

**A CRITICAL STUDY OF  
THE NOVELS AND WRITINGS OF J.M. COETZEE**

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**by**

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## DECLARATION

I, Ms. Sandhya R. Nambiar, hereby declare that this thesis entitled **A Critical Study of the Novels and Writings of J.M. Coetzee**, is the outcome of my own research undertaken under the guidance of Dr. K.S. Bhat, Dean, Faculty of Languages and Literature and Head, Dept. of English, Goa University. All the sources used in the course of this work have been duly acknowledged in the thesis. This work has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma or certificate of this or any other University.

  
Sandhya R. Nambiar

## CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that the thesis entitled **A Critical Study of the Novels and Writings of J.M. Coetzee**, submitted by Ms. Sandhya R. Nambiar for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, has been completed under my guidance. The thesis is a record of the research work conducted by the candidate during the period of her study and has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma or certificate of this or any other University.



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# Chapter I

## Introduction

*After such knowledge, what forgiveness?*

*T.S.Eliot*

### 1.1 Historical Background

The Europeans and the Westerners for a very long time projected Africa as the enigmatic Dark Continent. A purely European construct, this epithet enabled the whites to justify and legitimise the colonial enterprise of exploitation and subjugation. The politics behind such an epithet was the premeditated desire to plunder and loot the virgin continent and subjugate the natives. The white man made inroads into the continent first as traders and then as missionaries. They were aware that the continent was rich in natural resources and moreover they saw the possibility of using the manpower there to further their economic project. The knowledge that the natives were defenseless and the awareness that they could wield power over the natives because of the weapons they possessed, enabled the whites to make subordinates of the natives and establish their supremacy in the alien land.

Africa as a continent was subjected to colonial influences of the Portuguese, Dutch, English, French, German, and other colonisers. This influence is found not only in political and economic fields, but in the literary world also. Speaking of literature, we can find early forms of literature in their myths, legends, folktales and oral narratives. The myths dealt with the gods and the legends with the universe. Furthermore, folktales featured man and animals; song and dance was intrinsic to the natives. Africa's oral tradition being very rich and varied, writers drew upon it heavily in their works. The oral literature from the Congo and South Africa has been recorded to some extent. The earliest written literature, it is said, was found in North Africa.

West African literature was religion oriented and East African literature came under Arab influence. Written literature in Africa combined myth and history and therefore, was colourful and enigmatic. The oral tradition was transformed in the literary mode.

The Portuguese were the first who successfully navigated the Cape. However, they did not show any interest in colonisation. Till the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Portuguese had no competitors. Later on the Dutch arrived and the Dutch East India Company established a permanent settlement there. They had no intention of colonising the Cape, but only wanted it as a base camp where passing ships could replenish food stocks. A small number of the Dutch called Burghers established farms there and in due course expanded them.

In 1795, the British seized the Cape. Initially, like the Dutch, they too had limited interest in the Cape colony other than as a port. The British tried to solve the border dispute between the Boers and the Xhosa on the eastern frontier. Five thousand middle class British immigrants came to the Cape and their presence in South Africa was distinct. South Africa now had two distinct language groups and cultures. The English speakers were highly urbanised; dominating politics, trade and so on and the uneducated Boers were in the farms.

In 1880, the first Anglo-Boer war broke out which resulted in the victory of the Boers and the British came to terms with it. The second Boer war was fought when the British demanded voting rights for the 60,000 foreign whites. The Boers were defeated and British sovereignty was established with a focus on rebuilding the country. The Afrikaners found themselves relegated to the position of co-farmers. Britain tried to make English the official language in schools and offices, but the Boers stood up for Afrikaans.

South African literature is incredibly diverse with over eleven national languages

and literature has been written in all these languages which include Afrikaans and English. Afrikaans literature has developed an identity for itself. English literature initially was an extension of British or international English literature. The writers used the realistic mode to record the turbulent and chaotic history of the country and the experiences of the people which were typical only to them.

