



RESEARCH PAPER

Non-Arborealism in the Fiction (*Summertime and Foe*) of John Maxwell Coetzee

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PAPER INFO

ABSTRACT

Received:
January 03, 2021

Accepted:
March 01, 2021

Online:
March 20, 2021

Keywords:
Non-Arboreal
Development,
Heterogeneous,
Intertextuality
Non-Consanguine,
Post-Modern,
Rhizomatous,

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This research paper aims at a study of Coetzee's fiction i.e. *Summertime* and *Foe* in a rhizomatous frame work. The French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and the clinical psychoanalyst Felix Guattari have postulated a theory in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) and in *Rhizome: Introduction* (1976), they have opposed an arboreal development of plot and characters from some foundation. The present research focuses on a critical study of the rhizomatous theory and its relevance to Coetzee's fiction. It is avowed in this paper that rhizome-like narrative and characters have no unique source un-like a tree from which all the heterogeneous and multiple surface development occurs. The research discusses that the rhizomatous attribute is demonstrated in the story-line of *Summertime* and *Foe* as well as the characters. Moreover, the objective of the paper is to explore how the characters are intertextually developed although the characters are non-consanguine yet they are tied by perusal of motifs that slide throughout the novels. This paper will detail various events and characters those subsume the rhizomatous features which are propounded by Deleuze and Guattari in their theory. The research is qualitative in design and interpretative in nature.

Introduction

Rhizome is a botanical term for a creeping rootstalk that has a capability to produce the off-shoots and root system of a new plant. This concept is later incorporated in literature and the concept of rhizomorphic study is heralded by Deleuze and Guattari (1972-1980) in *A Thousand Plateaus*. The post-structuralist researchers have explained fundamental essentials required to compose a rhizomatous book. Deleuze and Guattari, have put forward concept of two types of

books i.e. root book and rhizomatous book. Root book propounds a genealogical progress in the plot construction whereas a rhizomatous book lacks this genealogical plot construction and characterization (Deleuze&Guattari, 1972-1980, p. 5). This paper aims to explore the rhizomatous characteristics in the fiction of Coetzee as multiplicity in the themes, an unusual plot construction and un-arboreal techniques of characterizations are the major characteristics of Coetzee's fiction.

The research is based on acclaimed books *Summertime* and *Foe* for the exploration of non-arborealism. All the features of a rhizomatous book are deciphered in Coetzee's novels. For this purpose, the basic characteristics of a rhizomatous book are elucidated. Coetzee has endorsed sundry and assorted characteristics explained by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*. The novels under discussion, *Summertime* and *Foe* lack any proper beginning, middle and end. Moreover, like a rhizome the book may start or end at any point as the characters are not drawn genealogically rather their life span in a particular phase has been discoursed. *A Thousand Plateaus* has offered negotiation of an arboreal book which originates from a root and has a chronologically sequenced narration of events. This research ventures to explore those elements in Coetzee's fiction which support the rhizomatous characteristics as propounded by Deleuze and Guattari.

A Rhizomatous Analysis of Coetzee's Fiction

This research centers on the concept of rhizomes presented by Guattari and Deleuze in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1972-1980). An excogitation and exploration of the plot, characters and their development in the novels *Summertime* and *Foe* is imperative to validate the rhizomatous features and un-arborealism in Coetzee's fiction. The inkling of rhizomes was phased by Jung. He has associated the idea of ginger like structure of rhizomes for the description of memories, dreams, human subconscious and other reflections. As Carl Jung avers in his article titled Memories, Dreams, Reflections, Prologue:

Life has always seemed to me like a plant that lives on its rhizome. Its true life is invisible, hidden in the rhizome. The part that appears above the ground lasts only a single summer. Then it withers away—an ephemeral apparition. When we think of the unending growth and decay of life and civilizations, we cannot escape the impression of absolute nullity. Yet I have never lost the sense of something that lives and endures beneath the eternal flux. What we see is blossom, which passes. The rhizome remains. (Jung, Para 8)

The post-structuralist writers including Deleuze and Guattari were inclined to write about the nature and function of rhizomes. It has been worded in *A Thousand Plateaus* as “There are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines” (Deleuze & Gattari, 1987, p.8).

