

**“As he was Guarded by a Crystal Shield”: The Rapture of Words in  
“Postscript” of *Elizabeth Costello*, by J. M. Coetzee**

The novel *Elizabeth Costello*, by J. M. Coetzee ends with the chapter “Postscript: Letter from Elizabeth, Lady Chandos, to Francis Bacon”. This text refers to a letter from Hugo von Hofmannsthal, a fictional letter that Phillip, Lord Chandos, wrote to Francis Bacon. In the original letter, Phillip expresses his dissatisfaction with his power of literary creation, which is extinct. In the novel *Elizabeth Costello*, Phillip’s wife sent a letter to Francis Bacon, begging for help. As a wife, she considers herself a shadow of her husband, but she loves him and in the face of his suffering, she suffers as well. This text aims to analyse the description about this ravishment, the rapture, rupture of words that a literary creator has to face. For this, the concept of metafiction is used. Lady Chandos, Elizabeth Chandos, considers that the couple’s life is crumbling; she feels it was like her husband was under a “crystal shield”, the words no longer reached him, he could not hear them, he could not produce them. The abbreviation in the signature Elizabeth C. may refers to the writer Elizabeth Costello herself, who no longer feels able to write.

**Keywords:** *Elizabeth Costello*. Rapture. Ravishing. Metafiction.

*“Words no longer reach him, they shiver and shatter, it is as if he is guarded by a shield of crystal” Coetzee*

## Introduction

This study aims to analyse the writer’s rapture of words in the chapter “Letter of Elizabeth, Lady Chandos, to Francis Bacon”, which is part of the novel *Elizabeth Costello*, by J.M. Coetzee. For this, an investigation on the concept metafiction and ravishment (as something taken away), are going to be approach, as well as others novels by Coetzee that brings ravishment as topic.

The novelist, essayist and literary critic John Maxwell Coetzee was born in 1940, in Cape Town, South Africa. He studied at Cape Town University, where completed his Master on the novelist Ford Maddox Ford, which he wrote while he was living in England. In United States, Texas University finished his PhD, the thesis was about Samuel Beckett’s fiction. Coetzee published many fictional novels, essays, also autobiographical fiction. He won many prizes, among them Booker Prize (1983 e 1999) and in 2003 Nobel Prize of Literature.

For this paper, the idea is approach specifically one chapter of the novel *Elizabeth Costello* (2003). In *Elizabeth Costello*, Coetzee brings a consecrated Australian novelist created by the author; Elizabeth Costello, who gives eight lectures in different institutions around the world, crossing countries and continents. The novel culminates with a postscript: “Letter of Elizabeth, Lady Chandos, to Francis Bacon”.

For this, the concepts of “ravishing”, approached by Lacan and metafiction are used. Lacan mentions the idea of “ravish” connected to love, utilizing a novel as example: *The Ravishing of Lol Stein* (1964), by Marguerite Duras, a French novelist. Lacan writes then “Homenage to Marguerite Duras on *Le ravissement de Lol V. Stein*”. This rapture can be associated to the rapture of words in literary process of writing.

The overview about metafiction concept, brought by Faria (2012), allows a better understanding on it, although Waugh and Hutcheon approach the concept with different focuses, all consider especially that “metafiction is fiction about fiction”. Waugh reinforces the influence of the contemporary context on literary productions. When criticizing, dialoguing, and discussing textual construction methods in fictional narratives it explores “the fictionality of the world outside the literary text”. In referring to themselves, according to Hutcheon, there is a continuous mirroring of human actions.

### **“Ravishment/Rapture” in self-conscious literary writing**

John Maxwell Coetzee is a world-renowned writer, who won many prizes and who has a written engaged with his own culture and with modern culture in general. His novels and autobiographical fictions have intellectual, moral and political forces, allowing that through them, the reader better understand the world.

Coetzee, the writer, sees the world. This world, our world, is one of a history of artistic creation and of politics. The writer’s impetus is to find the source of our actions, real and imagined [...] The imagination behind these works is inspiring because his imagination is one of penetration. His characters possess the duality of our existence, as awareness of our own craving for silence, and at the same time, of our conviction for action (Reichblum 1996: 7-8 Introduction of *What is Realism*, in Coetzee 1996).