The first fictional works in South Africa were produced by immigrants. They were an alienated lot who were not comfortable in the new surroundings. However, the indigenous ambience and culture fascinated them. Olive Schreiner's novel *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) is considered the founding text in South African literature. The novel though written in the line of English novels, authentically portrays South African rural life. Rider Haggard was another writer who wrote mythical and adventure stories, his most famous book being *King Solomon's Mines*. (1886)

Black writing, however, emerged only in the twentieth century. The first attempt by the English educated black writers was to reconstruct the African past. Solomon (Sol) Thekiso Plaatje was the first black South African to write a novel. His novel *Mhudi* was written in 1920 and published in 1930. Thomas Mfolo was another well known novelist. William Plomer in his novel *Turbott Wolfe* (1926) wrote about inter-racial love and criticised the white man's attitudes. Sarah Gertrude Millin was another prominent writer. Her novel *God's Stepchildren* (1924) expressed the views of the time and dealt with the white hierarchy. The 1940s saw many publications by black writers. HIE Dhlomo, B.W. Vilakazi and Herman Charles Bosman were some of the black writers of that time. Peter Abrahams who was of mixed race descent wrote *Mine Boy* (1946) which addressed the problems of the blacks in rural South Africa. Athol Fugard, Alex La Guma, Breyten Breytenbach and Sipho Sepamla were other well known writers.

The white writers also focused on the system of apartheid and the condition of the blacks in South Africa. Black writing in South Africa and almost all white writing in South Africa condemned the system of apartheid. This system was in fact one of the greatest evils perpetrated by man on man. On the basis of the colour of the skin, human beings were segregated as whites, blacks and the coloured. This stigma was implemented with brute force. The settlers felt that they belonged to a superior race and that the natives were inferior and base. White writers like Andre Brink, Breyten Breytenbach and Nadine Gordimer came down heavily on the system of apartheid. Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948) became very popular. So too, Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* (1981). They contributed to the view that the social responsibility of writers was to expose the evils perpetrated by the white regime. Hence they ventured into a realistic portrayal of the social and political conditions of the society,

Moreover, almost all the novels written in South Africa depicted racial friction. The system of apartheid, clearly demarcated the blacks as 'different' from and 'inferior' to the whites. The blacks were approximated to aliens in their own country. The repressed state of the blacks, naturally, made writers and thinkers come up with literature that could be termed as 'protest literature'. South African writers who were under the influence of apartheid, which had sociological and political repercussions, adopted an attitude of protest. The literature echoed the suppressed voices of the natives. These writers initially took it on them to retrieve their lost past. Hence they questioned the presence of the coloniser and engaged themselves in the dialectics of power. Writers in South Africa, both whites and blacks were influenced by the apartheid regime and they condemned it too. Their works portrayed the struggle and racial friction. The novelists responded to the social, political and economic crises in

the African society. Most of the writers like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiongo and Peter Abrahams addressed the institution of apartheid and the racial atrocities of the white race against the blacks.

These writers portrayed the hostility between the world of the white man and that of the blacks and unsurprisingly came under the scrutiny of the censors. Many of these writers were banned, imprisoned or exiled. South Africans wrote with a conviction that they owed a social responsibility to their country. They felt that literature had a social function to interpret and educate society. Instead of turning their backs to their own culture, they confronted the problems which racism brought in its wake and sought solutions for them in an imaginative form. All the writers, whites and blacks alike felt the need to record the violent history of the land and the horrifying experiences of the people.

Many writers were imprisoned or had to go into exile or flee the country for condemning the apartheid regime and its atrocities through their works. Dennis Brutus, a poet and activist who worked towards ending apartheid; Andre Brink, one of the most versatile figures in South African literary circles; Athol Fugard, a playwright and Alan Paton another well known white writer are worth mentioning in this context. In fact, Alan Paton opposed apartheid and offered a non-racial alternative to government policy.

