concerns as a writer newly resident in Australia seeking to orient and place himself in relation to his new national and historical context.

### **Forms of Disjunction**

The bicycle accident that jolts *Slow Man* to life immobilises the protagonist. As it opens the narrative it opens a new chapter in Rayment's life. He comes to view the accident as the line separating a relatively unconsidered past from a newly self-conscious present ("By the sign of this cut let a new life commence")<sup>3</sup>. The blow of the car that knocks Rayment from his bike into a semi-conscious heap on the tarmac opens a perspective in which the world swims before his eyes, eludes direct apprehension, escapes him. But even before he hits the ground, as he flies through the air in the split-second following the collision, Rayment has been shocked from that familiar space where words have meaningful referents in the world. While Rayment is air-borne, his mind narrates the event he is in the process of undergoing. The phrases that unroll in his mind materialise within a time-frame independent of the historical time in which his displacement from bicycle through air to tarmac takes place.

*Relax!* he tells himself as he flies through the air (*flies through the air with the greatest of ease!*), and indeed he can feel his limbs go obediently slack. *Like a cat*, he tells himself: *roll, then spring to your feet, ready for what comes next*. The unusual word *limber* or *limbre* is on the horizon too<sup>4</sup>.

The italicised phrases here identify the accident as the occasion of a literary description, but this pre-emptive description fails to dictate what actually transpires. The italics are the first sign of the disjunction that will dominate Rayment's experience after the accident. When Rayment later wakes in hospital, incomplete words form in his mind, sourceless human voices reach his ears. In his delicate physical and mental state he is sensitive to the form of the phrases that are spoken to him (his doctor will "*bring him up to speed*", his condition is "*not serious*"),<sup>5</sup> but the meaning of these phrases is no longer self-evident. He feels alienated from the hospital environment, but more pointedly from his injured leg. With an aversion that recalls Mrs Curren's reluctance in *Age of Iron* (1990) to enounce to herself the name of the disease racking her body (cancer), Rayment distances himself, his 'I', from his amputated leg and the prosthesis

spoken of by his doctor by thinking of each as a *thing*, foreign and unnamable. Pain is the imperative that forces him to recognise and accept his new condition, which seems to him strange enough to be a dream.

*Slow Man* begins, then, with Rayment's experience of forms of displacement and disjunction immediately the consequence of his bicycle accident. These forms are backdropped against a different order of displacement - emigration. Both Rayment and Marijana are emigrants to Australia: Rayment from France, Marijana from Croatia. The qualities in Marijana that appeal to Rayment range from her exotic name and handsome appearance to her efficiency about the house and her direct manner. He is especially attracted to Marijana as a capable maternal figure committed to supporting her family. It is largely because he has lost his mobility that he admires Marijana's stability in the real world (represented by her "sturdy" legs)<sup>6</sup>. He believes she embodies a structure of values he associates with the Old World of Europe, yet equally he sees her as a model of frank practical adaptability. This aspect of her character is reflected in her hybrid vocabulary and awkward but emphatic manner of speaking. She speaks a "rapid, approximate Australian English," infused with slang, "with Slavic liquids and an uncertain command of *a* and *the*"<sup>7</sup>. Though himself an emigrant (a few times over), Rayment has a surer command of English idiom than Marijana. By the measure of his speech he is more fully assimilated to the Australian English linguistic community, but, unlike Marijana, he lacks the bonds of a family group, his own 'people.' Rayment's interest in Marijana is charged by his solitary status in the world. Unmarried and childless, his parents and sister deceased, the erotic desire he feels for her is infused with a need to belong to a family group. Whereas Rayment is something of a purist who resists change, Marijana is presented as an adaptable, cosmopolitan character. This contrast in personality and attitude, as well as Rayment's desire to affiliate himself to a group and remember himself to history, is excellently illustrated in their interactions over photographs.

### Photographs

In Coetzee's fictions, photographs play a slight but significant role. In *Dusklands* Eugene Dawn carries around with him 24 incriminating photographs of American soldiers' activity in Vietnam, classified material for his work on his Vietnam report. From poring over these photographs at night he draws a surreptitious pleasure that speaks to his voyeuristic fantasy of penetrating the mind and body of the other (the Vietnamese enemy, but also his wife Marilyn and son Martin). He gazes at his photographs secure in his detachment from the event he is ideologically complicit with but greedy for the gritty reality of. Magda in *In the Heart of the Country* (1977) is doubtful of many things, including evidence of her childhood. She is sure such evidence exists in the form of a forgotten photograph secreted in a desk-drawer or trunk somewhere about her Karoo farmhouse<sup>8</sup>. In *Age of Iron*, a photograph of her daughter's two sons afloat in a canoe on a lake in North America prompts Mrs Curren to interpret the life-jackets they wear as emblems of her daughter's insulated existence in America. It dispirits her to think that her daughter's children are out of touch with the brute facticity of death that she as a cancer-ridden citizen of a country (South Africa) in revolt daily confronts<sup>9</sup>. As for the derelict Vercueil, she thinks of him as unphotogenic in the manner of a recalcitrant prisoner or fabled animal, likely to emerge in a photograph blurred or incomplete<sup>10</sup>. In contrast to their role in these novels, photographs in *Slow Man* are central to the plot.