From the above-quoted lines one can anticipate that the narrative and characters can also be rhizomatous. After reading Coetzee's fiction one comes to

know that the characters of Coetzee are emphatic and pithy. They are not developed from the same descriptive, explanatory origin as explained in a root book. The characters in *Summertime* and *Foe* are compendious and portrayed for declamatory purpose with a punchy description. In line with an un-hierarchical structure of the novels, characters in Coetzee's fiction are not verbose and turgid.

This paper discusses six postulates which define a rhizome and applies them on *Summertime* and *Foe* and the way Coetzee celebrates diverse personal and linguistic dimensions that crisscross in his fiction.

The first and second features of rhizomatous theory are connectivity and heterogeneity. The narrative moots the existence of connectivity amongst the characters and themes of the novels in a different way. The connectivity used in a rhizomatous book is different than that used in a root book. Continual breaks in the development of covinare independent, they can be detached and reattached with any incident as it proposes free entry and exit points in the text.

This principle deals with the endowment of heterogeneous and non-linear structure of the plot. The writers have touched on the work of Chomsky, who has elucidated the features of a root book by referring to sentence construction. Unlike linguistic trees, the characters in a rhizomatous book do not originate from the beginning of their existence. Rather, a particular period of their life is depicted. The writer carves out themes and motifs which might appear to be a breach of the original plot. All such vicissitudes are interlinked with each other like a rhizome.

Heterogeneity and connectivity in Coetzee's writing are discernible in the assorted themes including hardships faced by an amateur writer, hardships of a heretic and naïve author, inappropriate romanticism of Coetzee with various females and political scenario of South Africa during colonialism as depicted in his fiction. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari have criticized the anti-book or root book due to lack of any abstraction. To them, notion of abstractness is an essential characteristic of a rhizomatous book. Coetzee has incorporated the intangible and abstract idea of a character representation of a late writer in *Summertime* and of a female castaway in *Foe*.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, the characters can be relevant to each other. The character evocation seems to be apparently unattached from each other but the theme, motif and ongoing phenomenon keep them bracketed. Genealogical construction of rhizome like characters is impossible for Coetzee. The Principle of connectivity and heterogeneity is operating in *Summertime*. Five major characters in the text are connected to each other through interviews.

In *Summertime*, there is an interview with Julia; the mistress of surrogate Coetzee. Julia makes her heterogeneity and unusual connectivity with the plot construction clear when she says that her presence in Coetzee's life and Coetzee's

role in her life is ephemeral. It is just a part not the whole story of his life as they shared a relationship for a fleeting sublunary pleasure only.

In a rhizomatous book, the character discusses personal life during a particular and relevant time span with no irrelevant details. The affinity between Julia and Coetzee is again built when Julia unfalteringly prods herself of the purpose of visit she says "Let me get back to the story of Julia and her adulterous dealing, the story you have travelled so far to hear" (Coetzee, 2009, p. 49). It suggests that Julia is an un-arboreal and un-hierarchical rupture who is heterogeneous and can be connected to the other characters i.e. interviewees at any moment. Mr. Vincent and Julia present admissible details of Julia's life during 1973. When she says that Mark and she were divorced, the interviewer questions if it was the end of story because after the divorce, both Julia and Coetzee stopped seeing each other. Therefore, the role of Julia as a character comes to an end as Julia replies "On the contrary, it is the end of story. At least of the part that matters" (Coetzee, 2009, p. 45).

Coetzee has unconsciously endorsed the same words used by theoreticians, when Julia says that "But where is the body of tale, you ask? There is no body. I can't supply a body because there was none. This is a tale without body" (Coetzee, 2009, p. 51).

