3 THE INTERPLAY OF LINGUISTIC MEANS MANAGING THE READER'S ATTENTION: THE SLOW READING METHOD

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ABSTRACT

This research explores linguistic means of managing the reader's attention in Coetzee's novels with regard to slow reading method. The paper defines slow reading as a reading technique which aims not so much at construing various textual senses, as at probing those features of the literary text that slow down the process of its reading and comprehension, thus stimulating the reader's deep reflective inferences. It is found that one of the most striking aspects of Coetzee's works, on both formal and semantic levels, is their ludic stylistics, a heuristic artistic phenomenon that defines the ontology of the writer's novels and emerges in the literary text due to the unconventional combinations of various linguistic means. The latter, either individually or jointly, tend to create singular or multiple ludic effects. The hypothesis of the research stems from the assumption that the reading pace of Coetzee's fiction is slowed down by ludic stylistics, which engenders a detailed and deeply reflexive response by the reader. The methodology suggested is based on the cognitive theory of attention distribution with the method of the nodal points as the dominant one. The research results show that ludic stylistics, as a means of slowing down and hindering the act of reading, manifests itself through the ludic effects of structural and semantic accentuation and deaccentuation, instability, tension, ambivalence, indeterminacy, distortion, and lacunarity. Such ludic effects are viewed as the triggers that enable grabbing and maintaining the reader's attention.

KEYWORDS

Linguistic means, game, slow reading, text, ludic effect, ludic stylistics, reader's inferences.

> *Every text, after all, is a lazy machine asking the reader to do*
> *some of its work. What a problem it would be if a text were to*
> *say everything the receiver is to understand — it would never end.*
> *Umberto Eco*

3.1 SLOW READING AS A TOOL OF COGNITION

Revealing the inextricable relationship between the reader and the text, Iser in his *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* insists that the process of reading largely depends on

the properties of the latter: "The text only takes on life when it is realized, and furthermore the realization by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader – though this in turn is acted upon by different patterns of the text" [1].

Methodologically, reading can be discussed from two perspectives. First, it is considered as a reader's active, constructive, and interactive mental activity aiming to construe textual senses rather than mechanically perceive the textual reality [2]. Second, reading constitutes a set of practices, methods, and techniques intended for extracting information from the written text, its perception and understanding [3].

Since a literary text always holds a certain mystery and poses thought-provoking questions, it demands an emotional and spiritual tension on the part of the reader, which motivates his / her effective cooperation and co-creativity. Barthes in *From Work to Text* underscores that "the plural or demonical texture can bring with it fundamental changes in reading" [4], thus managing the addressees' cognitive activity as well as directing their attention.

This paper assumes that in reading practices the intentional and receptive properties of the literary text can be studied through a number of game models. The latter are also able to reveal the specificity of the author-text-reader relationship in the course of literary communication.

The relevance of viewing literary communication in ludic terms is explained by the game's ability to overcome stereotypes and conventions, to function as a form of the individual's free selfexpression. Barthes clarifies that here the game must be treated as a polysemantic term: "the text itself "plays" [...]; and the reader plays twice over: he plays at the Text (ludic meaning), he seeks a practice which reproduces it; but, so that this practice is not reduced to a passive, interior mimesis [...], he plays the Text [4]. Thus, the game turns the reader from *homo legens* to *homo ludens*.

According to Eco, in the process of text creation the author applies a system of codes that attribute definite meanings to the expressions that use them [5]. From the ludic perspective, while reading the addressee construes textual senses via a ludic code which objectivizes these senses.

Although literary games have been extensively researched in contemporary linguistics [6, 7], little attention has been paid to the receptive and methodological aspects of gaming in fiction. This paper aims to fill in the lacunae which can be observed in recent studies concerning the methods of reading games in fictional narratives.

The research employs the metaphor of game to reading practices in Coetzee's novels. If reading is viewed in ludic terms, then, like any game, it:

1) entails the reader's active, creative search aiming to decipher the meaning of the text;

2) adheres to a particular scenario and implies some rules;

3) focuses more on the process rather than on the expected outcome;

4) is characterized by the increased emotionality.

The core of this paper is the concept of *slow reading* which can effectively specify the author-text-reader communication regulated by the ludic principles. The earliest explicit reference to the notion of "slow reading" appears in Nietzsche's preface to *Daybreak* [8]. The philosopher views philology as a "connoisseurship of the word" requiring the reader to take the time to read [8].

Metaphorically, the process of slow reading is treated in terms of eating books [8]. Although, nowadays this famous metaphor of Bacon tends to be replaced by a reversed metaphor which foregrounds the opposite idea – it is not the reader who swallows the information; it is rather the information that eats them up [8].

Slow reading is defined as an attentive, thoughtful, and deep perusal, the one that is characterized by a close attention to details [9, 10], all sorts of "language trifles" [11]. It is the reading "under the microscope" [11], aimed at understanding various language "hindrances", difficult and incomprehensible moments, "hottest spots" – all those textual elements which interfere with the adequate interpretation of the text, on the one hand [11], and motivate the reader to think outside the box, on the other hand. Miedema points out that slow reading is about reading at a reflective pace [8].

