

Inward Changes in Coetzee's *Diary of a Bad Year*

Mudanças interiores na Obra Diário de um Ano Ruim de Coetzee

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Abstract: This article analyzes J.M. Coetzee's novel *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007), focusing on how its unique typographical structure mirrors the ethical and internal transformations of its protagonists, Señor C and Anya. The novel is famously divided into three horizontal sections: the "Strong Opinions" of an aging writer (Señor C), his personal reflections on his typist (Anya), and Anya's own perspective on their relationship. The analysis explores the juxtaposition of political and philosophical critiques with the micro-social interactions of daily life. Initially presented as a contrast between a cynical intellectual and a seemingly superficial young woman, the narrative evolves through a device of character deepening. The study concludes that the novel's dialogic harmony demonstrates how aesthetic and ethical choices are inextricably linked, ultimately leading to a profound inner change and moral awakening for both characters.

Key-words: J.M. Coetzee, *Diary of a Bad Year*, Metafiction, Political Ethics, Character Evolution, Literary Structure.

Resumo: Este artigo analisa o romance Diário de um Ano Ruim (2007), de J.M. Coetzee, com foco em como sua estrutura tipográfica singular reflete as transformações éticas e internas de seus protagonistas, o Sr. C e Anya. O romance é notoriamente dividido em três seções horizontais: as "Opiniões Fortes" de um escritor idoso (Sr. C), suas reflexões pessoais sobre sua datilógrafa (Anya) e a perspectiva de Anya sobre o relacionamento deles. A análise explora a justaposição de críticas políticas e filosóficas com as interações microsociais da vida cotidiana. Inicialmente apresentada como um contraste entre um intelectual cínico e uma jovem aparentemente superficial, a narrativa evolui por meio de um recurso de aprofundamento dos personagens. O estudo conclui que a harmonia dialógica do romance demonstra como as escolhas estéticas e éticas estão inextricavelmente ligadas, levando, em última análise, a uma profunda mudança interior e a um despertar moral para ambos os personagens.

Palavras-chave: J.M. Coetzee, Diário de um Ano Ruim, Metaficção, Ética Política, Evolução da Personagem, Estrutura Literária.

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Introduction

Diary of a Bad Year (2007), written by J. M. Coetzee, awarded for the Nobel Prize for Literature, is a renewal novel of the early 21st century. In general, Coetzee's work is renewing, an oeuvre that recovers themes and motives of the greatest writers of the 20th century, intertwined with well-tuned philosophical, logical, and mathematical thoughts. Coetzee's work is quite concerned with main motives, themes and artistry already developed by Musil, Kafka, Beckett, Tolstoy, and Dostoyevsky. He seeks in his work, as well as in **Diary of a Bad Year**, for ethical and aesthetical issues determining in his novels. In **Diary of a Bad Year** Anya's ethical choice and Señor C's choice to live a better life and to soften his opinions are the core themes of the novel, besides other daily events narrated by him and Anya.

Diary of a Bad Year is a novel which reshapes the formality of the novel in our century. Although other authors had already worked on that form, Coetzee's novel refreshes the novelist genre as a whole. It is a sort of diary which presents Señor C's opinions for a book which will be published in Berlin, intertwined with his experience with Anya, as well as Anya's story and view on Señor C. In his opinions, there are both the *Strong Opinions* and the *Second Diary*, a soft set of ideas, which in a whole looks like more of Adorno's **Minima Moralia**. It presents ideas and issues from our everyday life which could come from a newspaper or something like that. Moreover, the way Coetzee presents it is showing all levels and sides of the same problem, without forgetting the pros and cons, yet always assuring his own critical view on the facts he analyses.

The pages of the novel are divided into three stripes, which are typographically distributed on the page. There is an upper part, a middle part and a lowest one. The reader can choose whether he prefers to read the whole page or just one of the plots presented in each stripe. The upper part presents the opinions written by Señor C, who is supposedly John Maxwell Coetzee himself. We must notice that Señor C's ideas represent in a fictional dimension Coetzee's opinions on the issues discussed and criticised in the novel. Thus, Señor C seems to be a character that represents in many ways Coetzee's both autobiographic and political concerns in his novel.

The middle part presents Señor C's opinions, impressions and life experience with Anya, his hired typist. The lowest part, which comes into the novel just on page 25, presents Anya's relationship with both Señor C and her boyfriend Alan, as well as her impressions and opinions on Señor C's writing. The three parts seem to work separately, yet they are closely intermingled. They work as a sort of musical partitura which establishes a dialogic

harmony between the parts. For instance, things written by Señor C are going to be rephrased, commented, and criticised by both Anya and Alan during the novel. As Anya types Señor C's opinions and discusses them with him, her own opinions will contribute and even change Señor C's opinions and inner-self, in a way that at the end of the novel, what seemed to be just a little spoiled empty-headed girl will turn out to be a great revelation, a sort of pure and angelic Beatrice from Dante's *Vita Nuova* and *Divine Comedy*.

Views on Political Thought and Society in *Diary of a Bad Year*

Diary of a Bad Year presents in the upper part of the page Señor C's opinions he is writing for a book to be published in Germany. These opinions present daily facts quite important that they reveal our everyday attitudes. Señor C writes about State, Democracy, Politics, Terrorism, paedophilia, and so forth. His first chapter starts with a discussion on the origins of the state, as was proposed by Hobbes. Señor C sees the origins of the State as an irreversible handing off the right of people's governing to an authority. Hobbesian origins of the State is reviewed by Señor C in the Kurosawan theory of the origins of the state, i. e., people attributed their power to a gang of raiders and thieves who promised to protect them; this people, as a compensatory praise, would propose to pay taxes to the Samurais once a year.