If the writer's works came under heavy censorship in South Africa in the sixties and seventies, in the eighties it was the journalists. It was felt that the impact of writers on the masses was lesser compared to that of the media. It can be mentioned in this context that one of the main problems confronting writers in South Africa was that of identity. The white writers did not have the experience of the blacks about whom they wrote and the black writer could not experience what the whites in South

Africa went through. “The white writer... is cut off by enforced privilege from the greater part of the society in which he lives... The black writer is extremely limited in his presentation of white characters ... because of those large areas of the white experience he is excluded from by law.”<sup>1</sup>

About white writers in South Africa, Jason Cowley, a critic says that, although the white writers there have won the Nobel and the Booker, “yet there is also a feeling of hopelessness among many white South African writers, an increasing sense that to be a writer there is to be condemned, through the absence of a local leadership or anything resembling an indigenous literary culture, to write endlessly into a vacuum of indifference.”<sup>2</sup>

Until the arrival of Coetzee on the scene, realism dominated fiction in South Africa. Coetzee himself felt that the novel should act as a rival to history and operate on its own terms. He avers:

A novel that operates in terms of its own procedures and issues in its own conclusions, not one that operates in terms of the procedures of history and eventuates in conclusions that are checkable by history.... a novel that is prepared to work itself out outside the terms of class conflict, race conflict, gender conflict or any of the other oppositions out of which history and the historical disciplines erect themselves.<sup>3</sup>

Coetzee’s works were labelled as ‘apolitical’ as he did not overtly identify with the cause of the blacks as victims of the whites. Although a sense of hopelessness was there, Coetzee did not resort to propagandist writing like Alan Paton and Nadine Gordimer. Coetzee uses metafiction, parody, allegory and deconstructive techniques to write against apartheid and expose the oppression of the apartheid regime. With the use of precise and sparse prose Coetzee engages himself with the human condition.

His novels are about solitary characters and are often open ended, subject to interpretation which often allows readers to interpret the novels and come to a conclusion as per their understanding. Hence one notices a variety of interpretations and not any particular interpretation. This quality of the novels provides ample freedom to intelligent readers, subjecting the novel to close scrutiny and understanding. Coetzee does not offer any solutions but holds up the mirror to us.

Although Coetzee was very much concerned about South Africa and his novels were very much about South Africa, his emigration to Australia was looked at with askance. Critics felt that he was forsaking his country and spoke about his disloyalty to the country of his birth. However, we cannot pass such a harsh judgment on a committed and sensitive writer like Coetzee. His emigration to Australia can be interpreted as that of a writer who had accomplished his job in South Africa and had nothing to do there and of one who was moving to Australia seeking newer vistas to write on. Coetzee was heavily criticised for his novel *Disgrace*, the first written after the lifting of apartheid. This novel closely examined the tensions in the society in the post-apartheid era. Coetzee was condemned by the African National Congress for brutally representing the white people's perceptions of the post-apartheid black man. Even Nadine Gordimer's remarks about the novel were scathing. She felt that it was difficult for her to believe, having lived in South Africa all her life, that the black family in *Disgrace* protected the rapist. She regretted that Coetzee could find only such instances in post-apartheid South Africa.

Coetzee calls South African literature as "a literature in bondage". In his Jerusalem Acceptance Speech he avers "South African literature is a literature in bondage, as it reveals in even its highest moments, shot through as they are with feelings of homelessness and yearnings for a nameless liberation.... It is exactly the kind of

literature you would expect people to write from a prison.”<sup>4</sup>

A study of South African literature becomes incomplete without analyzing the political and economic situations in the country over the years. It is opined that South Africa was racially segregated under the system of apartheid which was practised from colonial times and made an official policy in 1948. The new legislation classified inhabitants into racial groups (‘black’, ‘white’, ‘coloured’ and ‘Indian’). From 1958, the blacks were denied citizenship, were made to live in Bantustans and provided with inferior services- education, medical care and others. There was a lot of resistance against apartheid and seething unrest among the people even though the State tried to brutally nab such protests. However, violence only increased and in the 1990s, negotiations to end apartheid began which culminated with the elections of 1994.