Albeit the term "slow reading" is associated with such related notions as "close reading", "quiet reading", "repeated rereading", "analytical reading", and "critical reading", it is not equal to them.

Slow reading is inherently interactive, immersive, and creative. This type of reading enacts a deep immersion into the text, engages the reader in a special atmosphere of intellectual search, giving him / her the opportunity to feel the joy of discovering something new, to see something familiar in a new way.

The research material comprises 200 ludic contexts, singled out from the selected novels written by John Maxwell Coetzee. His fiction is proved to be ingenious, experimental, and characterized by the fundamental change of conventional literary forms. One of the dominant principles that underlies the author's idiosyncratic innovative experiments with the traditional literary forms is the principle of game.

The idea of analyzing Coetzee's fiction through the prism of slow reading method is prompted by Wilm's *The Slow Philosophy of John Maxwell Coetzee* [12]. In his monograph, the scholar explores the philosophy and aesthetics of slowness in Coetzee's oeuvre. Specifically, Wilm singled out and discussed those literary tactics employed in Coetzee's fiction which "stimulate inquiry, argument, and meaning-making in a slow way" [12]. In his research, Wilm proves the idea that "Coetzee's prose explores ideas rather than posit them, it suggests them rather than professes them, it hovers over ideas, opinions, theories and illuminates them from various perspectives and in that way keeps questions raised" [12].

Following Wilm, we consider slow reading as "a method that is not a flashy way of re-describing close reading or other hermeneutic models" [12]. Defining slow reading, the author argues that "slow reading does not ask what a text *means*, it asks how a text can be *reflected* upon, how it can be *responded* to, what its *effects* are [12]. Also, he claims that slow reading rests on the assumption that "a certain kind of literature actually engenders a slow, detailed, deeply reflexive response by the reader" [12].

This research hypothesizes that the process of reading and interpreting the novels of Coetzee is slowed down by various ludic effects which give rise to ludic stylistics.

Accordingly, this paper sets out to explore those textual means that enable the emergence of ludic effects in Coetzee's fiction, on the one hand, and manage the reader's attention, on the

other hand, thus arousing a deep introspection and / or reflection on the part of the reader. The textual means of directing the hypothetical reader's attention are discussed in terms of the slow reading method.

3.2 LUDIC STYLISTICS AS THE UNCONVENTIONAL COMBINATIONS OF TEXTUAL ELEMENTS

Regarded as a system of language resources that enable the play with the reader, the term "ludic stylistics" is used primarily in reference to playful texts [6]. In such texts, the play with the reader results from his / her stereotypical vision of the text, its semantics and structure. Thereby, the essence of the receptive gaming lies in playing with the reader's expectations.

Ludic stylistics refers to the unconventional combinations of textual elements of any rank used by the authors to create specific value in their works. It reveals itself through a wide range of ludic effects which constitute the expected result(s) of literary gaming. The heterogeneity of textual elements that give rise to ludic stylistics prompts the differentiation of its two levels — macro- and micro. The microlevel of ludic stylistics covers various verbal means of generating ludic effects [13], whereas its macrolevel is represented by plot-building, compositional, and narrative techniques [6].

Consequently, the ludic stylistics of novels under consideration is fostered by various sense-making and text-building games which highlight its ontological dimensions — semantics and structure. In turn, the game is manifested by a broad array of ludic devices based on the unconventional usage of various linguistic means — lexical, lexico-semantic, syntactic, plot-building as well as compositional.

In Coetzee's fiction, the term "ludic device", or technique, is closely related to the concept of *semantic nonadditivity* [14], i.e. "not having a numerical value equal to the sum of values for the component parts" [15]. Regarding literary texts, semantic nonadditivity is explained as follows: "the content of the literary text is never equal to the sum of the meanings it is made up of" [14]. Iriskhanova employed the nonadditivity phenomenon to illuminate the cognitive background for the functioning of various stylistic devices in literary texts [16]. Specifically, she divides all stylistic devices into two groups: additive and nonadditive. Additive devices are aimed at maximizing the amount of the information they convey while ensuring consistency and accuracy. Besides, these devices are meant to minimize various "hindrances" (ambivalence, semantic gaps, occasional words, etc.), thus saving the recipient's cognitive efforts which are not directly intended to comprehend the information. Nonadditive devices are designed not so much to communicate a range of conventional meanings, but to generate new, emergent textual senses. Their purpose is to maximize the reader's inference efforts by creating all sorts of "obstacles", such as semantic gaps, referential shifts, violations of language norms, etc. [16].

In view of the game's ability to make familiar textual elements unfamiliar, we assume that ludic techniques belong to the group of nonadditive devices. In other words, they can function as those elements that, according to Eco, are able to slow down the reading process, gradually setting the rhythm, appropriate for the text comprehension [5]. Moreover, various gaming techniques

allow the reader to focus his / her attention on the author's stylistic choices, to concentrate not only on *what* the writer says, but on *how* s/he does it. Thus, following Wilm, we emphasize that various gaming techniques slow down the act of reading, while intensifying the act of reflexive responding [12].