Ironically, Señor C considers that the State's affairs do not consist much more than being sure that the subject is alive or dead, not caring whether he lives an honoured and dignified life. Besides that, the one who takes arms against the State is particularly treated as an outlaw, whereas a foreign enemy of the State should be treated with more honour than the outlaw. Coetzee introduces a very delicate and polemic issue in the very beginning of the novel, in order to show the tone of the discussions which are going to be presented later on. He sees politics, democracy, and the State's affairs rather in an ironic and pessimistic way. Though Democracy is said to be the highest development in our modern world, Coetzee sees it just as the act of 'anointing a man'. It does not mean that the most voted man will be able to rule the country very well. Democracy nowadays seems much more a toss of coin, through which the people attributes the power to A or B (*vox populi vox dei*). In that sense, Santos (20016) states that Coetzee's narrator is sort of

The voice that guides the reader through the work is at the center of the interactions. In this way, the analyses become more delicate since they must start from the actions and not from the impressions of the protagonist narrator. Once again, Coetzee provokes

criticism in the reader, instigating his distrust or at least his pondering of the judgments and impressions [of the characters]. (2016, p. 45)

What Señor C seems constantly to suggest and point out is that politics and democracy are closely connected with anarchism, which is the issue of the second chapter of the novel. He highlights the supposed good and benevolent results of democracy side by side with the damaging and harming results of anarchism and terrorism *within* democracy, yet concealed to our eyes. For example, at the same time as he analyses Al Qaida, he discusses Guantanamo Bay, suggesting that terrorism is not only present in terrorist acts done by Al Qaida, but also by the American Government that uses torture and illegal prison in Guantanamo Bay. Another example is when he discusses the role of the universities, and issues such as shame and curse. This juxtaposition slightly suggests that they are closely intertwined and have concealed interrelations. It is not just a simple coincidence that he juxtaposes things one after the other; Señor C build a portrait of what our modern democracy looks liked: a mixed up of cynicism, hypocrisy and the seemingly state which is said to defend Human Rights. According to Santos (2016),

Coetzee's choice for this type of narrator mirrors his positioning in relation to the society he so critically portrays in his works. [...] the narrator in Coetzee does not position himself as the owner of the absolute truth in relation to the themes he raises in his works. Rather, he presents them in such a way as to provoke critics in their readers, seeking to ignite their dormant capacity to become indignant at outdated values that clutter a more pluralistic and inclusive (South African post-Apartheid) society. (2016, p.44)

Señor C's pessimistic way of facing democracy and politics is echoed later on in Anya's voice when she reveals what she thinks on politics:

Alan votes Howard. As for me, I thought I wouldn't, in the 2004 election, but then at the last minute I did. Better the devil you know than the devil you don't, I said to myself. They tell you you have three years to make up your mind, from one election to the next, but that isn't true. You always wait till the last second to make up your mind. (COETZEE, 2007, p. 41)

Anya's voice seems to echo what people – I mean the mob – think on politics nowadays. People are not very concerned about whom they vote, but they just think that they might be choosing the right person. Anya's speech also echoed something veiled in people's attitudes towards politics, an attitude Señor C has analysed some pages before: people think in a dichotomist way, i. e., one chooses whether the right or the left party, an attitude that reveals that someone may be for or against one politician or, in deepest and

pessimistic level, servitude. What Coetzee suggests when discusses La Boétie's idea on servitude is that we have a third way: *quietism, willed obscurity* and *inner emigration*:

The alternatives are not placid servitude on the one hand and revolt against servitude on the other. There is a third way, chosen by thousands and millions of people every day. It is the way of quietism, of willed obscurity, of inner emigration. (COETZEE, 2007, p. 12)

By discussing La Boétie's opinions on people's reactions towards servitude, Señor C shows a third way people are used to choose and never mind to do it. People just accept what politicians have done in many domains, never considering whether they choose an ethical way or the most perverse and obscure one. Coetzee enhances this fact by presenting in his novel a seemingly dumb and empty-headed young woman whose reaction, at the end of the novel, is quite surprising: she is the one who will make an ethical choice, surprising everyone, including Señor C.

When Señor C discusses terrorism, he uses the word *hysterical* to describe what have been the attitudes of politicians and government to face this problem. Yet, he reveals in the chapter on Al Qaida that this terrorist group is completely destroyed and the government of USA and Britain use it as a means to spread out terror and thus they can have a good excuse for making a war. If Western government used to play a rational game with the Russians beforehand, nowadays they seem to face an enemy whose power is said to be diminished, although terrorists' courage and audacity is quite astonishing and feared. The reason why they fear the terrorists so much is that their enemy has nothing to lose, after having lost his family, friends and neighbours in the Iraq war. Nevertheless, if on the one hand the Western governments condemn terrorists, it is quite strange and even astonishing to imagine that Bush government have created Guantanamo which uses similar atrocities to terrorist attacks and attitudes. Also, the raiding practice in South Africa is nothing different from the practices done by Western in the native lands of Africa, South America, India, and Australia. As we can see, this juxtaposition of democracy and terrorism that they are very connected. Coetzee creates this artistic device of putting side by side the affairs of the state, democracy and terrorist affairs in order to enhance the sinister, gloomy and ambiguous attitudes in politics nowadays. According to Santos (2016)

There are no ready answers when talking about Coetzee, there is no room for the idealization of a community, whatever it may be. His writing is direct, but without losing the mastery in exposing what is intended to cover up and at the same time drown, without losing either subtlety or ambiguity. (2016, p. 48)

Thus, Coetzee's view on society is quiet realist and it is never idealized. He never projects social utopias in his works, creating ambiguities and subtleness, a thought-provoking device to make the readers ponder about their own lives. In the **Diary of a Bad Year**, The limits of what terrorism and what democracy is, or what 'spreading democracy' is, are not well defined and perceived nowadays. What Coetzee suggests at this point is that both sides are in a war whose attitudes are quite irrational.