Rayment's collection of photographs by the nineteenth century French photographer Antoine Fauchery (1823-1861) focuses various conversations between the three main characters - Rayment, Marijana, and Costello - about forms of authenticity; they are also the object of Drago's 'theft' and forgery. Rayment initially explains to Marijana that he started to collect these old photographs because he wanted to preserve in public memory the visual trace of the individuals represented in them. It later emerges that the collection sprang equally from his desire to preserve evidence of an outmoded method of photographic reproduction. He thinks of the photographs themselves as unwanted or forgotten, some of them "last survivors, unique," to which he has

given "a good home"<sup>11</sup>. His interest in photography is limited to black and white prints. Originally a darkroom technician, he lost interest in photography with the advent of colour prints and digital modes of reproduction. Colourless prints evoke in him nostalgia not for a specific past but the past as such, instanced as a material relic. In their imperfection they seem to him more authentic visual documents than digitally doctored prints.

In his seminal essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," Walter Benjamin argues that in the realm of visual art authenticity lies in "the here and now of the original" artwork that has been passed down "as the same, identical thing to the present day"<sup>12</sup>. He notes that an artwork's authenticity is evidenced in the physical traces it bears of its passage through time and in the cultural record of its transfer through the hands of those who have owned it<sup>13</sup>. As such, authenticity "eludes technological [...] reproduction"<sup>14</sup>. Benjamin distinguishes between the claim to authority of an artwork reproduced manually as against one reproduced by technological means. A manually reproduced replica cannot challenge the authority of an original because the traces of age on the latter are too subtle for imitation; absence of these traces identifies a false twin, a forgery. Since technological reproduction "is more independent of the original artwork than is manual reproduction,"<sup>15</sup> the former process can bring to light qualities of the artwork without interfering tangibly with the artwork. As examples Benjamin notes how in photography an adjustment to a camera lens can change the focus and perspective with which an object is represented, and how in film the processes of slow motion and enlargement bring into relief details in the represented scene imperceptible to the human eye<sup>16</sup>. Technological reproduction has the further capacity to place a copy of an original artwork in a new context - Benjamin gives the example of a recording of an orchestral performance listened to in a private room<sup>17</sup>. For Benjamin, "what withers in the age of the technological reproducibility" is the aura of an artwork<sup>18</sup>. He defines an artwork's aura as "a strange tissue of space and time: the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be"<sup>19</sup>. The translators of Benjamin's essay point out in a footnote that Benjamin's phrasing

here mingles not merely the dimensions of time and space but conveys a sense of simultaneous distance and proximity<sup>20</sup>. It is the auratic quality of his collected Fauchery photographs that Rayment is especially sensitive to.

Rayment attributes the aura of black and white photographs to the manual stages in the darkroom required to develop them. He contextualises his preference for analogue over digital photography as follows: "to the rising generation the enchantment lay in a *techne* of images without substance, images that could flash through the ether without residing anywhere, that could be sucked into a machine and emerge from it doctored, untrue"<sup>21</sup>. He is disquieted by the thought that an image in electronic form can be subjected to unconstrained manipulation in the space between its first recording and eventual printing. What unsettles him is that in this virtual space (an 'ether', a nowhere) the image is less a fixed than a potential image, open to endless differentiation from the referent it purports to mirror. He finds a pathos in the textured singularity of the figures engrained in colourless images as much as of the prints themselves. He values such photographs' palpable age and air of obsolescence, which amplifies for him their authority as testaments to absence and loss.

Marijana approves of Rayment's pastime on the grounds that by collecting first-generation photographs he "save [*sic*] history"<sup>22</sup>. For Marijana, the value of Rayment's hobby lies in its contribution to an archive of public memory: as she says, "So people don't think Australia is country without history, just bush and then mob of immigrants. Like me. Like us"<sup>23</sup>. It is not clear to Rayment who is included in Marijana's "us": himself and herself, or herself and her family.

Uneasy that she seems to locate the beginning of Australian history not with its aboriginal population but in the arrival of European immigrants, Rayment asks whether emigration marks a rupture in or erasure of one's history: "Do you cease to have a history when you move from one point on the globe to another?"<sup>24</sup>

Marijana maintains what she understands to be a common European view that in Australia people can construct lives without reference to where they have come from: "in Australia everybody is new. Don't mind if you come with this history

or that history, in Australia you start zero"<sup>25</sup>. Notwithstanding the validity of Marijana's view of social tolerance within the borders of Australia, she neglects to mention the strictly enforced Australian immigration laws, which JC scrutinises in his opinion on asylum in Australia in *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007)<sup>26</sup>.