Slow reading practices in Coetzee's works adhere to the cognitive theory of attention distribution in language and text [13]. This conception is based on the idea of selective perception, processing and keeping of information [17]. The point is that in order to fulfill a certain task, we intentionally give more prominence to some features (objects) than to others [17].

Thereby, in terms of ludic stylistics, the slow reading method in Coetzee's novels implies two main stage:

1. *The identification of textual fragments that represent the linguistic signals of ludic stylistics manifestations through the "nodal points" technique.*

2. *The analysis of linguistic and cognitive mechanisms for generating ludic effects that function as triggers for the reader's inferences.*

Let us consider these stages in detail.

3.3 THE IDENTIFICATION OF TEXTUAL FRAGMENTS THAT REPRESENT THE LINGUISTIC SIGNALS OF LUDIC STYLISTICS MANIFESTATIONS THROUGH THE "NODAL POINTS" TECHNIQUE

Since slow reading is intended to reveal those features of the literary text that induce slow, deep, and reflexive response on the part of the reader [12], any text can be viewed as a system of certain "nodes" or "plexuses" which explicate the cooperation and co-creativity between the text and its empirical reader [5].

Applying these ideas to Coetzee's fiction, the paper considers the technique of nodal points to be extremely effective for the identification and analysis of lingual signals of games. This technique allows combining the analysis of the text as a whole with a linguistic and cognitive interpretation of its separate fragments. It also helps the reader to center on those elements of the text that are essential for its comprehension and interpretation.

It should be pointed out that the technique of nodal points is related to Arnold's theory of salient positions of the text [18] which develops Riffaterre's conception of stylistic context [19].

As is known, Arnold defines salient positions as perceptually significant parts of the text which accumulate those elements that are critical for conveying the main theme(s) of the text [18]. The researcher considers the title, epigraph, beginning and ending of the text as its salient positions [18]. Nevertheless, the rhythmic pattern of the text consists not only of its salient positions but also of weak ones. The former are regarded as meaningful and informative textual elements that ensure both semantic and structural unity of the text [20]. The latter signify the text's discreteness, its semantic and structural partitioning. Being less informative than salient positions, the weak positions do not render the central meaning of the text [20].

Both salient positions and nodal points represent important text- and meaning-making milestones in reading practices. However, the distribution of nodal points is not limited to the text's title, epigraph, beginning and ending, they run through a whole text. In course of reading literary games, nodal points mark various "ludic impulses" that signal about crucial stages in semantic and structural dynamism.

The paper elaborates the typology of nodal points in Coetzee's novels regarding the following criteria:

A. ***The distribution of nodal points in the text:*** *single* or *multiple*.

B. ***The cognitive mechanism of nodal points identification*** with reference to the level of salience of a particular ludic device: *structurally* and *semantically conspicuous / inconspicuous*.

C. ***The principle of ludic text- and meaning-making the nodal point is related to***: *structural* and *semantic accentuation* and *deaccentuation*, *instability*, *tension*, *ambivalence*, *indeterminacy*, *distortion*, *lacunarity*.

Keeping in view the ability of literary games to allocate the reader's attention – from the high focus of concentration to the abrupt unconscious shift of attention with a further loss of it – the nodal points in Coetzee's fiction can be defined through cognitive mechanisms of focusing and defocusing [16].

Such mechanisms allow tracing the literary text's perceptually conspicuous and inconspicuous parts which jointly mark crucial changes in its semantics and structure brought about by various games.

Let us consider the fragment from Coetzee's Dusklands.

*On evenings when **the sober edge of reality is sharpest, when my assembled props feel most like notions out of books** (my home, for example, out of a La Jolla décor catalog, my wife out of a novel that waits fatefully for me in a library in provincial America), **I find my hand creeping towards the briefcase at the foot of my desk as toward the bed of my existence but also, I will admit, as toward an encounter full of delicious shame**. I uncover my photographs and leaf through them again. **I tremble and sweat, my blood pounds, I am unstrung and fit this night only for shallow, bilious sleep**. Surely, I whisper to myself, **if they arouse me like this** I am a man and these images of phantoms a subject fit for me* [21].

The attentionality of the passage above is achieved by means of bringing psychonarrative game to the focus of narration. Such game is signaled by the semantics of intrusiveness [7] grounded in the psychological phenomenon of intrusiveness (lat. *inrusion* – a thrusting, or pushing in). It objectivizes the destructive impact of the external events on the narrator's / character's inner world, thus rendering exaggerated fictionalized psychological senses. In literary text, intrusiveness takes the form of the narrator's / character's self-immersion into their inner world, persistent, repetitive, sometimes even obsessive-compulsive experience of some psychotraumatic events [7]. As a marker of ludic stylistics, intrusiveness is verbalized here via lexical and figurative means portraying the main character's paradoxical psychoemotional state of agitation (*if they arouse me like this*) deepened by the feeling of shame. Eugene Dawn's state is caused by the anticipation of photographs depicting the atrocities of the Vietnam War. Physiologically, such feelings and emotions reveal themselves through shudder (*tremble*), profuse perspiration (*sweat*), rapid heart rate (*my blood pounds*), sleep deprivation (*shallow, bilious sleep*), and the excessive nervousness which

is metaphorically viewed in terms of the stretched strings (*I am unstrung*). The epithet *delicious* in the expression *delicious shame* underscores Eugene Dawn's contradictory feelings brought about by this event.