The way he seems to sum up the problem could remind the reader of Sophocles' hymn in *Antigone* on men and his wonders. After going to hear a performance of the Sibelius fifth symphony, Señor C reveals:

One would have felt proud, proud that *one of us* could put together such sounds, proud that out of nothing we human beings can make such stuff. Contrast with that one's feelings of shame that *we, our people*, have made Guantanamo. Musical creation on the one hand, a machine for inflicting pain and humiliation on the other: the best and the worst that human beings are capable of. (COETZEE, 2007, p. 45)

Human beings are seen here, like in Sophocles hymn, as wonderful and feared, bringing inside them good feelings, making good acts, whereas they inflict pain, fear, and produce destruction. In Sophocles' hymn, men create their own way, but they also have no way; they plough the land and plant their own grains, whereas they find no way of escaping death; they can create things, whereas they can destroy them. They dominate beasts for their own use, whereas some of their reactions are beast-like. In the same way, modern men can create wonders in science, philosophy and arts, whereas they can rationally produce mechanisms to inflict pain and cause massive death.

Coetzee continues discussing many different subjects such as what Universities have become. In his opinion, they have turned out to be just institutions which are supposed to produce, like an industry, a series of academic essays and books, expelling diplomas every year without having the power to produce scientific knowledge as an activity *per se* any longer. Their independence and self-governing autonomy seemed to be wiped off from the face of the earth. They are just used as a means to prove and show that the democratic state creates a public and free space to discuss ideas, criticise and study society, government, politics, and democracy: even democracy. Nevertheless, their social impact and importance were reduced to economic and financial means. It is never considered whether they are important to the development of social, cultural and humanistic thought and thus making deep changes in human like and social organization.

Coetzee discusses many other issues such as paedophilia, body, the slaughter of the animals, curse, shame, honour, dishonour, competition, the importance of arts in society, and many other subjects. They are all discussed in a rather realistic, pessimistic and sometimes ironic way. Nonetheless, in the second diary, Señor C seems to change his concerns towards different subjects such as birds, dream, autobiography, classic authors, and many other *softer* issues, which will not be possible to be discussed here. They are the result of a good and benevolent influence experienced by Señor C in the novel: Anya's influence which changes Señor C's opinions and thoughts.

Anya's and Señor C's Inner Changes

In the very beginning of the novel **Diary of a Bad Year** Señor C meets Anya whose presence is quite astonishing. He feels like being attracted by a sort of apparition, angelical and 'startling' one. As he affirms in the novel, 'startling because the last thing I was expecting was such an apparition' (COETZEE, 2007, p. 03). Physically Anya looks like a Filipina, black hair, 'shapely bones', showing off her back to him. (2007, p. 06). She is this sort of angelic figure, as he notes in the first place (2007, p. 8), even though she just seems it physically. Coetzee presents in the very beginning of the novel this sort of eroticised woman who loves walking around, going out shopping, putting on her make-up to bewitch all the men around her. She seems to be a sort of Madonna, a modern Millie whose appearance is deeply stuck together with her adornment, which works as a simulacrum of her own identity. Her appearance might remind the reader Helen from Troy whose beauty was admired, adored, and envied by all men.

However, as he gets acquainted with Anya, he discovers she is not exactly the sort of angelic figure he thought in the first place, who seemingly promised to have 'an intuitive feeling' (COETZEE, 2007, p. 19). She seems to be not exactly this 'startling' woman as he thought of. (2007, p. 25). What he expected from her was an 'intuitive feeling' (2007, p. 19) in order to type his opinions and help him with them. She seems not to have this intuitive feeling, not to understand what he is doing, and not to cope with him. She mistypes his writings, changing words such as Kyoto for Tokyo. (2007, p. 71). 'As a typist pure and simple, Anya from upstairs is a bit of a disappointment. [...] the rapport I had hoped for, the feel for the sort of thing I write, is hardly there. There are times when I stare in dismay at the text she turns in'. (2007, p. 25). Besides expecting to find in her somebody who could help him typing his writings, once he cannot do it properly any longer, he wanted to have someone to

discuss and contribute with his writings. However, it seems she is not the one, at the end of the novel, he will find out exactly what he hoped from her.