Coetzee moved to United States for his PhD studies, in University of Texas, Austin, he wrote his thesis about the fiction of Samuel Beckett: *The English fiction of Samuel Beckett: an essay in stylistic analysis* (1968). In 1968, moved to New York to work in academic area. In 1983, he won Booker Prize, with the book *Life & Times of Michael K* and in 1999, with the novel *Disgrace* won the second Booker Prize.

In 1972, Coetzee went back to Africa where until 2003, taught Literature for the English Department of Cape Town University, assuming several positions in academy, among them the Distinct Literature Professor. Simultaneously held positions in others universities from United States, especially in Chicago University. In 2003, Coetzee awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Since 2011, Coetzee is a Literature professor at The University of Adelaine, Australia. Topics like colonizer, colonized, politic, literature in society and reflections on themes related to human nature are recurrent; also essays about culture, South African literature, literary essays, autobiographical fictions and fictional lectures.

The imaginary writer Elizabeth Costello was born in 1928, Melbourne,

1 Australia, she lived in England and France. She was married twice and has  
 2 two sons. She is almost 67. Along her career, she published nine novels and  
 3 two poems books. The writer travels around the world giving lectures and  
 4 speeches at different universities. The narrative *Elizabeth Costello* is  
 5 structured in eight lectures and one postscript. Lecture 1: Realism; Lecture  
 6 2: The Novel in Africa; Lecture 3: The Life of Animals and The Philosopher  
 7 and the Animals; Lecture 4: The life of animals and Poets and the animals;  
 8 Lecture 5: The Humanities in Africa; Lecture 6: The problem of evil;  
 9 Lecture 7: Eros; Lecture 8: At the gate; Post-writing: Letter from Elizabeth,  
 10 Lady Chandos.

11 Derek Attridge, professor of York University mentions that Coetzee  
 12 used his successful previous lectures (1997-University of Princeton, 1996-  
 13 Bennington College) to constitute this novel, adding the final chapters:  
 14 "Eros", "At the Gate" and an epistolary part as postscript: "Letter of  
 15 Elizabeth, Lady Chandos, to Francis Bacon".

16 However, to locate Coetzee in the tradition of postmodern playfulness, teasing  
 17 the reader with fictional truths and truthful fictions is to overlook the much  
 18 more important engagement in his work with the demands and responsibilities  
 19 of writing and reading, an engagement that runs through these pieces as it  
 20 does through the novels and memoirs (Attridge 2003, p.12).  
 21  
 22

23  
 24 Thus, each part of *Elizabeth Costello* has its self-sufficiency (can be  
 25 read separately) the novel brings self-reflection and description with  
 26 philosophical and literary essayistic force. There is a strong metafictional  
 27 element in the novel, as the main character is a renowned novelist and her  
 28 lectures expose her points of view on different issues related to human  
 29 nature.

30 The researches of Zênia de Faria (2012) carry an overview on  
 31 "metafiction" concept and its advances along the years. Since the sixteenth  
 32 century and in subsequent centuries, many self-directed and self-questioning  
 33 narratives have emerged. According to some theorists, metafiction would  
 34 be one of the marks of postmodernity in literature (Faria 2012:238).

35 Over the years, other theorists have taken up the study and used the  
 36 term metafiction and its derivatives, but starting from the same point, always  
 37 considering that: "metafiction is fiction about fiction." Many terms were  
 38 applied to designate this approach, such as postmodern narrative, self-  
 39 reflexive, self-conscious fiction, nonfiction, postmodern fiction,  
 40 historiographic metafiction, fiction, neo-baroque fiction, introversion novel,  
 41 introspective fiction, superfiction, transfiction (Faria 2012: 240).

42 The American novelist William Gass, in 1970, used the term  
 43 "metafiction", who defines that the central concern in this type of text is its  
 44 own fictional doing. Patricia Waught contemplates the following definition:  
 45

46 Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing that self-consciously aspires  
 47 attention to its condition as an artifact in order to pose questions about the  
 48 relation between fiction and reality. It provides a critique of its own methods  
 49 of construction; such a writing not only examines the fundamental structures

of fictional narratives, but also explores the possible fictionality of the world outside the fictional literary text (Waugh 1985, *apud* Faria 2012:245).