Similarly, heterogeneous connectivity of apparently disparate events can be found in the interview of Adriana, another character in *Summertime*. She is the mother of a schoolgirl, Maria Regina, who takes English classes from Coetzee. There is an unusual synergy between Coetzee and Adriana but it does not prove to be an expected relationship between a man and woman that constructs a heterogeneous connectivity with the recurrent theme of the novel i.e. life and persona of Coetzee. Adriana is a practical and rational single parent who does not want a lover in her life but a friend, who can help her to get settled in the new city.

The purpose of portraying the character of Adriana is to present an off-putting, pessimistic and abhorrent perspective of Coetzee which is an indispensable motif of the novel. Therefore, she functions as a tool to elaborate the obsessive and persistent nature of the late author. Adriana is the only character in the novel who hates Coetzee. She has been portrayed as a practical lady who holds a negative view of Coetzee despite his accomplishment as a writer. She elaborates her heterogeneous perspective regarding Coetzee by portraying the protagonist as a nobody other than "just an irritation and embarrassment...fool" (Coetzee, 2009, p. 193).

The interviewer has also solicited a particular life time of late Mr. Coetzee in his interview with Martin. The character of Martin epitomizes the point of view of Coetzee regarding Africa, the effects of colonial system and has presented the stance of Coetzee regarding "white South African Identity" (Coetzee, 2009, p. 209) which is a sub-theme of the novel.

In *Summertime*, Coetzee's individuality and the fact that he spent a large period of his life in Africa have had a huge impact. Coetzee has signified a different theme of political ideas of the late writer through an interview with his colleague. Martin reports that "What I am doing is telling the story of a phase in his life, or if we can't have a single story then several stories from several perspectives" (Coetzee, 2009, p. 217).

Moreover, *Foe* also subsumes narration of such incidents where heterogeneous connectivity has been entrenched. The divergent events paradoxically connect the intermittent themes of the novel which includes post colonialism and hardships of a female castaway along with various phases of life of the protagonist Susan Barton. She has been discussed as a slattern, various phases of her life as a mother, as a marooned woman (first castaway), as a gipsy, as a teacher and as a struggler in a new land. The writer has not chronicled a detailed description of her parentage and lineage rather she is introduced in an un-arboreal way. As a rhizomatous character she can be phased at any time at any place. No details of the childhood and married life of Susan have been drawn up rather the writer has focused on a particular life span of the protagonist and descanted on it.

Cruso, in *Foe*, also manifests the attributes of a rhizomatous character. The origin of Cruso and Friday (the manservant) in *Foe*, is vaguely described. Like Susan, their lineage has not been unveiled. Neither is the story of abandonment of Cruso and Friday aired. The dubious stories about their past reinforce their non-arborescence. At times, Cruso ostensibly flaunts his origin as a son of a merchant and he has left his luxurious house for the sake of adventure, sometimes he describes himself as a poor boy of no parentage. According to another version of his itinerary of life, he has been brought as a cabin boy by the Moors but he has managed to escape and made his way to a new and fantastic world of this island. The third hunch is of the shipwreck. He unleashes that their ship was drowned and he was marooned alone on the island with Friday fifteen years ago. These variant narratives coalesce in the portrayal of Cruso's rhizomatous character. Susan has been kept as incognizant as the reader about history of Cruso and Friday. Similarly, Cruso and Friday are as nonchalant about the past of Susan as the writer Mr. Vincent appears to be. Such anonymity leads her to a psychological predicament and her life becomes enigmatic and burdensome.

After more than a year a merchant named Hobart drops an anchor. He rescues the castaways which brings one of the phases of Susan's life to an end and starts another. She recognizes herself as the widow of Cruso after his death and the putative mistress of Friday. It compels her to live in lea for days. Therefore, a heterogeneous connectivity of an island integrates Friday with Susan in order to undergo the sufferings of a gipsy's life. This initiates the next phase of her life as a lonely woman and a mediatrix. Her meditations are pertinent to her psychological condition. She begins to suffer in mob which proves to be a different experience than suffering alone on an island.