In their relation there is a sort of gamble and game. Mainly Anya, whose showing off her *derrière* is a sort of pleasant game in order to be delighted, to feel adored and admired by Señor C. As she passes by Señor C with her laundry basket, she confesses: ‘I make sure I waggle my behind, my delicious behind, sheathed in tight denim. If I were a man I would not be able to keep my eyes off me.’ (COETZEE, 2007, p. 25). And also ‘when I make my silky moves I can feel his eyes lock onto me. That is the game between him and me. I don’t mind. What else is your bottom for? Use it or lose it’. (2007, p. 28). In the way she is presented here, the reader can have just the wrong idea of what is really going on in her inner dimensions, just a superficial view of her. The reader might think that Anya is just a sort of eroticised woman who loves being flattered and whose relationship with Señor C is going to fall into a simple sordid affair. Even later on in the novel she still seems to behave like that, when she disagrees with Señor C’s opinions on paedophilia:

I would like to bring Alan and Señor C together to debate the paedophilia business. Alan would wipe the floor with him. Even I could wipe the floor with him if I wanted to. I would wipe the floor with him and then march out. *Do you think I am a dummy?* I would say. *Do you think I can’t read between the lines? Keep your money, I don’t need it, do your own typing.* Grand exit. Curtain. (COETZEE, 2007, p. 91)

She seems to be too much influenced by Alan’s opinions, what is a natural fact, since he is her boyfriend. However, there is a detail here which is quite revealing in this fragment. She uses the conditional verb tense (*would*). What the narrator is suggesting is that she *would* do that if she were a very sordid, vulgar and trivial woman, she *would* humiliate and betray Señor C if she had no ethical feeling in her. What goes within seems to be that her feelings such as fidelity, respect for the elderly, human sensitivity, sympathy, intuitive feelings and so forth are interfering unconsciously in her saying. It is just an imaginative possibility coming out here, which has just a superficial root and does not reveal what her true feelings are. Those feelings are going to be important later on when she will make an ethical choice between betraying Señor C and coping with Alan or helping Señor C to finish his opinions and maybe, one day, come back and help him when he will die. Yet, until this moment, the reader may be just absorbed in the idea of a trivial, vulgar, silly girl.

What Coetzee does in representing Anya as such in the first place is to give the reader a sort of bait to catch him, as if he were using a very Shakespearian device. What Shakespeare used to do with audience was to give them a comic, villainous character, such as Shylock and

Hal, in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Henry IV, part I*, respectively, but then after taking the audience's attention and making them have fun of this comic character, Shakespeare transformed him into a complex and deeper character. Also, Coetzee hooks the reader by presenting this sort of Lady Gaga figure, who loves walking around with her shopping bags, showing off her behind, and being adored by all men. Later on in the novel, she will both make an ethical decision and help to change Señor C's opinions in his book, as I will discuss below.

On the other hand, Señor C makes this same sort of game when he envies her:

Her connection with the no doubt freckle-backed Mr Aberdeen is a great disappointment. It pains me to think of the two of them side by side, that is to say, side by side in bed, since that is what counts, finally. Not just because of the insult – the insult to the justice – of such a dull man in possession of so celestial a paramour, but because of what the fruit of their union might look like, her golden glow quite washed out by his Celtic pallor. (COETZEE, 2007, p. 11).

His feelings and thoughts about Anya, in a certain way, are concentrated on a sort of jealousy which comes out due to a possibility of his feeling attracted to Anya both physically and idealistically. Besides that, I think Señor C as a writer, an artist is feeling little bit intuitive about a hidden possibility of her revealing herself as a good creature, a good person, a sensible woman who can help him typing and discussing his opinions. The opposition between *golden glow* and *Celtic pallor*, *celestial paramour* and *dull man* and also the horrid thought of seeing their fruit seem to reveal that there is something that goes beyond physical beauty and erotic feelings. Also his game with her aims at drawing her attention at him: '*An intuitive feel*: those were my words. They were a gamble, a shot in the dark, but they worked. What self-respecting woman would want to deny she has an intuitive feel.' (COETZEE, 2007, p. 19). Señor C wants is to convince her that she is able to do the job, but also this sort of game is common and natural in a relationship whose first contact is to cause good impression.

As soon as the relation gets on, besides these games between them, the novel represents the contrasts between this intellectual *éminence grise* and this seemingly erotic empty-headed woman with her shopping bags. Besides representing paradoxes and contrasts in political, democratic, economic, artistic, ethical, and moral dimensions, Coetzee represents these contrasts in the individual level, between the great artist and thinker and his seemingly simple-minded typist: 'All he writes about is politics – he, El Señor, not Alan. It's a big disappointment. It makes me yawn. I try to tell him to give it up, people have had it up to here with politics.' (COETZEE, 2007, p. 26). What this contrast conveys is that both an

artist and a think fight today against big windmills, but they cannot change many things in society.

In a similar sense, when later on Señor C writes about Harold Pinter, he states that Pinter's recorded speech against Tony Blair's adherence to the Iraq War is likely ineffective, since one's 'using the rhetoric of the agora, one embarks on a contest which one is likely to lose because it takes place on ground where one's opponent is far more practised and adept.' (COETZEE, 2007, p. 127). An artist, people will say, has the freedom to express his opinions in a democratic state, even though it is ineffective and harmless.

Moreover, the complexities of modern life felt and experienced in politics, democracy, universities, and many other social dimensions are represented in the individual conflicts. If it is quite hard to face social and political paradoxes such as the origins of the state, the democracy which Coetzee concludes that is built up just in the reasoning of 'anointing a man' (COETZEE, 2007, p. 15) through the ballot and that people's task is not just to choose the write man, but to attribute power. Then, these very paradoxes are reproduced in social daily life. When Señor C tries to establish a conversation with Anya, he concludes from her conciseness that sociability is quite hard even in our modern buildings:

'Yes, I hear what you say and I agree, it is tragic not to know who your neighbours are, but that is how it is in the big city and I have other things to attend to now, so could we let the present exchange of pleasantries die a natural death?' (COETZEE, 2007, p. 05)

Coetzee suggests here that the conflicts between great ideals, philosophy, arts in opposition to politician acts and behaviour are spread out in micro-social dimensions as in our daily routine in which we cannot even face or know our neighbour. Also, Anya's observations on paedophilia, politics, and romance show this gap between the intellectual and her. She acknowledges that 'he is supposed to be the big writer and I just the little Filipina'. (COETZEE, 2007, p. 29).