Defocusing is considered to be a crucial cognitive mechanism of text perception being viewed as an essential requisite of language gaming and linguistic creativity as a whole [13]. While reading Coetzee' novels, the addressee's attention can be refocused, for instance, due to numerous games based on the incorporation of non-literary narratives into the structure of the main fictional narrative:

"On television last night, a BBC documentary which argues that, for reasons of his own, the US administration chooses to keep alive the myth of Al Qaida as a powerful secret terrorist organization with cells all over the world, whereas the truth is that Al Qaida has been more or less destroyed and what we see today the terror attacks by autonomous groups of Muslim radicals. [...]

Because it is too much to expect her to read my hand writing, I record each day's output on a dictaphone tape and give her both tape and manuscript to work from." [22].

In the passage from *Diary of a Bad Year* the reader's attention is hooked owing to the interplay of two different types of discourse – literary and essayistic. Being included into the structure of the literary narrative, the text of the essay fragments the plot and composition of the whole narrative, on the one hand, and destroys the semantic unity of the literary narrative, on the other hand. Specifically, the plot revolving around the relationships between Anya and Señor C, whom she helps to type essays, and around the futile attempts of Alan, Anya's boyfriend, to get hold of the writer's money, is constantly interrupting by the essay narratives. It is worth noting that these essays are not related thematically to the principal plot.

3.4 THE ANALYSIS OF LINGUISTIC AND COGNITIVE MECHANISMS FOR GENERATING LUDIC EFFECTS TRIGGERING THE READER'S INFERENCES

The interpretation of linguistic and cognitive mechanisms that underlie the ludic stylistics in Coetzee's fiction is done through cognitive, semantico-stylistic, contextual-interpretative, and narrative analyses. It allows ascertaining the following effects that give impetus to ludic stylistics in the texts in question: *structural and semantic accentuation and deaccentuation, structural and semantic instability, structural and semantic tension, structural and semantic ambivalence, structural and semantic indeterminacy, structural and semantic distortion, structural and semantic lacunarity*. As markers of ludic stylistics in Coetzee's fiction, these effects slow down, hinder the acts of reading, thus arousing a deep reflective response on the part of the reader. Let us turn to the analysis of linguistic and cognitive mechanisms of generating ludic effects in Coetzee's selected novels in detail.

A. The effect of structural and semantic accentuation / deaccentuation.

This ludic effect is brought about by all sorts of structural and semantic transformations in the narrative space of the novels. For example, the shift of the narrative focus from the description

of events to the portrayal of characters' inner worlds entails the creation of the foregrounded, hypertrophied psychologism which marks psychonarrative gaming:

*"Since the news came of his son's death, **something has been ebbing out of him that he thinks of as firmness. I am the one who is dead**, he thinks; or rather, **I died but my death failed to arrive**. His sense of **his own body is that it is strong, sturdy**, that **it will not yield of its own accord. His chest is like a barrel with sound staves.** His heart will go on beating for a long time. Nevertheless, **he has been tugged out of human time**. The stream that carries him still moves forward, still has direction, even purpose; but that purpose is no longer life. **He is being carried by dead water, a dead stream"** [23].*

The excerpt from Coetzee's *The Master of Petersburg* exposes the protagonist's emotional response to the death of his stepson and the man's ruminations about his future life without the beloved offspring. The man becomes so distraught that he himself feels like dead. As an indicator of ludic stylistics, the hypertrophied psychologism unveils a conflict between the man's physical and spiritual existence. Such experience is characteristic of the man who feels sad about his stepson's death. The belief that a person's soul dies in a state of grief (*I am the one who is dead*) is verbalized throught the metaphors of death (*I died but my death failed to arrive; he has been tugged out of human time; He is being carried by dead water, a dead stream*). Despite the demise of the soul, the body is still alive and clings to life. This assumption is rendered by the epithets *strong* and *sturdy* as well as by the simile *His chest is like a barrel with sound staves*. Jointly, these figurative means create the image of a physically strong man.

B. The effect of structural and semantic instability.

Prigogine states that an increasing interest in the phenomenon of instability within the framework of contemporary studies springs from the idea of the constructive role of time, new knowledge about dynamic and unstable systems, the discovery of non-equilibrium systems in the field of exact sciences, etc. [24]. In terms of philosophy, instability is defined as a state of a certain system, characterized by the heterogeneity and asynchronicity of all its processes [24]. Additionally, instability is regarded not only as an unstable state, but also as a structurally complex sequence of changes which defines the role and place of stability in this system [25]. Linguistically, instability is viewed as an uncertainty caused by the possibility of a sudden change in the present situation [26].

The concept of instability is also relevant for the study of structural and semantic gaming in Coetzee's novels. It is explained by the fact that the game itself is characterized by instability, it tends to intentionally destabilize the narrative, compositional as well as semantic status of the literary text.