As we have seen, Rayment's interest in the Fauchery photographs is antiquarian in the broadest sense rather than limited to the photographs' content. He collects them because he perceives them to represent a more located and tactile mode of recording the world in images than modern electronic modes. Rayment's sympathetic sense of history recalls the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), who devotes a large portion of his spare time to preserving and deciphering the enigmatic poplar slips he finds among the desert ruins outside his settlement. Though these ruins are abandoned and hold little more than archaeological interest, he would like to believe that in the "vacuousness of the desert," and the ruins in particular, there lies "a special historical poignancy"<sup>27</sup>. The ruins and the poplar slips survive as relics of an earlier community's settlement, about which there remains no other substantial record. The Magistrate admits to himself that his preoccupation with these relics is a function of the leisure he enjoys as an aging, comfortably placed civil servant in a distant imperial settlement. It is also in key with his private concerns about how he will be remembered in history. This concern is both a natural reflex of his late middle age and a specific response to his complicity with the Empire in its campaign (tortures, border raids), carried out by Colonel Joll of the Third Bureau, against the barbarians. In drawing this parallel between Rayment and the Magistrate I want to emphasize their shared interest in *the trace* of that which is lost. In Coetzee's most recent novel *Summertime* (2009) it becomes clear that these characters' preoccupation with the trace is wholly Coetzee's as a writer concerned to record the movement of his thought and feeling against the backdrop of his specific historical circumstances<sup>28</sup>.

Rayment's hobby is more self-interested than it first appears: it answers his personal concern with belonging to a social group and securing a place in the

national historical narrative as the donor of the Fauchery collection to the State Library in Adelaide. He thinks of his hobby as a matter of giving these Faucherys a home: by making a bequest of them - the "Rayment Bequest" - he hopes in turn to be given a place, accommodated, in public memory as their preserver. However, he is aware that his history as an emigrant complicates his claim to belong to the Australian nation. Prior to his accident he prided himself on his independence from others: the accident reminds him of his mortality and causes him to reflect on his lack of 'people' prepared to acknowledge him as one of their own and include him in their collective biography.

The Fauchery photograph that most deeply moves him shows a woman and six children assembled at the door of a wattle and mud cabin. It is one of hundreds in his possession of scenes from early mining camps in Victoria, New South Wales, and South Australia. Inspecting the photograph after his first exchange with Marijana about his Fauchery collection, Rayment has to check an impulse to align his history with that of the anonymous figures depicted in it and count himself one of their "tribe."

Not just bush, he would like to tell Marijana. Not just blackfellows either. Not zero history. Look, that is where we come from: from the cold and damp and smoke of that wretched cabin, from those women with their black helpless eyes, from that poverty and that grinding labour on hollow stomachs. A people with a story of their own, a past. *Our* story, *our* past. But is that the truth? Would the woman in the picture accept him as one of her tribe - the boy from Lourdes in the French Pyrenees with the mother who played Fauré on the piano? Is the history that he wants to claim as his not finally just an affair for the English and the Irish, foreigners keep out?<sup>29</sup>

The repetitious phrasing in this extract ("Not just bush ... Not just ... Not zero history... Look, ... from the cold and damp ... , from those women ..., from that poverty...") suggests both the emphasis with which Rayment would like to make his point to Marijana, if she were present, and the specific qualities of the photographed individuals and their situation that arouse his sympathy. Beyond the signs of squalor and a labour-hard life, Rayment identifies with the figures in the photograph because static and helpless they look back at him from the far



side of history, consigned and all but forgotten. It is precisely Rayment's fear of becoming, like these figures, voiceless in the echo-hall of history, immobile and anonymous before the gaze of posterity, or worse: uninstanced at all, lost to history (like Magda in *In the Heart of the Country*), that causes his gaze to linger on this photograph and inspires his collection. The important point here is that this is an image of members of an early community of European immigrants to Australia. I will shortly note how the stress Rayment lays on the possessive determiner 'our' in this extract informs his desired relationship with Marijana's son Drago.

### **The 'Ordinary' Past**

In the course of an essay on Mona de Beer and Brian Johnson Barker's book-length collection of photographs of pre-1910 South Africa, *A Vision of the Past* (1992), Coetzee asks whether it is plausible to treat "social history" as a sub-category of "history"<sup>30</sup>.

If the lepers confined to Robben Island are in the book because they belong to social history, are the Xhosa chiefs also confined to Robben Island not in the book because they belong to history? Does a dead baby in its little coffin (in the book) fall into social history, while trenches full of dead soldiers (not in the book) fall into history?<sup>31</sup>

Coetzee agrees with the editors' guiding idea that "ordinary" individuals and their pastimes are as deserving of a place in the historical record as prominent figures and seismic political events, but objects to the tone of placid contentment that he finds dominates the editors' selection of photographs representing "ordinary" folk in "ordinary" scenes. Who are these ordinary people and what constitutes the ordinariness of their activities? Coetzee's point here is that the term "ordinary" is expediently vague, as it pretends to a coverage it does not achieve. Hence he questions the editors' unexplained exclusion of pornographic photographs and photographs of an ethnographic sort exhibiting 'primitive' people<sup>32</sup>. The implication here is that this sort of suppressed material contributed as much to sharpening the self-image of Victorian South Africa and the nature of its

ordinary as stiff bourgeois family portraits or images of women in sunbonnets playing lawn tennis.