As the narrative proceeds in *Foe*, one can decipher that the second chapter comprises of letters written by Susan on particular dates of April and May. The letters function as a tool for unraveling Susan's mind as she begins her quest to find a writer who can publish her story so that she can live a respectable life. But soon the author of her story Mr. Foe disappears and she feels abandoned again. The quandary is enlarged when Mr. Foe gets arrested causing an increase in the troubles of Susan. Here Coetzee has presented a deviation from the core plot of novel. He has used these deviations to portray confrontation and identity crisis of two extricated cast away. Susan forgets her miseries and inability of Friday to speak and questions Mr. Foe "What has happened? Have the bailiffs tracked you down? Will you be able to proceed with your writing in prison?"(Coetzee, 1987, p. 64).

Afterwards, this disappearance leads to a series of multiple events including her confab about the household of Mr. Foe where she takes refuge, her attempts to teach Friday and to know his past and description of a girl named Susan Barton who introduces herself as a daughter of the protagonist. All these heterogeneous and disparate events are strung together in the portrayal of a miserable life of a female castaway.

Deleuze and Guattari have posited a concept of language that has been tactfully adopted by Coetzee in *Foe*. According to Deleuze and Guattari "language as Language is", in Weinreich's words, "an essentially heterogeneous reality" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987,p. 7). Language has non-verbal forms in addition to verbal communication. This diversity can be found in the recurrent bids of Susan to make Friday speak. She is found in a perpetual effort to make Friday speak or to teach him to articulate himself through non-verbal communication. On diverse grounds Susan attempts to corroborate the language patterns of Friday through heterogeneous forms such as music, sketching or drawing. Through the muteness of Friday, Coetzee has bolstered the conception of language as postulated by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* as:

There is no mother tongue, only a power takeover by a dominant language within a political multiplicity...It is always possible to break a language down into internal structural elements, an undertaking not fundamentally different from a search for roots. (Coetzee, 2009, 1987,p.7)

The attempts of Susan to make Friday speak are solicits for a root. She strives to find the base in heterogeneous series of events. Susan highlights the significance of retrieval of Friday's tongue, when she says:

To tell my story and be silent on Friday's tongue is no better than offering a book for sale with pages in it quietly left empty. Yet the only tongue that can tell Friday's secret is the tongue he has lost! (Coetzee, 1987, p. 67)

The missing links are necessary to fill the void and to build connectivity between Susan's and Friday's tales if she wants her story to be published. She imagines their stories connected somehow as they endure the same plight and their

collaboration will complement their narrative. Her utterance "He was a prisoner, and I, despite myself, his gaoler" (Coetzee, 1987, p. 43) demonstrates that somehow they are linked and share a collective memory, history and past.

Multiplicity, the third essential feature discussed by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, creates a linkage which correlates events that appear to be strayed from the main plot. Multiplicity has a significant role in the exploration of above discussed characteristics of a rhizomatous book i.e. connectivity and heterogeneity. Coetzee has fostered multiplicity in order to build heterogeneous connectivity. Through this multiplicity of narrated incidents, he has entrenched heterogeneous connectivity.

The sub themes of the text contribute in fashioning a multiplicity. Therefore, "Multiplicities are defined by the outside: by the abstract line, the line of flight or de-territorialization according to which they change in nature and connect with other multiplicities" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 9). This reflects the abstractness of various sub topics which are apparently different but are connected heterogeneously with the other multiplicities.

Multiplicity also resonates in *Foe*. It adds a rigorous and meticulous detail in the description. There are breaks amongst multiple incidents from the Susan's life. However, these breaks cannot be fathomed as conclusive breaks. No matter where the writer begins he can go to any nook or cranny or quadrant in order to achieve reality of the despondent life of the protagonist.