The first grand apartheid law, the Population Registration Act of 1950 introduced the system of identity cards which specified racial groups. The Group Areas Act of 1950 determined the place of residence according to race. The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 prohibited marriage between persons of different races and the Immorality Act of 1950 made sexual relations with a person of a different race a criminal offence. Under the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953, areas were set apart for whites and blacks. Signboards which said ‘whites only’ were seen in public places and even on park benches.

To add to the woes, education also was segregated. There were separate schools and colleges for whites and blacks. Blacks were not allowed to run businesses or professional practices in those areas designated for whites. Transport and civil facilities were also segregated. The hospitals of the whites provided better service whereas the blacks’ hospitals were overcrowded. The Pass Laws required the blacks

to carry a Pass which revealed their identity, race, age, tribe, place of birth and so on. If a person was found without a Pass he could be arrested and brought to trial.

Blacks could never acquire land in white areas. The women were the worst sufferers of racial and gender discrimination. They were denied legal rights and had no access to education or the right to own property. The African women worked as agricultural or domestic helps. The Pass Laws segregated the men from their families as they worked in urban areas and their families stayed back in the rural areas. The African National Congress organised a series of strikes, boycotts and civil disobedience actions. However, a group of disillusioned members of the African National Congress who formed the Pan Africanist Congress resolved to resort to violent means against apartheid. One of those protests led to the Sharpeville Massacre where 69 people were killed by the police, forcing the government to declare a state of emergency. Riots ensued all over, but the police ruthlessly suppressed them arresting more than 18,000 people. After the Sharpeville Massacre, the Security Council of the United Nations demanded an end to racial separation and discrimination.

In 1963, the United Nations Security Council called for a voluntary arms embargo against South Africa and it was made mandatory in 1977. Economic sanctions against South Africa were contemplated to put pressure on the apartheid government. Cultural, educational and sporting connections were ended in 1968. The United Nations condemned South Africa at the World Conference against Racism. By the late 1980s, the United States, the United Kingdom and twenty three other nations placed trade sanctions on South Africa. The Nordic countries in particular provided moral and financial support to the African National Congress.

In 1983, a new constitution was passed implementing a so called Tricameral

Parliament giving the coloured and Indians voting rights and parliamentary representation in separate Houses. Blacks, although forming majority of the population were excluded from representation. After President Botha's resignation in 1989, F. W. de Klerk succeeded as President. He moved towards negotiations to end apartheid and lifted the ban on the African National Congress, the Pan Africanist Congress, the South African Communist Party and others. He also made his first public commitment to release Nelson Mandela. Media restrictions were lifted and many political prisoners were released. Nelson Mandela was released on February 11, 1990 after serving for 27 years in prison. Finally, after a series of negotiations, apartheid was dismantled following the elections of 1994.

### **1.2 John Maxwell Coetzee: A Brief Biography**

In the context of my study of John Maxwell Coetzee's writings, a brief biographical sketch of the writer becomes imperative. Coetzee was born in 1940 in Cape Town, South Africa. His mother was a school teacher and his father a lawyer. Though Coetzee's parents were not of British descent, they spoke English at home. His primary education was in Cape Town and Worcester followed by secondary education in Cape Town in a school run by Marist brothers, a Catholic order. He joined the University of Cape Town in 1957 and in 1960 and 1961 graduated with honours degrees in English and Mathematics. He spent the next four years in England as a Computer Programmer alongside his research on Ford Madox Ford. In 1963, he married Philippa Jubber and had two children, Nicholas who died in 1989 in an accident and Gisela.

In 1965, he went to the University of Texas in Austin and graduated with a PhD in English, Linguistics and Germanic languages. His doctoral dissertation was on Samuel Beckett. For three years he was assistant professor of English at the State

University of New York in Buffalo. After he was denied permanent residence, he returned to South Africa and joined the University of Cape Town. Between 1984 and 2003 he taught frequently in the United States. Talking about J.M. Coetzee, John Banville in his article *Endgame* states:

J.M. Coetzee is a very different writer, even though his novels are set in the same moral landscape that Gordimer inhabits in her fiction. Coetzee has been careful to hold himself aloof from direct engagement with the issues of his time and specifically with the politics of his country. His aloofness is not that of the aesthete perched in his ivory tower. Like any serious artist, he is conscious that it is precisely by virtue of its timelessness that art contributes to its time and times to come.<sup>5</sup>

He was a committed writer and writing for him was a serious affair. Very often he refused to comment about his works because he felt that what the writer went through as he wrote was very different from what he thought of it later. Therefore, he refused to say much about his writings. This was interpreted by many of his critics as being evasive. It is this engagement with art that kept Coetzee away from the keen gaze of the censors. His works were acclaimed as fine works of art and therefore, escaped the eye of the censor even though he came down heavily on the country's system.

Coetzee won the Nobel Prize in 2003. The press release, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2003 in SVENSKA AKADEMIEN held forth thus:

The Swedish Academy in Stockholm honours the writer because he [Coetzee] is a scrupulous doubter, ruthless in his criticism of the cruel rationalism and cosmetic morality of western civilization. His intellectual honesty erodes all basis of consolation and distances itself from the

tawdry drama of remorse and confession.... Coetzee's novels are characterised by their well crafted composition, pregnant dialogue and analytical brilliance.<sup>6</sup>

In 2002, he immigrated to Australia. He lives with his partner Dorothy Driver in Adelaide, Australia where he holds an honorary position at the University of Adelaide. About shifting to Australia, Coetzee said that he was attracted by the free and generous spirit of the people and by the beauty of the land itself. James Magnuson director of the James A. Michener Centre for writers at the University opines that a number of his students have had a great deal of success. "He was very generous with all his students, very precise and thorough in his comments. The students were in awe of him – as frankly, was I. He is a person of great integrity; someone you know will always come through on his promises."<sup>7</sup>

Coetzee lived in South Africa and was a witness to South Africa's ugly periods in history - the regime of the whites and the clamping of apartheid which was condemned universally. The Apartheid era brought in its wake an upheaval in the lives of the people of South Africa. The history of South Africa was different from the history of other colonies of the whites. Apartheid which meant 'to set apart' was a shameful institution put into effect by the white rulers. Their only concern was to see that they could hold on to power over the people and economy of South Africa. They wanted to retain the hold over South Africa at any cost unmindful of the harsh treatment meted out to the natives - the people who legally belonged to the land. In fact the whites claimed it as their right to establish power over the natives. No feeling of remorse affected them on exploiting the rightful inhabitants of the land. Being brutally indifferent to the needs of the people they exercised their stronghold to obtain what was profitable for them. They wanted to

amass wealth at the expense of the real owners of the land, the natives. To achieve this, they resorted to the meanest of measures and brought in vile legislative measures. The natives could do nothing but be under the iron yoke of the rulers. They had absolutely no say in the political and economic field. Their very existence was defined by the dictates of the rulers who least thought of their welfare. These rulers felt that they did not have to show any sort of respect or compassion for the natives. Coetzee was a witness to these atrocities. He admitted to his complicity not as an individual but as a white man who had to share the burden, the guilt of so gross an institution. Coetzee was one among many of the white South African writers who was sympathetic to the blacks in South Africa and sensitive to what the natives were experiencing there. During the censorship years and as a writer/critic he had firsthand experience of what it was, to be a writer in such a regime.

Coetzee, like many of his contemporaries came down heavily on the system of apartheid which was practised in South Africa. Life under apartheid, it was generally felt, required a realistic documentation of oppression in South Africa. However, Coetzee was different from the writers who had until then written about South Africa and its gruesome situation. Coetzee's writings were set in the context of the apartheid era. But in his novels he was not merely keen on unveiling the atrocities of the regime that would entail a realistic portrayal of the times.