Therefore, metafiction not only reflects on writing itself, but also surpasses the walls of poetics, because it considers real methods of a textual construction process. The literary critic Linda Hutcheon enhances the reflexes of contemporary society in metafictionality: "[...] it would be foolish to deny that metafiction today is recognized as a manifestation of postmodernism". The mobility and dynamism of current days strengthen the individual struggles of everyday life, so that livingness and experiences often become elements that compose fiction. Hutcheon establishes strong relations between the term metafiction and postmodernism:

The formal and thematic self-consciousness of metafiction today is paradigmatic of most of the cultural forms of what Jean-François Lyotard calls our "postmodern" world – from television commercials to movies, from comic books to video art. We seem fascinated lately by the ability of our human systems to refer to themselves in an endless mirroring process (Hutcheon 1984 *apud* Faria: 245).

The Canadian professor on Comparative Literature uses the expression "an endless mirroring process" as a strong presence in contemporary works, showing how reflexes of life transpose into poetics.

The last chapter of *Elizabeth Costello*: "Letter of Elizabeth, Lady Chandos, to Francis Bacon" treats on the ravishment and the rapture of words. Through the epistolary genre, it presupposes a sender called Elizabeth, Phillip's wife, who apologises for the letter formerly sent by Phillip, Lord Chandos, to Francis Bacon. This chapter refers to the letter by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, a fictional letter. In original letter, Phillip expresses his frustration with his failure in literary written, which was extinguished and Elizabeth asks for help in face of her husband's suffering and ravishment.

To a better understanding on the term "Ravishing", this paragraph carries some definitions brought by dictionaries. According to *Vocabulary.com*

The adjective ravishing describes something or someone of exceptional beauty. The adjective *ravishing* comes from the verb *ravish*, which is from the Latin word *rapere*, meaning to seize. In English, the verb meant to plunder or to carry away, and later a sense arose that meant to carry away in pleasure or to seduce.

The word "Rapture" is semantically related, it "is a feeling of emotional ecstasy so magical it's almost as if you've been transported to some other world. Coming to us from an old French word meaning "carried away". In *Michaelis Dictionary* the verb "ravish" means: "To pull, to take away something using force and violence, to rip; to take, detach, retain and take it by force; rapture, kidnap; seize oneself by love; fall in love, pounce".

There are many definitions, but I highlight "to plunder or to carry

away”, “to take away something using force and violence, to rip out”, “rapt” and “to seize”. The words “ravishment” and “rapture” are semantically related in this meaning.

The use I make for this term in literature consists on the effect of rapture the words, which causes the rupture with them, resulting in the impossibility of writing. Moment lived by writers when something supresses that their ideas flow from pen to paper sheet.

Lacan mentions the notion of “rapture” connected to love, having a novel as example to illustrate the concept: *The Ravishing of Lol Stein* (1964), by Marguerite Duras, a French novelist. Lacan writes the text: “Homenage to Marguerite Duras on *Le ravisement de Lol V. Stein*”. Lacan’s essay begins with the following words

*Le ravisement*- this word is enigmatic. Does it have an objective or a subjective dimension- is it a ravishing or a being ravished- as determined by Lol V. Stein?

Ravished. We think of the soul, and of the effect wrought by beauty. But we shall free ourselves, as best we can, from readily available meaning, by means of a symbol.

A woman who ravishes is also image imposed on us by this wounded figure, exiled from things, whom you dare not touch, but who makes you her prey.

The two movements, however, are knotted together in a cipher that is revealed in in a name skillfully crafted in the contour of writing: Lol V. Stein.

Lol V. Stein: paper wings, V, scissors, Stein, stone, in love’s guessing game you lose yourself (Lacan 1987: 7)

The character Lol, fiancée from Michael Richardson, is in a ball and watch without reaction her fiancé being taken by another woman, a woman that suddenly appeared in the ball. Lol V. Stein watches in a silent way the rapture of her fiancé, who was ravished by that strange lady. Michael Richardson dances with this woman and goes back to Lol, who jealously manifests, but even so, the fiancé leaves the ball with the ravishing woman. Lol, disillusioned, falls on the ground and passes out.