The structural instability in Coetzee's works is detected due to a variety of *deictic shifts* [27] in the text's narrative, plot, and compositional structures. The semantic instability results from the innovative combinations of lexical, lexico-syntactic, and figurative means. Coetzee's *Foe* can serve as a good example of the structural and semantic instability that hinder the act of reading this novel:

1. *"**There I** lay sprawled on **the hot sand**, **my** head filled with the orange blaze of the sun, **my** petticoat (which was all I had escaped with) baking dry upon **me**, tired, grateful, like all the saved.*

[…] "Castaway," **I** said with **my** thick dry tongue. "**I** am cast away. **I** am all alone." And **I** held out **my** sore hands" [28].

2. "**April 15ᵗʰ**

We are now settled in **lodgings in Clock Lane off Long Acre**. I go by the name Mrs Cruso, which you should bear in mind. **I have a room on the second floor"** [28].

3. "**The staircase** was dark and mean. **My** knock echoed as if on emptiness. But **I** knocked a second time, and heard a shuffling, and from behind the door a voice, his voice, low and cautious. It is **I**, **Susan Barton**, I announced – **I** am alone, with Friday" [28].

4. "**The staircase** is dark and mean. On the landing **I** stumble over a body. It does not stir, it makes no sound. By the light of a match **I** make out a woman or a girl, her feet drawn up inside a long grey dress, her hands folded under her armpits; or is it that her limbs are unnaturally short, the stunted limbs of a cripple?" [28].

The narrative structure of *Foe* drags the reader into "a labyrinth-like reading" [29], along with a perplexed understanding to the story. Compositionally, the novel comprises a series of frame narratives, three of which are represented from Susan Barton's, the main character's, point of view, while the narrator of the fourth story remains unknown.

The narrative instability that marks the text-building game in this novel is detected due to an abrupt change of the narrator's subjective and spatiotemporal coordinates. Specifically, three passages cited here are represented from the perspective of Susan Barton, whose voice is identified through a number of linguistic units with subjective semantics (*I, my, me, Susan Barton*). However, the spatial coordinates of the narrative vary (*from the island to the house on Clock Lane, not far from Long Acre, and then to Mr. Fo's apartment*) and are indicated by the lexical units of spatial semantics (*there, the hot sand, lodgings in Clock Lane off Long Acre, a room on the second floor, the staircase*). The time frame of the passages is also unstable – from indeterminate (the first passage) to chronologically fixed in the second (April 15ᵗʰ) and again indeterminate in the third fragment.

In the fourth passage, the location of the narrator is undefined, resulting from the subjective indeterminacy and spatiotemporal ambivalence. The narrator (*I*) remains unspecified throughout the whole story. The spatial coordinates of the fourth fragment (*staircase*) suggest a house, but its belongingness is not clear. The spatial ambivalence emerges due to the same spatial setting (the staircase) in the third and fourth passages, which hints the story ends at Mr. Foe's house.

Hence, compositionally, the above quoted passages are arranged according to the principle of *mise-en-abyme*. Nevertheless, the narrative instability is also traced within each part, and the ludic effect is brought about by the semantic indeterminacy and / or ambivalence arising from the interplay between several narratives in the structure of the whole novel. It is reflected in the following passages:

"Let **me** tell you my story," said I; "for I am sure you are wondering who I am and how I come to be here" [28].

"***I would gladly now recount to you the history of this singular Cruso***, as I heard it from his own lips. **But the stories he told me were so various, and so hard to reconcile one with another**, that I was more and more driven to conclude age and isolation had taken their toll on his memory, and he no longer knew for sure what was truth, what fancy" [28].

The destabilization of the principal narrative is caused by a retrospective "leap" which alludes to the story of Susan who tells about the search of her daughter. Thus, the main character manages to interweave this narrative into the story of her stay on the island. The shift of the narrative level is foregrounded by the word combination *my story*.

An additional layering of the narrative is done by incorporating into its structure, via mise-en-abyme principle, the story of Cruso (*the history of this singular Cruso*). As Cruso's narrative abounds in various contradictions (*But the stories he told me were so various, and so hard to reconcile one with another*), it prevents Susan from telling an unambiguous and coherent story, thus reinforcing semantic indeterminacy in this novel.

C. The effect of structural and semantic tensions.

As signals of ludic stylistics, the zones of tension in the novels under analysis grow out from the interplay between two types of tension – semantic and structural. Moreover, this interaction is accompanied by the emergence of the emotional tension. The structural tension arises due to the collision and / or the conflict of properties of old and new literary forms brought about by text-building gaming, whereas the semantic tension springs from various deviations as a result of meaning-making games. Such games give impetus to semantic emergence in the literary text. The sources of semantic tension are asymmetric processes caused by gaming, which involves structural and semantic re-arrangements of the conventional literary forms, thus changing the program of their intended interpretation:

"He has **a vision** of his mother in her big double bed, **crouched, her knees drawn up, her back bared. Out of her back, out of the waxy, old person's flesh protrude three heedless: not the tiny needles of the acupuncturist or the voodoo doctor but thick, grey needles, steel or plastic: knitti theng needles**. The needles have not killed her, there is no need to worry about that, she breathes regularly in her sleep. Nevertheless, she lies impaled.

Who has done it? Who would have done it?