The writer has inscribed themes of gruesome massacre of the black, slavery and bondage and a perpetual infliction brought about by society in *Summertime* and *Foe*. The dissociation of stories, struggles and life experiences is intricate and tangled. In this way, different people come up with their stories that appear to be different from the outset but are interconnected fundamentally for a coherent representation of struggles.

After an in-depth study of *Summertime* and *Foe*, the particles and molecules (in rhizomes) and characters (in novels) seem to be constructing each other. Deleuze and Guattari have explained congruence among multiple stories by giving an example of plateau. Similar to a plateau, where millions and billions of sand particles combine together in order to form a crystal or a plateau, various random characters in the fiction of Coetzee join in order to present a collaborated work.

This characteristic repudiates the hierarchal notion of "father principle" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.19) and the growth of characters from the origin. It aggrandizes the idea of "body without organ" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 4). "Puppet strings" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 9) have been instituted by Coetzee in order to co-relate heterogeneous and un-arboreal events. In *Summertime*, the writer has adopted the puppet string of interviews as a tool of multiplicity. He has employed the comments and events of diverse characters in order to bring about the

sub-themes of the novel. Whereas, in *Foe*, the writer has used the puppet string of letters written by Susan as a way of exploring sub themes including the concept of cannibalism and their ties with the child hood of Friday, the loss of tongue and non-verbal communicative struggles of Susan, mysterious dances and music of Friday and the introduction of an ambiguous character named Susan Barton. Coetzee has used the puppet strings of interviews and letters and multiple characters in order to create a deleterious effect of unity in diversity.

Coetzee's fiction is always in the process of formation, de-formation and re-formation. The idea of de-territorialization and re-territorialization is pertinent to discuss the metamorphic feature of Coetzee's work. De-territorialization and re-territorialization is to uproot from one place and re-implant at another for a better growth. Deleuze and Guattari have explained the concept in terms of 'Orchid and Wasp'. The characters in Coetzee's fiction build variant grounds for themselves like wasp after it drops pollen on an orchid. The pollination brings forth new seeds and saplings. Similarly, dissemination of incongruent events and characters form new patterns in the plot and new liaisons amongst the characters. This brings innovation and newness in the plot development (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 10).

In *Summertime*, Julia de-territorializes herself from her previous identity then she establishes her persona as a mistress of Coetzee and re-territorializes. Same is the case with Margot who is an endeared cousin of Coetzee. In a family gathering, Margot detaches herself from family and goes on a cruise with Coetzee to see the whole village. This is de-territorialization and during her stay with Coetzee at night, she plays a role to defend him and Margot experiences the lemma of re-territorialization. After the culmination of this relationship she emerges as a different character with her sincere association with the protagonist.

Similarly in *Foe*, Susan's abandonment on the island is a de-territorialization. She finds herself in a new world and re-territorializes herself in the tedious and rugged landscape. Moreover, Susan attempts to find the genesis of loss of Friday's tongue which offers a point of de-territorialization, where Susan detaches from the main plot which is description of Susan's troubles. She tries to know Friday's heart through music but all in vain. The writer has presented all such heterogeneous and multiple details of such attempts in order to accomplish de-territorialization. Rather she attempts to make Friday understand language beyond the few words he already knows in order to re-territorialize him.

Fourth postulate of rhizomatous book is 'Assignifying Rupture'. Deleuze and Guattari hence defined the characteristic in the following words:

A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines or on new line... Every rhizome contains lines of segmentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialized, organized, signified, attributed, etc; as well as lines of de-territorialization down which it constantly flees. (Deleuze, & Guattari, 1987, p. 9)

They have defined the path of rhizomatous endeavor as a non-linear and rather abrupt passage where the twists and turns of the plot are deliberate and evoke a sense of independence. 'Asignifying Rupture' is inclusion of various incidents in the novels those can be branched as individual, independent and separate story line. This is discernible in *Summertime* when an interviewer tells all about Mr. Coetzee, the story of that particular character ends instantly as the next chapter carries a different narrator with new perspective.

