



A Self-Portrait Of Coetzee In *Summer Time*

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ABSTRACT

Today, like Selfie, since mid-fifteenth century, many portrayed their own images by drawing, painting, printing, sculpted and photographed. Even in literature, self-portrayal occupied its place, from 17th century. However, the main purpose of self-portrait, be it any form was to either to depict themselves as the main subject or to reveal out their innate feelings or to convey their perception or to reveal their identity, to others. In such a way, J.M.Coetzee reveals out his own life sketches by portraying himself as a dead man in *Summer Time*. The novelist sees himself through five major characters- a lover, a cousin, a dancer, a friend and a colleague. So the main purpose of this conceptual paper is to bring out how *Summer Time* reveals out the self-portrait of Coetzee.

Key Words:

Self-portrait, recollection, interview

Today, self-portraits, acts as an important tool to recollect the vibrant moment in one's life to share with others. Self-portraits not only capture the moments of one's lives but also it helps to review their own view about themselves. In this way, J.M.Coetzee's memoir, *Summer Time*, reveals out the novelists personal life of pictures and he acts as a strong critic of analyzing himself. This could be clearly justified as, "Coetzee wrote them himself. They are memos to himself written in 1999 or 2000, when he was thinking of adapting those particular entries for a book". (ST 20)

J.M.Coetzee has published his first auto-biographical work in 1997, titled *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life*. In sequel, titled *Youth* was published five years later and



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following this came *Summer Time*, in 2009. In all these three works, Coetzee has revealed about himself, with the mixture of fact and fiction and made the reader to see him in different perception.

Summer Time revolves around a young English biographer Mr. Vincent who underwent a research on South African writer J.M.Coetzee's life in his thirties. Through him, the readers get to know various facts about the novelist, yet he traces out many more facts by interviewing five close and familiar friends to get more details of Coetzee. In fact the five people, Julia, a married women, whom Coetzee had an affair, next his cousin Margot, third is Adriana, a widowed Brazilian dancer with whom Coetzee's daughter studied English lessons and fourth a friend Martin and last a colleague. Through the eyes of these main characters, the reader gets to know various fascinating insights into his character.

The novel opens up in 1972, with Coetzee's ailing father who was reading a journal gets frustrated about a news where few people were shot dead and flips his page to the sports news. As the story goes, reader gets to know through his father, that Coetzee's family were living in a ram shackle cottage near Cape Town and also comes to know the father-son relationship.

Mr. Vincent who interviewed with the five people over eight month, in Canada, South Africa, Brazil, England and Paris was astonished to know Coetzee as a writer. However, the first person to interview was Coetzee's lover. Dr.Julia Ki Frankl, from Ontario. Dr.Julia who was a married psychotherapist women, gives a dull picture and bad time that she spent with Coetzee. She narrates by recalling that she met him in various places such as a book keeper, in a super market and has exchanged their love and as well had love making. But the love making was pleasure less and he was impotent. This picture creates a strong confusion amongst the readers because, Coetzee in reality is married and blessed with two children. Yet Coetzee had portrayed in the novel as an unmarried and a man leading a conjugal life.

The second to be interviewed was his cousin Margot. Through her, readers get to know more details. One fine day, Coetzee has invited Margot for a ride and had a talk about 'koup' which means dry place. He further spoke about the "the Hottentot" language, who



speak with a dead people. This created a wonder at him and he further told her that he had a desire to buy a house and some land in a small village, at Merweville. At the same time, when Margot and Coetzee went back to their home, family members enquired about their whereabouts. Margot took this as a chance and in turn enquired Coetzee's father about his plan to buy a house. But it was a great disappointment for Margot when she came to know the fact that, Coetzee led his life with his father's money and is planning to abandon his father.

At one stage Coetzee left South Africa to escape from the clutches of the Army and planned to settle in America. But there he did not follow the law and could not locate any job, so he was not able to get citizenship, which forced him back to South Africa. Margot further stated that Coetzee was introvert, similes less, ridiculous, incompetent, opinionated, heatless and sexless. He was quite different from others in both boyhood and adulthood. Margot also recollects how she used to write letter to him to get her marry and also she would insists him to become a writer and earn more money by becoming a best seller. For it, Coetzee replies in humbleness, that he do not know to write and the fate would determines the rest. Finally Margot winds up the interview by telling Vincent that his mother was hospitalized with a cardiac problem and questions Vincent why he is writing so much about her, instead of writing about Coetzee.