Such loneliness, he thinks, hovering in spirit over the old woman in the bare room. **His heart is breaking; sadness pours down like a grey waterfall behind his eyes"** [30].

The passage from Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* represents an oneiric narrative – the vision of Elizabeth Costello's son, in which he sees his mother in an unusual way. The structural tension grows out of an abrupt inclusion of a dream narrative in the structure of the text. The dream narrative that portrays the son's emotional response to the vision interrupts the principle story-telling focusing on the arrival of the famous writer, Elizabeth Costello, in the United States where she is to be awarded the Stowe Prize.

In the above cited context, the semantic tension arises thanks to the logical and semantic ambiguity brought about by a clash between illusory, abnormal oneiric reality and the quasi-reality

of fictional narrative. The deviant character of the oneiric reality is implied by Elizabeth Costello's paradoxical visual image in the son's dream which highlights the woman's posture (*crouched, her knees drawn up, her back bared*), the spot on her body where the needles are inserted (*Out of her back [...] protrude three heedless*), the size and the variety of these needles (*not the tiny needles of the acupuncturist or the voodoo doctor but thick, gray needles, steel or plastic: knitting needles*).

Additionally, the semantic tension is increased in the quoted passage by the innovative combinability of verbal imagery:

(i) the metaphor of a broken heart (*his heart is breaking*);

(ii) the simile in which the power of human sadness is compared to a waterfall flowing over a person (*sadness pours down like a grey waterfall behind his eyes*);

(iii) emotionally colored vocabulary employed in the description of the woman and her psychological state (*the waxy, old person's flesh, loneliness*).

D. The effect of structural and semantic indeterminacy.

As attention triggers, the zones of structural and semantic indeterminacy emerge in Coetzee's literary texts thanks to the violation of their structural characteristics and "diffusion" of textual senses under the influence of structural and semantic games:

"*The wind has dropped, and now **the snowflakes come floating down**, the first fall of the year, flecking the rooftiles with white. All morning I stand at my window watching the snow fall. When I cross the barracks yard it is already inches deep and **my footsteps crunch with an eerie lightness**.*

In the middle of the square there are children at play building a snowman. Anxious not to alarm them, but inexplicably joyful, I approach them across the snow.

They are not alarmed, they are too busy to cast me a glance. They have completed the great round body, now they are rolling a ball for the head.

"Someone fetch things for the mouth and nose and eyes," says the child who is their leader. It strikes me that the snowman will need arms too, but I do not want to interfere.

They settle the head on the shoulders and fill it out with pebbles for eyes, ears, nose and mouth. One of them crowns it with his cap.

It is not a bad snowman.

This is not the scene I dreamed of. *Like much else nowadays I leave it feeling stupid, **like a man who lost his way long ago but presses on along a road that may lead nowhere**"* [31].

In the fragment from *Waiting for the Barbarians*, structural and semantic indeterminacy arises due to the game with the novel's ending. Its essence lies in the depiction of the repeated events, which entails the "diffusion" of textual senses.

First, at the end of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Coetzee intentionally redepicts, although with some variations, the episode about the children's play with snow which is previously seen by the protagonist in his dream. The fact that the game in the ending is not imaginary, but real, makes the reader assume that the man's dreams have come true. At the same time, he emphasizes that this is not his dream (*This is not the scene I dreamed of*).

Second, at the end of the novel the semantic indeterminacy emerges because of sudden oscillations in the tonal system of the narrative – from the dramatic and even tragic tone, generally peculiar to the author's novels, to optimism that inspires hope, and then again to hopelessness. The image of a person who cherishes the hope is viewed in terms of symbolism of the first snow (*the snowflakes come floating down, my footsteps crunch with an eerie lightness, It is not a bad snowman*). The motif of a losing hope is conveyed through the image of a man who lost his way long ago (*like a man who lost his way long ago*) and takes the road which probably leads nowhere (*presses on along a road that may lead nowhere*). The idea of uncertainty is rendered by a stylistically conspicuous indefinite pronoun *nowhere* completing the novel.

E. The effect of structural and semantic ambivalence.

Ambivalence (*ambi... + lat. valentia strength*) is thought of as a pertinent feature of the game. It means a simultaneous experience of positive and negative emotional or cognitive orientations toward a person, situation, object, task, or goal [32].

In reading practices, ambivalence implies the ability of a particular object to simultaneously evoke two opposite emotions in the reader, thus grabbing his / her attention. This engenders different readings of some textual fragments, which is demonstrated by an example from Coetzee's autobiographical novel *Youth*:

*"Yet he cannot accept that the life he is leading here in London is without plan or meaning. A century ago poets deranged themselves with opium or alcohol so that from the brink of madness they could issue reports on their visionary experiences. By such means they turned themselves into seers, prophets of the future. Opium and alcohol are not his way, he is **too frightened** of what they might do to his health. But are **exhaustion** and **misery** not capable of performing the same work? Is living on the brink of **psychic collapse** not as good as living on the brink of **madness**? Why is it a **greater sacrifice**, a greater **extinction of personality**, to hide out in a garret room on the Left Bank for which you have not paid the rent, or wander from café to café, **bearded**, **unwashed**, **smelly**, bumming drinks from friends, than to dress in a black suit and do **soul-destroying** office work and submit to either **loneliness** unto **death** or **sex without desire**? Surely absinthe and **tattered** clothes are old fashioned by now. And what is heroic, anyway, about cheating a landlord out of his rent?"* [33].