Giselle Gonçalves Mattos Moreira, in her paper “The Ravishing of R. B.” addresses to Duras’ novel and to Lacan’s concept

If Duras’s writing marks exactly this space between the narrative constructions and Lol’s shout, Lacan marks, on the other hand, that Lol, in her stammering, “can’t say she is suffering” (Lacan 2003:199). And even more: for Lacan, “being understood doesn’t suit for Lol, who is not saved from ravishment” (Lacan 2003:203). Finally, with Duras, we can say that it is only by celebrating “the taciturn nuptials of empty life with the indescribable object” (Lacan 2003:205).

Like Lol isn’t save from the ravishment/ rapture of her fiancé, also in fictional novel *Elizabeth Costello*, the character describes that the writer Phillip isn’t save from the ravish of his love object, the literary writing. Maybe Elizabeth Costello cannot save herself from this either.

For a writer there are many different moments in life, moments with company, moments of loneliness, and instants in reality, others in

1 imagination, phases of inspiration, and phases of ravishment / rapture of  
 2 words. Maurice Blanchot in the text "Literature and the Right to Death", of  
 3 *The Work of Fire* states on the writer's condition  
 4

5 The trouble is that the writer is not only several people in one, but each stage  
 6 of himself denies all the others, demands everything for itself alone, and does  
 7 not tolerate any conciliation or compromise. The writer must respond to  
 8 several absolute and absolutely different commands at once, and his morality  
 9 is made up of the confrontation and opposition of implacably hostile rules.  
 10 One rule says to him: "You will not write, you will remain nothingness, you  
 11 will keep silent, you will not know words" (Blanchot 1949 :312)  
 12

13 As Blanchot says, a writer is several people in one, who has to respond  
 14 to several demands and absolutes. Sometimes there are outside or inside  
 15 rules that require nothing more than silence: "If it were to become as mute  
 16 as a stone, as passive as the corpse enclosed behind that stone, its decision to  
 17 lose the capacity for speech would still be legible on the stone and would be  
 18 enough to wake that bogus corpse" (Blanchot 1949: 329). For a writer, the  
 19 incapacity of writing is like a temporary death.  
 20

## 21 22 **Methodology**

23  
24 The methodology involves an investigative study about the biography  
 25 and bibliography of J. M. Coetzee, a brief overview on the writer's  
 26 trajectory based on the University of Cape Town website. Then, I present the  
 27 concepts used in theoretical approaches: metafiction, considering the  
 28 perspectives of Hutcheon (1984), Waugh, (1985), Faria (2012), the term  
 29 "ravishment" according to Lacan (1987) also Blanchot ideas about the writer  
 30 and the process of writing.

31 For appreciation, I highlight others Coetzee's works, which have  
 32 ravishment as an important topic: *The Master of Peterburg* (1994), *Youth:*  
 33 *Scenes from a provincial Life* (2002) and *Disgrace* (1999). From that, I carry  
 34 out an analysis of chapter: "Letter of Elizabeth, Lady Chandos, to Francis  
 35 Bacon", showing through this part of the novel, intertextual and  
 36 metafictional elements, emphasising the concept of "ravishment/rapture".  
 37  
 38

## 39 **"An Endless Mirroring Process": Authorship, Writing Process and** 40 **Ravishment in Coetzee's Fictions**

41  
42 In Coetzee's literary universe, there are several works into which the  
 43 characters are also writers, this reinforces the presence of metafiction along  
 44 the bibliography of the South African writer. These characters sometimes  
 45 suffer with "ravish", the rapture of words. I mention three literary works that  
 46 preceded *Elizabeth Costello* and present quotations that illustrate this  
 47 thematic approach in his fictions.

48 Retaking Waugh declaration: "[...] the lowest common denominator of

1 metafiction is simultaneously to create a fiction and to make a statement  
 2 about the creation of that fiction.” She highlights the explicit statements on  
 3 author’s own text used along the narrative construction. Along the four  
 4 works, the involvement between authorship and the writing process appear  
 5 clearly.