The next person Mr. Vincent interviewed was Adriana, a Brazilian widowed dancer. Adriana and her family shifted from Angola to Cape Town, as they felt Cape would be the safest place for them to lead their life. But unfortunately fate has played in the life of Adriana, as she loses her husband who was murdered when he was working as a security guard. Gaining confidence and a spirit, plans to bring her daughter well. She puts in a school, to learn English properly, but when her daughter talks so praise of her English teacher, Adriana gets curious to know who and what sort of the man is, the English teacher . So Adriana invites Coetzee to her flat, to have a cup of tea. But when she met him at first, was not much impressed and advised him not to teach English as he was not an English man, who cannot teach proper English accent and make her daughter to speak English properly.



Coetzee was worried of her remark and tried to make her understand the role of a teacher and the learner. But Adriana wasn't happy with him and so she writes a letter insisting him not to play with the emotions of her daughter. In return letter, Coetzee has surprised her by inviting her family to a picnic in Fiasco and also invited them to his home for a cup of tea. Finally they agreed to go for the picnic. After few days Adriana receives another letter from Coetzee, who have assured that he would not betray the trust she has put on him as far as her daughter is concerned and insisted her to meet him once. By this time when Mr. Vincent asks for the letter, she gets annoyed and questions him as. "...you tell me you are writing biography of a man who happened many years ago to be my daughter's English Teacher and now suddenly you feel, you are permitted to interrogate me about my 'relation'? What kind of biography are you writing? It is like Hollywood gossip, like secrets of the rich and famous". (ST 170)

Mr. Vincent questions Adriana in a complicated way whether Coetzee is a homosexual. This shows how typical interviewer Mr. Vincent is and through his hard hitting questions get stuff facts from people whom he is interviewing with. To reply Vincent, Adriana states, he was a lonely man not fit for conjugal life. She further recalled how he often talks about Schubert, the Musician. She further reported that she respected the friendship of Coetzee as he was a facilitator and protector for Adriana and her daughter. She also recounts and says the romantic affair both had. Finally she closes the interview by stating that at one stage, she has requested principal to remove her daughter from Coetzee's classes and found another teacher for her daughter. From then, she had a blurring relationship with Coetzee. However she remarked and respected him as a great writer and a great human being.

The next interview was with Martin, who was Coetzee's colleague. Both Martin and Coetzee left South Africa as they considered it as temporary residents. When Vincent questions Martin, he says, Coetzee always maintained secret and also even in his teaching he extended the same. Mr. Vincent then interviewed another colleague of Coetzee, M'M Denoel. Both she and Coetzee have offered a course in African literature and found that he was clever, cold, supercilious, knowledge and in short admirable as well.



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Finally Martin questions Vincent, as how he chooses the people, he interviews and he replies that it is from the hints provided by Coetzee himself in his notes. When Vincent was questioned as, why he depends more on interviews than his notes and diary entries, Vincent replies as, "I have been through the letters and diaries. What Coetzee writes there cannot be trusted, not as a factual record ... because he was a fictioneer ... As documents they are valuable, of course; but if you want the truth you have to go behind the fictions they elaborate and hear from people who knew him directly, in the flesh" (ST 225).

Thus the interview ends through the various people and gives the readers different portrait of Coetzee. The novelist have adopted a unique style of narration for he imagines himself to be dead and he has a biographer writing about him and the picture he gives about himself is quite critical.

To wind up, many critics and readers traced out many differences between J.M.Coetzee and the subject in the novel. As there is a thin dividing line between truth and fiction, some critics and readers, considered *Summer Time* as a semi-auto biographical novel. However, in short, Coetzee has skillfully portrayed this novel that was short listed for the Booker prize in 2009. Irrespective of certain controversies, success did not come his way, yet *Summer Time* was a strong and matured novel where Coetzee has woven the story in a unique style and portrayed himself very frankly.

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