In the passage above, structural and semantic ambivalence emerges owing to the semantic "abyss" brought about by free indirect discourse employed for presenting autobiographical events. According to Attridge, the use of the third person in fictional biographies "implicitly dissociates the narrative voice from the narrated consciousness" [34], creating a liminal ("in-between"), double narrative perspective, the viewpoint of otherness. Thereby, "we have a voice that seems to vibrate *between* a narrating and narrated consciousness" [35]. The speech of the autobiographical narrator seems to be "embedded" in the parlance of the protagonist, being simultaneously veiled by it. Additionally, the effect of semantic ambivalence is enhanced by Coetzee's confessional mode of presenting the autobiographical narrative in the form of free indirect speech.

The passage cited above depicts the protagonist's thoughts about his life in London, his hesitations on the desirability of living and working in the city. The narrator's voice is detected here through the point of view (the third person) as well as by the unemotional tone set at the beginning of the fragment (*Yet he cannot accept that life is leading here in London is without plan or meaning*). Conversely, the protagonist's voice is signaled by expressively and emotionally colored lexical units which point to John's cautious attitude to this dilemma: *too frightened, exhaustion, misery, psychic collapse, madness, sacrifice, extinction of personality, bearded, unwashed, smelly, soul-destroying, loneliness, death, sex without desire, tattered*. Syntactically, the protagonist's perspective is defined through a range of interrogative sentences which communicate his deep introspection, generate semantic and emotional tension of the text, and intensify the semantic ambivalence (*But are exhaustion and misery not capable of performing the same work? Is living on the brink of psychic collapse not as good as living on the brink of madness?*).

For presenting autobiographical events, Coetzee resorts not to the retrospective focus of fictional autobiography, but to the simultaneous narration, thus distancing the narrator's consciousness from the protagonist's voice (*Yet he cannot accept that the life he is leading here in London is without plan or meaning*), which serves as another source of semantic ambiguity. Explaining the specificity of such narrative mode, Attridge puts: "The use of the present tense and third person doesn't convey a desire to avoid responsibility or the absence of any sense of remorse; rather, it signals that the author has no interest in *making a case*, in convincing the reader of the unimpeachability of his motives or the fullness of his repentance" [34].

F. The effect of structural and semantic deformation.

As an inherent feature of creative activity, deformation is considered as an artistic technique, aiming at unconscious or intentional distortion of artistic forms in the artworks. Considering deformation as an object of literary creativity, Vygotsky defined it as a transfer of the literary text's elements to new material [36], which entails transformations or modifications of one or another element [36]. According to the scholar, the material includes words, sounds, images, fragments of the plot, textual meanings, etc. [36].

In literary texts, deformation processes are engendered by the author's intention to consciously rethink the known facts of reality. Deformation illuminates the writer's desire to go beyond the automatism of the stereotypical speech. Literary deformation can be viewed as a means of foregrounded expressiveness of literary forms aiming to highlight some of their essential characteristics.

Structural deformation of narrative forms entails a distortion of their textual senses. The ludic effect of semantic deformation is brought about by the emergence of various contradictions between the semantics of textual elements of the original literary forms and their deformed variations, which is exemplified by the following extract:

*"In the last corner, under the transoms, half buried in sand, his knees drawn up, his hands between his thighs, **I come to Friday**.*

*In the last corner, under the transoms, half buried in sand, his knees drawn up, his hands between his thighs, **I come to Friday**.*

I tug his woolly hair, finger the chain about his throat. 'Friday,' I say, I try to say, kneeling over him, sinking hands and knees into the ooze, **'what is this ship?'** *[...]*

He turns and turns till he lies at full length, his face to my face. The skin is tight across his bones, his lips are drawn back. I pass a fingernail across his teeth, trying to find a way in.

His mouth opens. **From inside him comes a slow stream, without breath, without interruption. It flows up through his body and out upon me; it passes through the cabin, through the wreck; washing the cliffs and shores of the island, it runs northward and southward to the ends of the earth. Soft and cold, dark and unending, it beats against my eyelids, against the skin of my face"** [28].

The quoted passage constitutes the final episode of Coetzee's *Foe* which is regarded as a postcolonial version of Defoe's famous novel *Robinson Crusoe*, reinterpreted in a metafictional way [37]. The fragment depicts the meeting of an unknown narrator with the protagonist named Friday (*I come to Friday*). The narrator seeks to find out the details of the shipwreck ('*what is this ship?*'). In this way the reader is dropped directly to the beginning of the novel – [...] *towards the strange island, for a while swimming as I had rowed, against the current, then all at once free of its grip, carried by the waves into the bay and on to the beach* [38]. The effect of semantic deformation emerges due to two narrative techniques:

1) the shift of the narrative perspective (at the beginning of the novel the story is told by Susan Barton, while the narrator of the novel's finale remains unknown to the reader);

2) simultaneous maintaining of the spatial coordinates of the narration (*beach*) and identity of the narrated event (*shipwreck*).