6 In the novel *The Master of Petersburg* (1994), Coetzee integrates  
 7 supposed events from the writer and philosopher Fyodor Dostoevsky’s life,  
 8 who is 49 years and travels to Petersburg to visit the place where his stepson  
 9 Pavel Isaev lived. When 21 years old Isaev dead, Dostoevsky stays in Anna  
 10 Sergeyevna’s house, where he tries to understand what happens: accident,  
 11 suicide, murder. After various findings about his stepson he tries to write  
 12 something, tries to produce literature. There were many attempts, but he is  
 13 blocked, the words are rapture, and his son’s ghost haunts him.

14 Following old habit, he spends the morning at the little desk in his room.  
 15 When the maid comes to clean, he waves her away. But he does not write a word.  
 16 It is not that he is paralysed. His heart pumps steadily, his mind is clear. At any  
 17 moment he is capable of picking up the pen and forming letters on the paper. But  
 18 the writing, he fears, would be that of a madman – vileness, obscenity, page after  
 19 page of it, untameable. He thinks of the madness as running through the artery of  
 20 his right arm down to the fingertips and the pen and so to the page. It runs in a  
 21 stream; he need not dip the pen, not once. What flows on to the paper is neither  
 22 blood nor ink but an acid, black, with an unpleasing green sheen when the light  
 23 glances off it. On the page it does not dry: if one were to pass a finger over it, one  
 24 would experience a sensation both liquid and electric. A writing that even the blind  
 25 could read. (Coetzee 1994:19).

26 Despitest his many attempts, it was like his words had dried. “He cannot  
 27 write, he cannot think. [...] For hours he sits at the table. The pen does not  
 28 move. Intermittently the stick-figure returns, the crumpled, old-man travesty  
 29 of himself. He is blocked, he is in prison” (Coetzee 1994: 172-173).  
 30 Dostoevsky knows that poetry could bring his stepson back, he was an  
 31 artists, a master.

32 *Disgrace* (1999) brings David’s life, a Literature professor, who along  
 33 his career published three books, and, at moment tries to write an opera  
 34 about Byron. However, in face of his problems in personal and professional  
 35 life, it seems that words do not loom anymore and musical notes in scores  
 36 do not sound perfectly on the piano.

37 He has, if the truth be told, been putting it off for months: the moment when  
 38 he must face the blank page, strike the first note, see what he is worth. Snatches  
 39 are already imprinted on his mind of the lovers in duet, the vocal lines, soprano  
 40 and tenor, coiling wordlessly around and past each other like serpents. Melody  
 41 without climax; the whisper of reptile scales on marble staircases; and, throbbing  
 42 in the background, the baritone of the humiliated husband. Will this be where the  
 43 dark trio are at last brought to life: not in Cape Town but in old Kaffraria? (p.52)  
 44 [...] At the piano he sets to work piecing together and writing down the beginnings  
 45 of a score. But there is something about the sound of the piano that hinders him:  
 46 too rounded, too physical, too rich (p. 78)[...] Out of the poets I learned to love,  
 47 chants Byron in his cracked monotone, nine syllables on C natural; but life, I found  
 48 (descending chromatically to F), is another story (Coetzee 1999: 78)

David faces the blank page, he has something in mind, he can imagine the melody and transposes the idea, but the result is not satisfactory. Along the novel, he tries several times to develop the opera, but he cannot. David pronounces the last sentence of the novel: “Yes, I am giving him up” (Coetzee 1999: 93). David gives up of his struggles and of his opera.

*Youth: Scenes from Provincial Life II* (2002) is an autobiographical fiction that allows us to keep up with the relationships, anguishes, researches, readings and writing of a young man, John, in his search for the artistic identity. Furthermore, John tries to produce a literary written, but the ravishment prevent him:

He has come to London to do what is impossible in South Africa: to explore the depths. Without descending into the depths one cannot be an artist. (p.131)[...]Unless he wills himself to act, nothing will happen, in love or in art. But he does not trust the will. Just as he cannot will himself to write but must wait for the aid of some force from outside, a force that used to be called the Muse, so he cannot simply will himself to approach a woman without some intimation (from where?- from her? from within him? from above?) that she is his destiny. [...] Now he is not a poet, not a writer; not an artist (Coetzee 2002: 166-168).