Even though Anya seems to be stupid in the first place, Coetzee leaves a hint that she is not such an insensible and unfeeling. As she warns him not to leave the blinds open, he just asks her:

What could I possibly get up to that would interest strangers? He says. I don't know, I say, people get up to surprising things. Well, he replies, they will soon get bored watching me. I am a human being no different from them. Nonsense, I say, we are all different, in subtle ways, we are not ants, we are not sheep. That is why we take a peek through the blinds when the blinds are left open: to see the subtle ways. It's only natural. (COETZEE, 2007, p. 32)

In this fragment, we can see that Anya is much more aware of inner dimensions and differences between human beings. This is one of the first hints that she is not so stupid as she looks like. Anya starts changing not late in the novel. She shows being sensitive, although seemingly naive. When she states is that she is his secret area, *segretaria*, (COETZEE, 2007, p. 30), Anya leaves a hint that there is something occluded inside her, inwardly, which will be very precious in the end of everything. This secret aria sounds like something secret, precious, and surprising. Being his secret aria suggests being a space which is quite exclusively reserved to him, a place where he will find comfort, revelation, and safety.

She also demonstrates this sort of sensitive and intuitive feeling when her opinions about writing a novel start to influence Señor C:

Why do you write this stuff? Why don't you write another novel instead? Isn't that what you are good at, novels? [...] Still, I said, we have all got opinions, especially about politics. If you tell a story at least people will shut up and listen to you. A story or a joke. (COETZEE, 2007, p. 54-55)

She tries to convince him of writing a novel, but what she wants instead is to know about his life, his affairs, and his marriage. She gambles again though he interprets something quite different. In the *Second Diary*, Señor C will write exactly sketches of stories, he will write about cricket, birds, and so forth. Anya's conversation with Señor C will little by little change his hard and awkward opinions. She also changes his way of facing life, oldness, and death.

On the one hand, Anya expresses her opinions, feelings and ideas about Señor C; on the other hand, Señor C acknowledges step by step Anya's influence on his writing. Coetzee starts dealing with this inner change and discovery introducing a web of leitmotifs such as spleen and metaphysical pain. There is a constant spleen feeling felt by Señor C. (p. 12) and he feels like having a metaphysical pain. (COETZEE, 2007, p. 7). Coetzee seems to be quite acquainted with the new neuroscientist discoveries, such as Damasio's book *Descartes' Error*. Señor C shows in the novel this sort of acknowledgement when he deals with Intelligent Design, on chapter 17 of his *Strong Opinions*. (COETZEE, 2007, p. 87-86). Señor C constantly mentions his feelings on the body, his physical changes. On chapter 13, *On the body*, he criticises our Cartesian obsessive attitude towards splitting up the experience of our body, as we say 'my eye', 'my leg', 'my brain': 'the existence of such locations shows that language cannot get purchase, cannot get going, until it has split up the unity of experience'. (COETZEE, 2007, p. 59). Coetzee puts this sort of experiences felt by Señor C as a device

to suggest us that his body, as his soul, undergoing both spiritual, intellectual and physical, sensitive changing.

When in the first place Alan suggests he is planning to take Señor C's money, she shows ethical feelings when she argues with Alan about stealing money. 'And what entitles us to steal his money anyway? It is not stealing, says Alan, not if he is dead. [...] It is not stealing if he is dead? I say. That's new to me.' (COETZEE, 2007, p. 49). She shows here for the first time that she is not a stupid and vulgar woman at all, but she is unveiling her innermost feelings towards Señor C. Even though in the beginning she has shown stupidity and vulgarity, it was probably due to Alan's influence in her life.

Alan is a cynic and opportunistic man, whose feelings and thoughts shows his sinister and perverse dimensions. He wants to take advantage from Señor C at any cost. He is jealous and he thinks Señor C desires Anya. Alan is always trying to define Señor C as a mischievous and ill-behaved old man, whose has erotic thought about Anya. He rivals all the time with Señor C, by opposing his opinions. However, Anya proves she is not stupid at all, when Alan is trying to convince this man has money and that they could take something from him. Alan imagines Señor C is writing secretly about Anya and he may be jealous of the fact, but what wants is to get some money from Señor C. And her ethical integrity comes out in this moment:

Come on, Alan! You want me to dress up in convent-school uniform and appear in court as some virginal type who blushes when a man has thoughts about her? I will be thirty in March. Lots of men have had thoughts about me. (COETZEE, 2007, p. 61)

She is quite ironic here, playing with Alan's childishness and immature ideas. She is not such a simple-minded woman; she has a minimum of decency and self-respect. As Anya acknowledges, Alan still has a sort of childishness due to his lonely childhood. When they are arguing, she asserts:

Alan squirms like a little boy, but his embarrassment doesn't run deep. I know what sort of childhood he had: lonely, unsure, desperate to be noticed. From the moment he met me he has been demanding praise and attention. It is as if I have taken the place of his mother. (COETZEE, 2007, p. 120)