Coetzee's game with the canonical version of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* by means of its deformation lies in a paradoxical choice to imbue Friday with a "silent voice" (*From inside him comes a slow stream, without breath, without interruption*). The idea of the power of "silent speech" is verbalized by visual and tactile hyperbolized imagery, whose dominant is the metaphor of washing (*washing the cliffs and shores of the island; it runs northward and southward to the ends of the earth it beats against my eyelids, against the skin of my face*).

G. The effect of structural and semantic lacunarity.

As is known, lacuna means a blank space or a missing part [39]. Gasparov underscores that lacunae, or gaps, are not "free spaces" in which you can insert any element, appropriate in form and content, they constitute blurred, not fully expressed spots, where the material intended for them is already visible with varying degrees of expressiveness [40]. In fiction, the distribution and functioning of gaps largely depends on the author's aesthetics, his / her individual style, historical and genre norms [41].

In acts of reading, various gaps represent the elements of textual indeterminacy [1] which engender slow and careful analysis, thus giving room for the reader's imagination and fantasy. Wilms assumes that "the protean gaps implemented in Coetzee's narratives [...] deliberately urge the reader to take a reflexive action and develop her own ways of thinking as well as her own ways of reading" [1]. This is demonstrated in the ending of Coetzee's *Age of Iron*:

"*Vercueil stood on the balcony staring out over **a sea of rustling leaves**. I touched his arm, his high, peaked shoulders, the bony ridge of his spine. Through chattering teeth I spoke: **'What are you looking at?'***

He did not answer.** I stood closer. **A sea of shadows** beneath us, and **the screen of leaves shifting, rustling, like scales over the darkness.

'Is it time?' I said.

*I got back into bed, into the tunnel between the cold sheets. The curtains parted; he came in beside me. For the first time **I smelled nothing**. He took me in his arms and held me with mighty force, so that **the breath went out of me in a rush. From that embrace there was no warmth to be had**"* [42].

Coetzee defined the end of *Age of Iron* as agitated, exciting, and "troubled" [38]. In the final episode the semantic of this novel, the effect of structural and semantic lacunarity is exerted due to the ambiguity introduced through visual, auditory, and tactile imagery, implemented to portray the setting of the text's ending. Verbally, the ambiguity is created by the sea metaphor (*a sea of rustling leaves; a sea of shadows*) as well as by the simile in which the screen of leaves behind the window is compared with a thin film (*the screen of leaves shifting, rustling, like scales over the darkness*). Jointly, these figures of speech foster the atmosphere of mystery and anxiety. The general tone of semantic ambiguity is enhanced by the silence of Vercueil, a homeless man, an alcoholic, whom Mrs. Curren, the protagonist of the novel, takes as the last refuge of the soul (*He did not answer*).

Additionally, the effect of semantic gap is increased due to the potential alternativeness in the episode's comprehension by the reader. It can be thought of either as a letter of a woman who is between life and death or as a letter of a woman who is in an altered state of consciousness, caused by potent drugs. Moreover, the passage can be viewed as a story told by an unknown narrator [43]. Though, the metaphor of death (*the breath went out of me in a rush*), the fact that the female's smell is lost (*I smelled nothing*), and that she does not feel the warmth of Vercueil's hugs (*from that embrace there was no warmth to be had*) allow the conclusion that the novel's end implies the death of the protagonist.

In the given passage, the plot gap appears as a result of the foregrounded defocusing of the novel's ending, thus provoking a rereading and / or rethinking of the work. It should be noted that Coetzee's choice of a deviant character – the one whose unreliability is explained by a terminal illness and consequently psychological inadequacy – to fostering the general tone of semantic uncertainty.

CONCLUSIONS

Slow reading, viewed as a method for working on the literary text, enacts the reader's deep immersion into the textual world, active and creative interaction in the "author-text-reader" mode.

Slow reading focuses not so much on the reconstruction of various textual senses, but on the reader's emotional and intellectual response to particular characteristics of the literary text. Slow reading gives wide room for the reader's reflexivity and interpretation, while revealing the intentional facet of the literary text, the author's stylistic idiosyncrasies.

The employment of slow reading method for the novels by Coetzee comes from the assumption that the ontology of his works is influenced by the linguistic and artistic phenomenon of ludic stylistics which illuminates the writer's innovative transformations of conventional literary forms regulated by the principles of game. Ludic stylistics of Coetzee's fiction is signaled by a number of ludic effects which constitute the intended result(s) of various text-building and meaning-making games unfolding in his novels. The research shows that it is ludic stylistics that slows down, hinders the reading rhythm of Coetzee's works as well as their perception and gives rise to the reader's numerous inferences. Consequently, the slowness in reading and interpreting the novels under consideration is caused by the ludic structural and semantic effects of accentuation and deaccentuation, instability, tension, ambivalence, indeterminacy, deformation, lacunarity. These effects are the results of the unconventional usage of various linguistic means – lexical, lexico-semantic, syntactic, figurative as well as plot-building, compositional, and narrative. The prospects of further research in this area are the exploration of cognitive mechanisms underlying literary communication governed by ludic principles.

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