John feels that the depths he searches do not reach him. He hopes that an outside force comes to him; the destiny of his art depends on something or someone that inspires him. Until this does not happen, he does not consider himself an artist with words.

As it could be seen, Coetzee’s novels have strong metafictional components, bringing “Fiction about fiction”, in which the self-consciously aspires attention. As Hutcheon says, this kind of literary text demonstrates an “endless mirroring process”, because the subject reflects directly in the object.

Thinking about these works, also ravishment is a recurrent issue, including his autobiographical fiction. Rapture is also densely present in the postscript: “Letter of Elizabeth, Lady Chandos, to Francis Bacon”, of *Elizabeth Costello*.

### **“As he was Guarded by a Crystal Shield”: The Rapture of Words in “Letter of Elizabeth, Lady Chandos, to Francis Bacon”**

This final chapter of *Elizabeth Costello* refers to a letter from Hugo von Hofmannsthal, a fictional letter written by Phillip, Lord Chandos to Francis Bacon. In original letter, dated on August 22, 1603, Phillip expresses his frustration before his power to literary creation, and apologies because it has already been extinct:

But it is my inner self that I feel bound to reveal to you-a peculiarity, a vice, a disease of my mind, if you like-if you are to understand that an abyss equally unbridgeable separates me from the literary works lying seemingly ahead of me as from those behind me: the latter having become so strange to me that I hesitate to call them my property. (p.1) [...] I felt, with a certainty not entirely bereft of a feeling of sorrow, that neither in the coming year nor in the



following nor in all the years of this my life shall I write a book, whether in English or in Latin: and this for an odd and embarrassing reason which I must leave to the boundless superiority of your mind to place in the realm of physical and spiritual values spread out harmoniously before your unprejudiced eye: to wit, because the language in which I might be able not only to write but to think is neither Latin nor English, neither Italian nor Spanish, but a language none of whose words is known to me, a language in which inanimate things speak to me and wherein I may one day have to justify myself before an unknown judge (Hofmannsthal 1902:7).

Phillip uses the metaphor of abyss to explain his feelings: “an abyss equally unbridgeable separates me from the literary works”. There is no bridge, which connects him back to words. Independent of the language he wants to express, a strange language persecutes him, but this language is incomprehensible.

In the novel *Elizabeth Costello*, Phillip’s wife sent a letter to Francis Bacon, begging his help. She loves him and face of his suffering, she suffers as well. Elizabeth finds a copy of the letter dated on August 22 and she answers on September 11, supposedly sent 20 days after Phillips’ letter. Her letter highlights her concern:

“I fear you may think my husband wrote in a fit of madness, a fit that by now may have passed. [...] no husband can succeed in concealing from a loving wife distress of mind so extreme. These many months have I known of my Philip’s affliction, and suffered with him (Coetzee 2004: 226).

Her perplexity at her husband’s comments makes her afraid that Bacon thinks Phillip wrote the letter in a momentary attack of madness, but in reality it was an outburst per experienced the silence and insanity of writing disability, resulting in “an abyss unbridgeable” which separates him from the literary works.

This bridge unbridgeable impede words from arriving, they are ravished. As Lacan states: “Ravished. We think of the soul, and of the effect wrought by beauty. But we shall free ourselves, as best we can, from readily available meaning, by means of a symbol”. For Phillip, the letter to Bacon is a symbol for trying to free his soul. Similarly, Elizabeth writes to be saved from her affliction.

A time of affliction I call the present time; yet in the company of my Philip I too have moments when soul and body are one, when I am ready to burst out in the tongues of angels. *My raptures* I call these spells. They come to me -I write without blushing, this is no time for blushing – in my husband’s arms. He alone is guide to me; with no other man would I know them. Soul and body he speaks to me, in a speaking without speech; into me, soul and body, he presses what are no longer words but flaming swords (Coetzee 2004: 228).

Elizabeth raptures, in this case, are related to the “feeling of emotional ecstasy”, the silence of her husband makes her body and soul a unity, in raptures, the affliction flows in the letter, but not like words but as flaming swords. She was carried away for a moment.