Sontag points out that photographic images "which idealise (like most fashion and animal photography) are no less aggressive than [photographic] work which makes a virtue of plainness (like class pictures, still lives of the bleaker sort, and mug shots)"<sup>33</sup>. Sontag links this aggressiveness to what she identifies as the fundamentally "didactic"<sup>34</sup> quality of photography, by which she means a photograph's power to boast authority as a piece of documentary evidence, unequivocal proof of the historicity of an event. In a court of law, "the camera record incriminates"<sup>35</sup>. The photographs in de Beer and Johnson's book are collected for the less urgent purpose of exhibiting 'scenes from provincial life' (to borrow the subtitle to Coetzee's *Boyhood* (1997) and *Summertime*), but, as Coetzee points out, the editors' exclusion of improper or marginal photographs from the collection reveals their less than innocent motive of wanting to parade an innocent image of life in pre-1910 South Africa. To properly - not 'decently' but 'critically' - appreciate such a collection of photographs it is necessary, then, to bear in mind these exclusions even as one bears in mind that one's appreciation of de Beer and Johnson's 'vision of the past' is certain to be informed by the shadow cast on the present by historical events that took place in South Africa post-1910.

Rayment's efforts to preserve his Fauchery photographs spring from his awareness that the historical narrative of a nation necessarily involves certain exclusions, "acts of silencing and censoring,"<sup>36</sup> along with certain emphases. As an emigrant he has lived out discontinuities in space and culture; without living family he is peculiarly conscious that he lacks the affirmation and security of a foundational group from which to derive and chisel his identity. Rayment explains to Drago that it is for the sake of "our historical record"<sup>37</sup> that he maintains his Fauchery collection. This phrase causes in him an upwelling of emotion because he recognises that the single photograph he holds is capable of establishing between himself and Drago the bond of shared witness.

Because just possibly this image before them, this distribution of particles of silver that records the way the sunlight fell, one day in 1855, on the faces of two long-dead Irishwomen, an image in whose making he, the little boy from Lourdes, had no part and in which Drago, son of Dubrovnik, has had no part either, may, like a mystical charm - *I was here, I lived, I suffered* - have the power to draw them together<sup>38</sup>.

This is a good example of how Rayment's sensitivity to the pathos of these old photographs and the figures depicted in them underpins his affinity for Drago. More than their respective relationships with Marijana, Rayment senses that their shared appreciation of this particular photograph might provide the common ground for the bond he wishes to establish with his (albeit later) fellow emigrant Drago. This photograph is thus more than a random occasion for Rayment's reflection: it *sponsors* his thoughts by lending its aura to them here. Drago's later digital manipulation of another of Rayment's Faucherys of course has precisely the opposite effect of estranging them. The authority of photographs lies in their illusion of self-presence. But this authority is tenuous because as an image frozen and turned free of its place in space and time it calls for contextual framing in words. Rayment is aware that in making a public bequest of his Fauchery collection he will be linking his name to the collection. When Marijana discovers this, she raises the question of the respective truth-value of a name and an image. "Photograph is not the same as just name," she says; "is more living"<sup>39</sup>.

Acknowledging this point to himself ("If names are as good as images, why bother to save images? Why save the light-images of these dead miners, why not just type out their names and display the list in a glass case?")<sup>40</sup>, Rayment is moved to reflect that if he does provide a photograph of himself to supplement his name it will be one from a period of his life prior to his bicycle accident.

Marijana's suggestion that photographs are "more living" than mere names is less instructive than her accompanying thought that photographic images are of a different order to words. What she means is that words and images have different

truth-values. Barthes notes that photographs do "not necessarily say *what is no longer*, but only and for certain *what has been*"<sup>41</sup>. A photograph is a "certificate of presence": "it cannot *say* what is lets us see"<sup>42</sup>. It is on account of this incapacity to "say" what they show, that photographs invite verbal captions. However, words cannot complement (complete) an image, but only supplement it. A verbal caption anchors an image but is not a substitute for it. As an example of this non-equivalent, supplementary relationship, it is worth considering the function of photographs in the novels of W.G. Sebald.

In the hybrid affairs that are Sebald's novels, uncaptioned photographs silently punctuate the prose. It is entirely to Sebald's purpose that the photographs in his novels are colourless and unreferenced. They are less illustrations than points of gravity about which the narrative eddies and flows. Alternatively one could think of them as slide-show stills connected by reams of prose written in the vein of reminiscence. They are placed at irregular intervals and variously sized. Banal and haunting, their net effect is to deepen the sepia tone of the prose. Suggestive of a muted history, the photographs in Sebald's novels are remarkable less for what they reveal than for the details - the names and histories of the figures they depict, the location and era in which the photographs were taken - that they conceal. For Sontag, "[t]o offer [photographic] evidence at all is to endow what has been described by words with a mysterious surplus of pathos. The photographs and other relics reproduced on the page [in Sebald's novel *Austerlitz*] become an exquisite index of the pastness of the past"<sup>43</sup>.