Coetzee engages with the impact of apartheid and its gruesomeness on the human psyche at the individual level. He deals with the problematics of the relationship between the whites and the blacks of South Africa and the inhuman activities carried on in the guise of apartheid. The focus is on the impact of

colonialism on the people of South Africa. Coetzee is able to very sensitively portray and present before us the effect of colonialism on the people of South Africa. He examines this impact by putting before us the tragedy of individuals rather than a group of people. Hence the novels are an engaging portrayal of what individuals per se go through in an oppressive regime. The protagonists in the novels of Coetzee are highly sensitive beings who suffer on account of the atrocities of the whites, directly or indirectly. The course of their lives is affected and charted by the way the whites treat them. These individuals are ordinary men and women, living in a conflict-torn society, influenced by the environment which is very oppressive. Going through immense hardship and difficulties, they suffer, yet they go on with their life stoically. It is the plight of the individual as against the society of which he is a part that Coetzee is interested in. This is significant because the reader is able to respond to the oppression and trauma which an individual goes through in a very sensitive manner.

Coetzee is a serious writer who carefully weighs and chooses his words. He begins all his novels with arresting statements thus catching the attention of the readers and encouraging them to read on. His writings are precise and crisp with every sentence carefully worded, avoiding unnecessary descriptive passages and the statements he makes have the stamp of finality to which no one could possibly add anything. Since almost all his novels avoid unnecessary long drawn passages they are not lengthy.

Being a resident of South Africa gave Coetzee a firsthand knowledge of apartheid and its brutal machinery and machinations. He could have a close understanding of how the State functioned, how it employed vicarious measures to maximise its gain, and how effectively it suppressed the natives. The activities

of the State which were studied and well planned stunted the life of the blacks. It was appalling for Coetzee to see how the whites functioned in the pursuit of their own betterment. They were indifferent to the physical and mental sufferings of the blacks. They did not think of the injustice they were causing to the natives and had absolutely no qualms about what they were doing. They were totally callous to the suffering of the natives.

### **1.3 Brief Discussion of the Works of Coetzee**

Coetzee was thirty four when he published his first novel in 1974. The only reason possible for this late entry into the field of creative writing could be his conviction that a writer does not write anything substantial, anything worth publishing, in his twenties. The subject matter for this first novel was collected during his stay in the United States between 1968 and 1971 at the University of New York in Buffalo, at a time when America was fighting the war in Vietnam. There were mixed opinions among the people regarding the propriety of America's war in Vietnam. Both in the U S and in other countries a debate was going on regarding the participation of the U S in the Vietnam War. Despite the general belief that the United States had no business to be in Vietnam, the United States had its own convincing explanations. There were several anti-war campaigns going on in the U S especially in the universities where students organised anti-war demonstrations. Coetzee even joined the anti-war campaign while at the University and this was one of the reasons why he was denied citizenship in the U S. Hence he returned to Cape Town and joined the University as a Professor of English. All the details of the Vietnam War that the Americans fought which accumulated in his mind produced the first novel, *Dusklands*. Being in America, Coetzee could very well follow the tensions of the war that was seen in the society of his times. Coetzee questions and presents the impact of colonialism and its

tools of implementation on the individual.

*Dusklands* comprises two narratives, one based on the Vietnam War and the other on an expedition into the land of the Namaqua (the natives of South Africa) by a traveller named Jacobus Coetzee. Having two novellas in a novel is a unique method in novel writing. The themes of the two novellas are, however, the same. Both are about aggression and violence. One can easily draw parallels between the two. The first novella set in California is the narrative of Eugene Dawn who is working on a plan for the psychological subjugation of the Vietnamese through the use of radio broadcasts and this entails a devastating effect on his mind. The second is an 18<sup>th</sup> century narrative of Jacobus Coetzee who ventures into the deep jungles of South Africa ruthlessly subjugating and annihilating the people there. This campaign has a reciprocal effect. The two novellas are two hundred years apart but both deal with European imperialism. Jacobus who enters the black man's territory, tries to convince himself that he is a superior being, but finds himself in a ridiculous position. In making his contact with the Namaqua tribe, he is deeply humiliated, leading to his insanity and the massacre of the tribe. Jacobus' thirst for revenge and his subsequent show of violent behaviour is typical of the violence shown by the white settlers in South Africa.