She knows how to use his faults as a trick, as in a game between them. She notices his lack of attention and uses it in a game. Although she seems to be completely on Alan's side, this fact suggests that she was always aware of what kind of person Alan is, never forgetting her own opinions and desires. A woman knows how to enchant and deal with a

man who needs attention and care. Coetzee introduces little by little this maternal, angelic figure who presumably will take care of El Señor. What she thinks she is towards Alan, she will do with Señor C later on: to give protection, care and attention. Coetzee employs a technique which induces in subtle that details she is not the one the reader might have noticed in the first place, yet a very kind, maternal, sensitive, and angelic character. Coetzee have learned this technique with the great classics, such as Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Musil. Anya embodies the kind of character who will take care of Señor C at the end of his life. As Señor C acknowledges in Anya a Beatrice when he stops to think baffled: ‘Last night I had a bad dream, which I afterwards wrote down, about dying and being guided to the gateway to oblivion by a young woman. What I did not record is the question the occurred to me in the act of writing: *Is she the one?*’ (COETZEE, 2007, p. 59). Her opinions will influence him later on, in a way that he will not be able to work without her help.

Once she is becoming an angelic figure, in some moments, she starts feeling pity for him, when she tells Alan about a dream Señor C told her:

It was really sad, about dying and his ghost lingering behind, not wanting to leave. I told him he should write it down before he forgets, and work it into his book. [...] I am beginning to feel sorry for him, I said. He’s got no one. Sits in his flat all day, or in the park talking to the birds. (COETZEE, 2007, p. 77-78)

This statement of her own enhances her purest, most sensitive dimensions. Yet, what happens, in fact, here is that Señor C’s dream, talk and opinions also start to influence, change Anya’s inner-self. At the same time, they unleash her innermost sense of fidelity, love, care, maternal protection, purity, and sensibility. She looks like being influenced *El Señor C* when Alan realises it, ‘are you falling under his influence?’ (COETZEE, 2007, p. 95).

She feels more this inner change when she wants to do something, for example, going to the movies or something else, instead of being sitting in their flat watching the cars and talking about Señor C. Alan does not like Anya’s friends and he has no friends at all. They have no social life (COETZEE, 2007, p. 100). It is clear that they do not have social life due to Alan’s unsociable behaviour, who just wants to rival with Señor C and his co-works. Coetzee suggests that Anya’s purest feelings are just concealed for a while due to Alan’s haughty and unmanageable behaviour. Her purest feelings are coming out little by little. I think what Coetzee does here is to introduce a sort of ‘objective correlative’, as T. S. Eliot provocatively criticised Hamlet, for not having it in the play. Alan functions in the novel as a negative ‘objective correlative’, bringing out through contrasts with Señor C some facts

unveiled so far. By contrasting both Alan and Señor C shows that Anya's character is just hidden, dreaming in the deepest stratus of her innermost self.

Finally, she complains that no one listens to her opinions, whereas both Señor C and Alan seem to be disputing her:

He records his opinions (drone drone) which I dutifully type out (clickety clack) and somewhere down the line the Germans buy his book and pore over it (*ja ja*). As for Alan, Alan sits all day hunched over his computer and then comes home and tells me his opinions about interest rates and Macquarie Bank's latest moves, to which I dutifully listen. But what about me? Who listens to my opinions? (COETZEE, 2007, p. 101)

Her irony and sarcasm show her despise to both Alan's and Señor C's concerns. Both concerns are hardly interesting to her, suggesting that she is a very well-tuned with something else like love, care and affection. However, they do not demonstrate her much concern and kindness, once as she notes here they are said just to dispute her attention. Nevertheless, at the end of the novel, the reader's great surprise is that the one who listens to her opinions is exactly Señor C. Later on she will establish an analogy between them, in a sort of triangular relation in which she is the centre.

But just recently I have begun to feel crushed between him and Señor C, between certainties on the one side and hard opinions on the other, to the point where sometimes I would like to withdraw and go off by myself. [...] The old bull and young bull, fighting it out. And me? I am the young cow they are trying to impress, that is getting bored with their antics. (COETZEE, 2007, p. 109)

Her feelings and concerns here is to leave both Alan and Señor C, instead of being used as a beastly trophy or object, which mainly Alan exhibits to other men. She has just realised that she is being used as an object of envious triangular desire. (p. 87). Alan's attraction to Anya is pervaded by this Girard's triangular structure, which is defined as a relation in which the object is not really desired by the person, but through someone else's eyes. Since the very beginning of the novel this sort of triangular relation is perceived and staged by all of them, Anya, Señor C and Alan. It is important to highlight here that Girard is quite enough embedded with psychoanalytical assumptions, although he never acknowledges the psychoanalytical influence. Girard's triangular structure is based on both Freudian and Lacanian theories, mainly the mirror stage essay by Lacan. Coetzee himself has ambiguously despised in an interview Girard's influence in his work, as Coetzee himself acknowledges it in *Doubling the point* (p. 104 and 105).

Besides that, as Alan mentions *probability*, and Anya suspects he is spying on her (COETZEE, 2007, p. 106). She has never beforehand spoken of *probability*, since it is the text she had typed the day before. In the very middle of the novel, she ratifies: ‘I never breathed a single word to you about probability before now, I say. So how come you know what Señor C thinks about probability?’ (COETZEE, 2007, p. 113). Anya’s change is more visible exactly in the middle of the novel, as a change happens in the middle of the novel *Disgrace*. This seems to be a pattern Coetzee has learned by the classic novelists such as Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Musil. From this moment on, she will become more and more suspicious of Alan’s plotting something against Señor C.