Sebald's typical narrator (who goes by the name 'Sebald') is a solitary individual, estranged from kin and kind. He sleeps in hotel beds and sees the incipience of the past in the scenes in the present he narrates. His wandering through cities and towns and landscapes occasions the meditations on art, architecture, and literature that constitute the body of Sebald's narratives. By making 'Sebald' the site at which the miscellaneous narrative elements (facts, impressions, digressions) gather, Sebald offers a portrait of an individual human consciousness struggling to clarify an image of itself against the murk of

collective European history. There are no photographs interleaved in *Slow Man* in the manner of Sebald's novels, but there is a characteristic Coetzean emphasis on the priority of being remembered in narrative. To remember, to *re-member*: disjoining the word in this way makes clearer the link between Rayment's desire to imprint his name in the Australian state record (i.e., to be remembered) and his efforts to reclaim autonomy as author of his own life (i.e., to re-member or reconstitute himself as an independent agent - as a body in the world as much as a character in narrative). In both instances he seeks to assert himself as a subject with the will to decide the terms of his existence in the face of circumstances beyond his choosing and a narrative (history, Costello's fiction) it is not in his power to write.

### **Original and Prosthesis**

Rayment's outrage at Drago's act of digitally superimposing his father's and sister's face onto the faces of two figures represented in one of Rayment's Fauchery photographs, stems from his sense that a pristine original has been corrupted or desecrated. His strong reaction is ironic on at least three levels. First, Rayment places an undue premium on his Faucherys' originality. He values the Faucherys because they are first-generation prints, but more tellingly because, as we have seen, for him they are relics of an obsolete mode of photographic reproduction that he imagines preserves the authenticity of the objects it represents. He prizes what he thinks of as the original photographs, the "ones touched by Fauchery's hand."<sup>44</sup> The special value he accords them is based on their status as artefacts bearing the traces of their history, specifically their contact with the photographer himself. He is inflamed by the thought of Drago's two acts, which in his mind mingle as one: Drago's misappropriation of the photographs themselves and his digital doctoring of their content.

The second level of irony lies in Rayment's interpretation of the act as a violation of his property, which, as Costello points out,<sup>45</sup> is an interpretation out of line with his view of himself as the temporary custodian of a collection of artefacts not rightly his own but public stock. The third and clinching irony is that Rayment's reaction betrays his earlier deeply felt wish (instanced in the extract above) to bond with Drago.

In reply to Rayment's demands for the return of the original Faucherys, Marijana insists that "images is [*sic*] free"<sup>46</sup>. By this statement she means to highlight the naivety of the idea that to take a photograph is to *steal an image* of something and to remind Rayment that Drago has displayed the 'stolen' or doctored images on his website, where they may be *freely* viewed by others. Marijana's point is that Drago's priorities and frame of reference are more modern and thus quite different from Rayment's. Rayment proves Marijana's intuition correct: he swats aside her suggestion that he placate himself by browsing Drago's website and renews his demand for the originals. Uninterested in computers, he values what he can hold in his own hands. Rayment's first impression that Drago's alteration of the Faucherys amounts to a forgery is reinforced by the homophonic middle vowel sounds of the words 'Fauchery' and 'forgery.' Costello later observes that Drago is not a forger nor the act a forgery since Drago evidently did not perpetrate it with a view to making money<sup>47</sup>. The name 'Jokić' invites an alternative interpretation of the act as a joke.

Drago's tampering with the Faucherys is foreshadowed by his sister Blanka's alleged theft of a silver chain from the store Happenstance. The charge against her is possibly ungrounded and the silver chain she steals is known to be fake. These details reinforce the link between this incident and her brother's act, and these in turn with Rayment's concerns about his prosthetic status as a character. A glance at Barthes shows how photographs reinforce this theme in Coetzee's novel.

Due to the slow shutter speeds of early cameras, human subjects had to stand still (stock-still) for a prolonged period. This procedure lent itself to portraiture, but, as Coetzee points out in his essay on de Beer's book, gave to scenes of activity a stiff, emblematic air<sup>48</sup>. Barthes explains how early photography imposed on its subjects an economy of posture that reduced a dynamic social reality to an uneasy still life.

Photography transformed subject into object, and even, one might say, into a museum object: in order to take the first portraits (around 1840) the subject had to assume long poses under a glass roof in bright sunlight; to become an object made one suffer as much as a surgical operation; then a device was invented, a kind of prosthesis invisible to the lens, which supported and maintained the body in its passage to immobility: this headrest was the pedestal of the statue I would become, the corset of my imaginary essence<sup>49</sup>.

The terms that rivet Barthes's account here - subject and object, surgical operation, prosthesis - have an immediate pertinence to *Slow Man*, for they highlight Rayment's concerns about agency and mobility as a person subject to the buffets of history and a character-pawn in another's narrative. His bicycle accident belongs with his first emigration with his mother to Australia as an event in which he had no choice. His conversations with Costello, on the other hand, remind him that his limited freedom of movement as an amputee is analogous to his circumscribed agency as a character in a novel.