[...] *We are not meant to live thus*. Only for *extreme souls* may it have been intended to live thus, where words give way beneath your feet like rotting boards [...] It will be a time, if ever it comes, when giants or perhaps angels stride the earth (I cease to hold myself back, I am tired now, I yield myself to the figures, do you see, Sir, how I am taken over?, *the rush* I call it when I do not call it *my rapture*, the rush and the rapture are not the same, but in ways that I despair of explaining though they are clear to my eye, *my eye* I call it, *my inner eye*, as if I had an eye inside that looked at the words one by one as they passed, like soldiers on parade, *like soldiers on parade* I say) (Coetzee 2004: 228).

This other excerpt shows that words are not so trustable, especially because they can be carried away, taken with violence and abducted. For the wife Elizabeth, words can go down like our feet on rotting boards. As her husband suffers with rapture, maybe she was also taken over for a ravishing force that affects her. In the course of the following page, she begs Bacon to save them.

Save me, dear Sir, save my husband! Write! Tell him the time is not yet come, the time of the giants, the time of the angels. Tell him we are still in the time of fleas. Words no longer reach him, they shiver and shatter, it is as if (*as if*, I say), it is as **if he is guarded by a shield of crystal**. [...] and sometimes I his wife, yes, my Lord, sometimes I too creep through. *Presences of the Infinite* he calls us, and says we make him shudder; and indeed I have felt those shudders, in the throes of my raptures I have felt them, so much that whether they were his or were mine I could no longer say (Coetzee 2004: 229-230 Bold Emphasis added).

Lady Chandos, Elizabeth Chandos, considers that their lives like a couple is coming down, she begs answers from Bacon, words to be sent back to Phillip, showing there is hope yet. For while, her husband cannot be reached by words, he cannot listen to them or produce them. She uses the analogy of a shield of crystal, as he was guarded by it. The bolded sentence is also part of this paper's title, using the symbology of "shield of crystal" like something that repels words and ravishes them far away.

The signature of the letter is "Your obedient servant Elizabeth C. This 11 September, AD 1603" (Coetzee 2004: 230). Therefore, Elizabeth C., can indicate Elizabeth Costello, the protagonist writer, who has contribute for many years with academy, with readers, with literature and in her aging thinks she is no longer reached by words as before, maybe she is guarded by "a shield of crystal", protecting her own spirit and mind.

## Conclusions

In the final analysis, the trajectory of the renowned novelist, essayist and literary critic John Maxwell Coetzee indicates how much the literary written, its process and a self-consciousness construction are present in his works. For instance, the novels *The Master of Peterburg* (1994), *Disgrace*

(1999), *Elizabeth Costello* (2004) and the autobiographical fiction *Youth: Scenes from a provincial Life* (2002) not only exhibit a strong metafictional component, as well as deal with the “rapture/ ravishment”.

This happens through a real writer put in fiction: Fyodor Dostoyevsky, who tried to write a novel; an imaginary professor who could not write an opera; a fictional woman writer, who exposes in an intertextual letter her needs, and Coetzee, himself as the young John, searching for his identity in the artistic universe. As metafictional works, these writings not only “examines the fundamental structures of fictional narratives, but also explores the possible fictionality of the world outside the fictional literary text”.

In the same way, the postscript “Letter of Elizabeth, Lady Chandos, to Francis Bacon” (in intertextuality with Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s fictional letter written by Phillip, Lord Chandos to Francis Bacon) emphasizes the afflictions that affects a writer and surrounding people. Silence, speechless, blanked paper, blockade, pursuit for salvation; words are ravished away like Lol V. Stein’s fiancé: “paper wings, V, scissors, Stein, stone, in love’s guessing game you lose yourself”. A writer “is not only several people in one, but each stage of himself denies all the others”, and must “respond to several absolute and absolutely”, as Blanchot states, along this game of love for literary production, in being several people and carrying many absolutities a writer can lose oneself.

Nevertheless, even that words may be ravished away, (as happened with Dostoyevsky, David, John, Phillip, Elizabeth) and no longer reach the writer “guarded by a shield of crystal”; it has to be considered that the words are already eternised through written. In addition, if one day words return, the writer can once again explore the depths of soul through poetic.

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