After that startling change, everything turns upside down. Alan confesses he has put a spyware inside Señor C’s computer (COETZEE, 2007, p. 115 and 123). However, she suspects he has been doing something else:

What else have you been spying on, Alan, that you haven’t told me? [...] Are you saying that he writes about me in secret? Have you been reading his private diary? Because, if you have, that will really make me angry. What a mess! What a mess! I wish I had never got involved. (COETZEE, 2007, p. 118-119)

Her angry suggests her honesty and fidelity to Señor C. She thinks it is completely wrong to take money from somebody who has done nothing against them, as well as she is Señor C’s typist and feels pity, concern, and sympathy to him. Also, she realises that he used her to put the spyware inside Señor C’s computer. (COETZEE, 2007, p. 133). As he tries to convince her that his money could be theirs for a while and he could take some profit of it, Anya becomes very angry. Alan tries to persuade her to corroborate with him to take Señor C’s money, once all his fortune is going to an institution which takes care of animals used in laboratory experiences. At this moment, she asks Alan:

You and me?
That’s right: you and me.
I don’t mean you and me, I mean, what has his money to do with you and me?
(COETZEE, 2007, p. 126)

Her ethical choice and integrity come out here. Her concern here demonstrates her feelings such as fidelity, care, concern, and maternal love. Furthermore, Coetzee builds up another important contrast here: her attitude works in the book as a contrast or even a paradox to the greatest politicians and authorities all over the world, such as Bush, Tony Blair, and Thatcher. Anya’s honourable attitude contrasts with the chapter on shame,

dishonour, and national shame. Both Señor C and Anya discuss dishonour. She gives an example of three young guys who tried to kidnap and rape her and a friend of her, showing Señor C a rather realistic way of facing dishonour. Anya's ethical choice is much more praiseworthy than someone else's attitude criticised by Señor C.

In the middle part of the page, Anya leaves a letter saying she cannot get on writing down his opinions. (COETZEE, 2007, p. 117). After that, as Anya reencounters Señor C, she reveals that 'I said I would type your book for you, and I always do what I say'. (COETZEE, 2007, p. 151). Coetzee uses Anya as a character who at the first glance seems to reproduce in the individual domain the sort of little sordid and sinister atrocities, although she reveals herself completely the opposite to this sort of attitude, as she shows pity, fidelity, love, care, hope, and concern. She seems to embody what Hegel in his **Aesthetics** pointed out back in the Middle Ages, that is to say, the feelings of nobility, love, charity and fidelity. She embodies those feelings revealing them in her attitude and care towards Señor C.

As she highlights in the novel, Alan has crossed the line and she is living with a 'professional swindler' (COETZEE, 2007, p. 139). Then Anya discovers his 'true face'. She realises it is worth living with a man who tries to extort money from others and just want to rival with Señor C. As she affirms when Alan tries to convince her to take Señor C's money, 'I could begin to look at you in a different way. Have you thought about that? Alan, I am formally serving you notice: if you push ahead with this scheme of yours, things will never be the same between us'. (2007, p. 143). What is guiding her reaction and feelings here is exactly her sense of love, care, pity, fidelity, which determine her ethical choice. What did not seem to exist now is clearly there in the hearts of her heart. She does not want to meddle with Alan any longer. His true face haunts her and makes her ponder: 'something bad is going on between Alan and me. I free myself from his arms and face him. Is this your true face, Alan? I say. Answer me seriously. Is this the kind of person you truly are?' (2007, p. 149). She acknowledges she is being pushed by Alan's bad influences and does not want to be involved in his sort of game and deeds: 'The other half side is a dark hole into which one of us is falling, I hope not me.' (2007, p. 151).

Anya and Señor C are humiliated by Alan in the dinner Señor C offers them. Alan tells Señor C exactly everything he wanted to do with Señor C's money, i. e., he wanted to steal his money in order to put it in a bank account to take some interest on it. Also he pronounces his verdicts about what he thinks Señor C is. Anya knows he aims at humiliating her; he wants to show her what he is able of. After being humiliated, she tells him in the elevator: 'I at last had a chance to say my say. For what you have made me undergo this

evening I will never forgive you, Alan, I said. Never. And I mean it.’ (COETZEE, 2007, p. 217). After leaving Alan, Anya promises to come back to take care of Señor C:

All that I will promise him, and hold his hand tight and give him kiss on the brow, a proper kiss, just to remind him of what he is leaving behind. Good night, Señor C, I will whisper in his ears: sweet dreams, and flights of angels, and all the rest. (COETZEE, 2007, p. 227)

She is this angelic and maternal figure throughout the novel, although it is something that only appears as the time passes. When Alan seems to have been planning something against Señor C, Anya points out that ‘I don’t want you to make a fool of him, I say.’ (p. 73). She promises she will come back and protect him, take care of him when his will be dying and hold his hand at the very end.