The events hingeing on Drago's forgery-joke illustrate a few key points about Rayment, which are among the novel's major concerns. First, it points up his preoccupation with authenticity. This stems primarily from Costello's presence in his life, who causes him to doubt that his agency is his own and that his life has a nonfictional actuality. His arguments with Costello and Marijana about the equal or rival status of copies and originals in the realm of photography elaborate directly though in different terms his abiding concern about his status as a fictional character. His suspicion that he is a character-pawn in a narrative dictated by her informs his reluctance to accept that he has been permanently severed from the life and body he had prior to his accident and that his new condition as an amputee calls for compromises on his part: in particular, admitting that he is no longer fully in control of his life, but must rely on professional carers' help and a walking aid. Further, as Dominic Head notes, the forgery-joke reveals that Rayment's egotistical desire to be identified as author of his Fauchery collection is at odds with his ostensible aim of making them public

property and his 'idealistic and reverent notion of a shared history of migrancy' (a history shared with Drago and the immigrants in his photographs by Fauchery).<sup>50</sup>

### **Elizabeth Costello**

Rayment's disputes with Costello gravitate around the question of who between author and character possesses greater agency in respect of the other. Coetzee's Nobel Lecture "He and His Man" (2003) suggests that if there is intimacy between these two entities, each has independence too. In *Slow Man* Coetzee demonstrates the same point, albeit in a more heavy-handed way, by embedding Costello as a character in the narrative she is supposedly in the process of writing. Because she slips the moorings that fix her as protagonist in her native text of *Elizabeth Costello* (2003) she too can be viewed as an emigrant of sorts, a transtextual author-figure. It is important to note that the similarity of 'Costello' and 'Coetzee' underlines her status not simply as what Foucault calls the "author-function,"<sup>51</sup> but an author-figure modeled on Coetzee.

In *Slow Man* the author-impresario Coetzee casts a long shadow in the character of Costello; but there are finer traces of this author's presence in the names of some of his characters. The initials of Coetzee's first two names - 'J.M.' - are present in 'Marijana' and reversed in the initials of her and her husband's first name and surname (Marijana Jokić, Miroslav Jokić). Elizabeth Costello is a character cast from the same initials and life-stage as the protagonist of *Age of Iron*. In *Slow Man* there is a further resonance between the name of Rayment's physiotherapist, Madeleine Martin, and the name of Eugene Dawn's wife and son, Marilyn and Martin, in *Dusklands*. That this resonance is deliberate becomes clear in *Summertime* when these and other names from Coetzee's earlier novels are recycled. What is the effect and significance of these intratextual links and echoes? What purpose do they serve?

Coetzee's habit of leaving authorial fingerprints in his fictions by way of parts or allotropes of his name - 'Coetzee', 'John', 'J.M.', 'M.J.', 'JC', 'Costello' - in the first place has the effect of reminding the reader of the wovenness of his texts and the individual who has done the weaving.<sup>52</sup> These fragments of the author's name



also function as false coin that both invites and sabotages a simple autobiographical reading of the work by actively dissolving the imagined boundary between the author and the book. Coetzee's name-fragments function less as signature than imprimatur or watermark - a questionable authentication. It is the nature of print culture to make of the printed book a commodity and the author's name a brand or trademark. In this way the name becomes shorthand for the work: thus we speak of reading Coetzee, doing a course in Coetzee. Planted in the fiction, the author's name functions in the manner of a caption to a photograph: to frame or anchor the representation but not to define or exhaust it. By leaving trace of his own name in the fictions, by recycling certain of his characters' names, and by exporting Costello wholesale from one book to another, Coetzee thoroughly textualises the idea of the author 'Coetzee' and implies that the fictions are less discrete entities than interwoven parts of a larger text that we habitually summon with the name 'Coetzee'. By setting up a conversation among his fictions Coetzee in some measure counteracts the inevitable critical impulse to search out parallels between the writer's life and work and, in the form of literary biography, stage-manage a dialogue between the two.

### **Being at Home in Language**

In comparison to Marijana, Rayment appears to be entirely naturalised in the English language and in Australia, his command of idiom sure. Rayment recalls that he was six when he left France for Australia with his mother and stepfather; after university he returned to France for an unspecified period, before returning to Australia permanently. In interactions with extended family in France he recalls feeling the "odd one out," the "stranger in the corner;" to them he was "*l'Anglais*"<sup>53</sup>. He thinks of himself as a terminal foreigner - both by nature and force of circumstance. The implications of his multiple emigrations for the way he uses language are interesting. His exposure as a child to French language and culture seems to have left very little trace on his thought and speech. Occasionally a French word or phrase turns up in his thoughts or conversation, but these are either phrases assimilated to English, such as *joie de vivre*<sup>54</sup>, or rather woodenly-supplied equivalents of an English expression: "a seahorse,

*cheval marin*," "a heart case, *un cardiaque*."<sup>55</sup> The oddest interpolation of French occurs early in the novel when Rayment dubs his leg *le jambon*, a term he feels keeps it "at a nice, contemptuous distance"<sup>56</sup>. His distaste for what his leg has become is understandable, but is it plausible that Rayment should draw on his native language to alienate his leg from himself given that there is no evidence to suggest he has or had a vexed relationship with France and the French? He reminds Costello that his three relocations imprinted "the immigrant experience" on him "quite deeply"<sup>57</sup>. To understand why French should be to Rayment the language that best signifies estrangement or why English should not rival French in this capacity, it is necessary to appreciate more closely Rayment's and Costello's views on what it means to be a native speaker of a language.