Coetzee has employed an 'Asignifying Rupture', as Julia expresses her feelings about the difference of her story line and that of surrogate Coetzee. His presence in Julia's life is nothing more than a fissure. She says "From my point of view the story of John may have been just one episode among many in the long narrative of my marriage" (Coetzee, 2009, p. 44).

Later on, the story of Margot in *Summertime*, who is in love with Coetzee since her childhood, lays the bedrock of the story of a naive girl who wants stupendously from her life. She gives an account of her past with Coetzee in her meeting with Mr. Vincent. The story line diverges when Margot alleges "His declaration has certainly made her heart glow. What an odd character, this cousin of hers!" (Coetzee, 2009, p. 99). The writer has aptly drawn the overarching theme by portraying Coetzee unconcerned about these feelings of Margot. However, this can be independently sorted out as a separate story, an 'Asignifying Rupture'.

Adriana, in *Summertime*, who is a sole provider of two daughters palpably draws the attention of reader in describing the troubles of a fetid woman as an immigrant, a single mother and working woman. She becomes an 'Asignifying Rupture' as she comes up with a different story, not directly linked to the plot. Adriana describes her life as an arthritis in front of Mr. Vincent when she also expresses the pique and vexation when Coetzee comes to her dance classes. She elaborates her conflict with her daughter regarding their relationship with Coetzee. It can be studied as an independent story in itself.

Likewise, in *Foe*, there are three major phases of Susan's life. The first phase amounts to her life before her abandonment on the island. Although, the writer has not presented the details of her life before her arrival on the island, the second phase of her life is her arrival on the island. It is the time when she spends a year and more on the island. The third phase is her life after rescue. These various phases are segments that can be studied as independent stories, but these ruptures of rhizomatous characters have been connected with each other. Susan defines various phases of her life in these words "How much of my life consists in waiting! In Bahia I did little but wait... Here I wait for you to appear or for the book to be written that will set me free of Crusoe and Friday" (Coetzee, 1987, p. 66).

In *Foe*, the writer (Foe) yens for all the main currents of life of the protagonist Susan Barton. She has riveted the description of a confined life spent on the Island

where she has been abandoned. Moreover, Foe is interested in the explanation of all her life. On the contrary, she wants to discuss only one part of her life. Foe argues:

We therefore have five parts in all: the loss of the daughter; the quest for the daughter in Brazil; abandonment of the quest, and the adventure of the island; assumption of the quest by the daughter; and reunion of the daughter with her mother... As to novelty, this is lent by the island episode. (Coetzee, 1987, p. 117)

To him, only the story of her abandonment on the island is not a great story in itself but Susan does not concede to his idea of tethering together various ruptures from her life. Thus Coetzee has followed the tradition of incorporating 'Asignifying Rupture', a characteristic of rhizome. Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* aver:

These lines always tie back to one another. That is why one can never posit a dualism or a dichotomy, even in the rudimentary form of the good and the bad. You may make a rupture, draw a line of flight. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 9)

The above quoted lines elaborate the rhizomatous and 'Asignifying' characteristic where one story can be detached from the main current and carries a different line of thinking pattern and a different action.

After an intensive study of *Summertime* and *Foe*, it transpires that these novels resonate with all the salient features of a rhizomatous book as described by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Coetzee has created non-arboreal and abstract characteristics in his writings which are detached and bracketed at the same time. This proves that Coetzee has a blueprint of a rhizomatous book in his mind that can be found in his acclaimed novels.

Conclusion

The research paper has explored the notion of rhizomatous book as discussed by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* and its resonance in *Summertime* and *Foe* by Coetzee. This paper vindicates the existence of rhizomatous characteristics including connectivity, heterogeneity, multiplicity, the idea of de-territorialization, re-territorialization and 'Asignifying Rupture' in the fiction of Coetzee. These characteristics are employed as stylistic devices in featuring non-arborealism in Coetzee's fiction.

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