At the end of the novel, Coetzee reveals one of the main themes of the novel which he has learned by the classic authors: to live a better life. (COETZEE, 2007, p. 193). And he learned this through the standards of the Russian novelists Tolstoy and Dostoevsky: ‘By their examples one becomes a better artist; and by better I do not mean more skilful but ethically better. They annihilate one’s impurer pretensions; they clear one’s eyesight; they fortify one’s arm.’ (2007, p. 227). Even though Señor C acknowledges that the Russian novelists had changed his way of writing, Anya also influences deeply his feelings, ideas, thoughts, opinions, and ethical dimensions. Señor C discovers that what is important is to live better. She starts to suggest ideas for his writing, for example, writing about cricket, the birds, a love story and so forth. For example, when they talk about terrorism, she suggests: ‘When you write about terrorists, I think – candidly – you are a bit up in the clouds. A bit idealistic. A bit unrealistic. My guess is you have never in your life come face to face with a real Muslim fundamentalist.’ (2007, p. 73). Her ideas and opinions about politics, terrorism, and dishonour appear very early in the novel. When she advises him to write about cricket, she proposes him a good response of how politics works:

The kind of writing you do doesn’t work with politics. Politics is about shouting other people down and getting your own way, not about logic. Write about the world around you. [...] What he says about politics sends me to sleep. Politics is all around us, it’s like the air, it’s like pollution. You can’t fight pollution. Best to ignore it, or just get used to it, adapt. (COETZEE, 2007, p. 35)

Anya’s response to politics is exactly what Señor C defined as a third way, i. e., ‘quietism’, ‘willed obscurity’, ‘inner emigration’. (COETZEE, 2007, p. 12). Anya’s opinions on politics and fighting against a skilful politician appear later when Señor C writes a chapter

on Harold Pinter, who has taken arms and guns against Tony Blair. Although Pinter's attitude against Tony Blair's taking part in the Iraq war is to be considered a heroic act, it will not work since he is dealing with a much stronger and more skilful opponent. (COETZEE, 2007, p. 127).

Anya influences Señor C little by little. She suggests him to write about cricket, the birds or a love story. Everything she says is 'charming', she can say anything she wants to him. (COETZEE, 2007, p. 45). She wants to know things from his past, and then she suggests writing a love story or his memoirs: 'You can always work the past in. It is not as if you don't have memories, sitting at your desk, letting your mind wander. Tell a few stories and you will come across as more human, more flesh and blood. You don't mind me giving my opinion, do you?' (2007, p. 68). Even though she wants to stretch the truth about his past, her opinions and suggestions will work deeply in his way of writing and acting with her. She is not just a mechanical typist, but his secret-aria, what shows exactly what she will mean to him in the end of the novel.

Later on, he acknowledges that he needs her. She needs her for his writing, as well as he realises that she needs him too. When she quits writing his opinions and leaves a note to him, he wonders if she really needs him: 'as a cry for help from a young woman more troubled of soul than I had dreamed?' (COETZEE, 2007, p. 119). From this moment on, both are going to need each other: on the one hand, Anya will need his attention due to Alan's discourtesies in front of Señor C, on the other hand Señor C needs her more and more. His letter to her shows exactly what he thinks and feels about her help, care, and fidelity: 'You have become indispensable to me – to me and to the present project. I cannot imagine handing over the manuscript to someone else. It would be like taking a child away from its natural mother and putting it in a stranger's care.' (2007, p. 121). Señor C's letter demonstrates the sort of maternal and angelic figure Anya has turned out to be. Her care to him and his writing means more than a simple professional work; it means that he is deeply linked to her affectively. Señor C thinks about his changes. He realises that has become important and that her influences on him changed deeply his opinions:

What has begun to change since I moved into the orbit of Anya is not my opinions themselves so much as my opinion of my opinions. As I read through what mere hours before she translated from a record of my speaking voice into 14-point type, there are flickering moments when I can see these hard opinions of mine through her eyes – see how alien and antiquated they may seem to a thoroughly modern Millie, like the bones of some odd extinct creature, half bird, half reptile, on the point of turning into stone. (COETZEE, 2007, p. 136-137)

In this moment, the reader sees that this modern Millie is in fact one of us, one of Coetzee's readers who just want to have a story and enjoy the plot. Her influence changes him a lot: he started to write about politics, dishonour, shame, curse, and terrorism; in the second diary he will write about birds, cricket, music, a plot to a book, the classics and so forth.

Final Remarks

Diary of a Bad Year presents, besides that, many other issues, not possible to touch here: 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy', says Hamlet to Horatio. That is a saying, I think, which fits in Coetzee's work: he writes more things than politics, the origins of the state, honour and dishonour, curse and so forth. Coetzee touches in the problem of autobiography and confession in both **Diary of a Bad Year** and **Doubling the Point**. It is quite impossible for him to be sincere once as we try to say something our rationality, feelings change the confessional issues.

Coetzee also presents autobiographical issues in his novel. In **Diary of a Bad Year** he presents a narrator, Señor C whose identity is similar do J. M Coetzee himself: a university professor, elderly man, facing some daily difficulties such as death, the decaying of the body, the possibility of being betrayed by somebody like Alan and so on. Elizabeth Costello is also a university professor, as Coetzee himself is, who discusses problems such as the slaughter of animals, the role of the universities and so forth. In both **Youth** and **Boyhood**, Coetzee presents sort of memoirs of a provincial life, very similar to his own experiences in South Africa and USA. In **Summertime**, Coetzee expands and exceeds the limits of the conventional novel: in the novel, it is himself, J. M. Coetzee, dead, who is depicted and represented.

Besides that, Coetzee also presents in **Diary of a Bad Year** the problem of being a post-colonial subject who left South Africa to live in Australia, who identifies himself not with the South African culture, yet not totally with the European first half of the 20th century culture. He quotes constantly Musil, Kafka, Beckett, Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky as core authors of the European culture and literature. He is also quite interested in the German tradition, which always had seen itself as a peripheral culture, differently from the English and French tradition. In many senses, Coetzee refreshes and creates the edges of the novel; his novels can be seen as a sort of 'unlimited' novel, to quote Hamlet's definition of the 'unlimited poem'.

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