Rayment is too "diffident" to pronounce the word "care" to Marijana because he believes it to be "[t]oo much an English word, an insider's word"<sup>58</sup>. However, he is prepared *to write it* in a letter to her. Costello observes that English is not Rayment's "true language"<sup>59</sup>. She bases this judgement on her sense that he meticulously and self-consciously selects his words each time he speaks, rather than speaking spontaneously "from the heart"<sup>60</sup>.

I would even say that English is a disguise for you, or a mask, part of your tortoiseshell armour. As you speak I swear I can hear words being selected, one after the other, from the word-box you carry around with you, and slotted into place. That is not how a true native speaks, one who is born into the language<sup>61</sup>.

In Costello's view, a native speaker is someone whose speech has an unreserved, fulsome quality, like song: "Words well up within and he sings them, sings along with them"<sup>62</sup>. She tenders an image here of a native speaker who absorbs language with their mother's milk (Rayment's phrase),<sup>63</sup> someone in whom that language comes to pulse like blood, according to an involuntary rhythm. In her estimation, Rayment (like Coetzee's other overliterary characters, Eugene Dawn and Magda)<sup>64</sup> "speaks like a book"<sup>65</sup>.

There is more going on here than simply an evaluation of Rayment's aptitude as a speaker of English. As an emigrant, his experience of being foreign to a place and culture does not cover his sense of being *fundamentally* foreign to language. He phrases this latter conviction in terms that instantly recall Costello's description of herself in "At the Gate" as a "secretary of the invisible"<sup>66</sup>:  
"Privately I have always felt myself to be a kind of ventriloquist's dummy. It is not I who speak the language, it is the language that is spoken through me. It does not come from my core, *mon coeur*.' He hesitates, checks himself. *I am hollow at the core.*"<sup>67</sup>

We can safely say that Rayment's sense of inauthenticity as a speaker of language ("a kind of ventriloquist's dummy") is linked to the inauthenticity he feels as a character directed by Costello's hand: although Costello seems to be ignorant of details of Rayment's biography (for instance, that he returned to France)<sup>68</sup> and in horizontal conversation with her character, she remains his nominal author. The noteworthy detail here is that the idea of being "a kind of ventriloquist's dummy" is as relevant to Costello's conception of herself as a writer in *Elizabeth Costello* as it is to Rayment's understanding of himself as a character. That Rayment and Costello are interdependent entities or voices in this novel is clear enough. The point I want to emphasise is that Rayment's and Costello's shared attitude to language in *Slow Man* opens a dialogue between Rayment's experience as an emigrant and Costello's conception of the experience of writing.

The various textual traces in *Slow Man* invoking Coetzee-the-author and elements of his other fictions underline Coetzee's priority in this novel of setting the story of Rayment's accident and emigration within the larger frame of Coetzee's emigration to Australia. In spatial terms, *Slow Man* describes a contraction of horizons: crippled, Rayment is restricted to his flat; inhabiting what he calls a "zone of humiliation,"<sup>69</sup> he dwells in his flat and is chary of ventures into the outside world. In seeking to link his life to Marijana's and her children's by investing in their futures and observing them living out that

investment, he resembles Costello who seeks to *see out* a speculative investment in her character Rayment. Costello is to Rayment as Rayment is to Drago and Blanka: an interested sponsor. The textual details that situate *Slow Man* within the larger frame of Coetzee's biography range from the transtextual migration of Costello through the intratextuality of particular characters' names to consistencies between Rayment and Coetzee: a 'Dutchman' father, estrangement from a 'native' tongue (French in Rayment's case, Afrikaans in Coetzee's), a cold personality (replicated in the John of *Youth* and *Summertime*), and, above all, a sense of being irremediably foreign. Evidence in support of this last point can be found in "Retrospect" in *Doubling the Point*,<sup>70</sup> where Coetzee enlarges on his experience as a child, adolescent, and young man of feeling alien in various environments. Conditioned by his temperament as a bookish, introspective individual, it is a feeling Coetzee traces to his childhood sense of culpability for speaking English at home and attending English-medium classes in rural Worcester at a time of rampant Afrikaner nationalism. The feeling stays with him as a Protestant attending a Catholic high school in Cape Town and as a student becomes consolidated as he shies from the political right and skirts the left. The feeling reasserts itself during the period he spends in Britain and the United States in the 1960s, where he recalls feeling not homesick, "merely" alien.

Notably, Rayment hesitates to use the word 'home,' preferring to refer to his "domicile" or "residence" - the physical site of his location, free of connotation: "This flat. This city. This country. Home is too mystical for me"<sup>71</sup>. For Costello, on the other hand, the word has that deeper reach Rayment prefers to avoid. Whereas he is a stranger among his own kind ("I am not the *we* of anyone," he remarks)<sup>72</sup>, she confides that she is most at home when she identifies with her character, Rayment, in writing: "When I am with you I am at home; when I am not with you I am homeless"<sup>73</sup>. For Costello, identifying through writing with a character who is a multiple emigrant and foreigner is to be at home. It is on these grounds that it is possible to see the respective attitudes of Rayment the emigrant

and Costello the writer towards language and modes of belonging interfuse in the writing of the multiple emigrant Coetzee.

## Notes

- 1 The other fictions are *Elizabeth Costello*, *Diary of a Bad Year*, and *Summertime*.
- 2 This paper forms part of a chapter of my doctoral thesis on Coetzee's late fiction (which I take to range from *Youth* (2002) to *Summertime* (2009)). The thesis is still in progress.
- 3 J.M. Coetzee, *Slow Man* (London: Secker and Warburg, 2005), p. 26
- 4 *Ibid.*, p.1
- 5 *Ibid.*, p.6
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 50
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 27
- 8 J.M. Coetzee, *In the Heart of the Country* (London: Vintage, 2004), p. 43
- 9 J.M. Coetzee, *Age of Iron* (New York: Penguin, 1998), pp. 194-5
- 10 *Ibid.*, p.193
- 11 *Slow Man*, p.193
- 12 W. Benjamin, 21. M.W. Jennings, B. Doherty, and T. Y. Levin, eds., *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings*. Trans. Edmund Jephcott, et al., (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 19-55
- 13 *Ibid.*, p.21
- 14 *Ibid.*, p.21
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 Benjamin suggests that the camera has the power of evoking what he calls "the optical unconscious," by which he means a deep structural choreography of objects invisible to the naked human eye. *Ibid.*, 37
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 21-22
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 22
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 23
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 43, fn. 5
- 21 *Slow Man*, p. 65
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 48
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 49
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 J.M. Coetzee, *Diary of a Bad Year* (London: Harvill Secker, 2007), p. 111
- 27 J.M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (New York: Penguin, 1980), pp. 16-17
- 28 J.M. Coetzee, *Summertime* (London: Harvill Secker, 2009), p. 7, p. 104
- 29 *Slow Man*, p. 52
- 30 J.M. Coetzee, *Photographs of South Africa, Stranger Shores: Essays 1986-1999* (London: Vintage, 2002, pp. 344-350), p. 348
- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 349
- 33 S. Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978), p. 7
- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 *Ibid.*
- 36 This phrase comes from Coetzee's preface to his book on censorship, *Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship*. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996). The book's 12 essays document Coetzee's attempt "to understand a passion with which I have no intuitive sympathy, the passion that plays itself out in acts of silencing and censoring. They also constitute an attempt to understand, historically and sociologically, why it is that I have no sympathy with that passion." (vii)
- 37 *Slow Man*, p. 177
- 38 *Ibid.* Emphasis in the original
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 50

- 
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (London: Vintage Books, 2000), trans. Richard Howard, p. 85. Emphasis in the original
- 42 Ibid., p. 85, 87. Emphasis in the original
- 43 Sontag, "A Mind in Mourning: W.G. Sebald's travels in search of some remnant of the past" (*Times Literary Supplement*, 5056, 25 Feb. 2000: 3-4), p.4
- 44 *Slow Man*, p. 205
- 45 Ibid., p. 220
- 46 Ibid., p. 249
- 47 Ibid., p. 259
- 48 J.M. Coetzee, 2002, p. 345
- 49 R. Barthes, 2000, p. 13
- 50 D. Head, *The Cambridge Introduction to J.M. Coetzee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 87
- 51 M. Foucault, p. 1628. "What is an Author?" in *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Co., 2001) (Ed) Vincent B. Leitch, et al., p. 1622-36
- 52 The word 'text' comes from the medieval Latin word *texere*, which means 'to weave.'
- 53 *Slow Man*, p. 196.
- 54 Ibid., p. 41.
- 55 Ibid., p. 120, 165.
- 56 Ibid., p. 29.
- 57 Ibid., p. 192.
- 58 Ibid., p. 165.
- 59 Ibid., p. 230.
- 60 Ibid
- 61 Ibid., p. 230-1
- 62 Ibid., p. 230
- 63 Ibid., p. 197
- 64 E. Dawn: "I was a bookish child. I grew out of books." (*Dusklands*, p. 30). Magda: "My learning has the reek of print, not the resonance of the full human voice telling its stories." (In *The Heart of the Country*, p. 51)
- 65 *Slow Man*, p. 231
- 66 Elizabeth Costello: *Eight Lessons* (London: Vintage, 2004), p. 199
- 67 *Slow Man*, p. 196-7
- 68 Ibid., p. 192
- 69 Ibid., p. 61
- 70 J.M. Coetzee, *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1992) (Ed) David Attwell, p. 391-5
- 71 *Slow Man*, p. 196
- 72 Ibid., p. 193
- 73 Ibid., p. 159