Since 1974, Coetzee has been writing fiction rather regularly at intervals of three to four years. With great involvement and diligence Coetzee took to novel writing very seriously. His popularity as a writer of international stature, the Nobel Prize and the two Booker Prizes and many other prestigious awards conferred on him, stand testimony to this. Like every committed writer he responds to the times. However, the way he engages with the issues marks him off from the other writers.

Coetzee's second novel *In the Heart of the Country* is an investigation into the idea

of selfhood and the rhetoric of patriarchy. Magda, the white woman faces oppression not only from her father but also from the black farmhand Hendrik. She desperately tries to construct a life for herself. The narrative of Magda is self reflexive and Coetzee problematises the concept of the self in the novel. The character Magda is a displaced being. She is aware of the futility of all relationships and tries to find a meaning to her life by her communion with the skygods. Magda tries to subvert the state of subservience and dominance and is raped by Hendrik, the black farmhand. The whole novel is in the form of an interior monologue. For her, language cannot depict the passion she feels for the land and the people.

Coetzee's third novel *Waiting for the Barbarians*, though an extension of previous themes is more overtly about the coloniser- colonised situation. For David Attwell, a scholar and authority on Coetzee, "*Waiting for the Barbarians* is a pivotal work in the development of Coetzee's oeuvre."<sup>8</sup> Coetzee exposes the atrocities of imperialism in the novel. Although the novel is not set in any specific time or place, the parallels are quite obvious. The novel is clearly a response to the political and social situation in South Africa. Although the protagonist, the Magistrate, is against the atrocities of the empire, he cannot escape his complicity in the mission. To quote Richard Martin , a literary critic "What is fore grounded in this narrative, what stands out in sharp relief against the indeterminate setting, are the (existential) realities of birth and death, pleasure and pain, power and victimization, that is the 'reality' of human experience."<sup>9</sup>

In the next novel, *Life and Times of Michael K*, Coetzee depicts confrontation against imperialism, though it takes the form of passive resistance by a single individual. This Booker prize winning novel published in the year 1983, portrays the civil war torn society of South Africa. It is a challenging novel, more demanding

because Coetzee examines the individual vis a vis the State. The State symbolises imperialism and Michael K represents the pent up rebellion of the colonised, which takes the form of passive resistance. Living life on his own terms, Michael K tries to take his ailing mother to her town in a makeshift cart and is stopped by the police because he does not have the necessary papers. However, she dies on the way and Michael goes to the farm with her ashes and scatters it. He tries to live on the farm in communion with nature. Nevertheless, when the owner of the Visagie farm tries to make a subject out of him, he escapes as he does not entertain the idea of being subject to anyone. He prizes his freedom more than anything else and his personality rebels against the very idea of subjugation. When the State relegates him to the camp he escapes even from there and keeps on escaping to live the life of a recluse in the town where he used to live with his mother earlier.

*Foe* published in 1986 is according to Dominic Head, a critic “A metafictional text, a postcolonial reworking”<sup>10</sup> of Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*. Head further contends: “Coetzee’s preoccupation... is the problem of the silencing and mutilation of the colonial Other.”<sup>11</sup> The theme of colonialism depicted in the previous novels is more evolved and taken to a philosophical level. In *Michael K* we have the protagonist who refuses to speak whereas in *Foe*, Friday cannot speak because his tongue has been mutilated. The novel is about the act of storytelling and how authors create stories and characters.

His novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) places the coloniser and the colonised in a typical state of the oppressor and the oppressed. Even though the protagonist sympathises with the blacks, he is helpless. He can do nothing to transform the situation because he belongs to the colonial system. The colonial masters who are very powerful will not allow anyone to disrupt their avowed purpose.

*Age of Iron* (1990) is about the post apartheid era when South Africa was in the midst of turmoil and chaos. Mrs. Curren, a retired Professor of Classics, who has hitherto lived an isolated life without getting involved in the violence in the society, gets into the fray because her maid's son is in the forefront of the struggle against the police. She is suffering from cancer, symbolic of the violence that is eating into the society. She finds herself sympathizing with and even protecting the black youth who are fighting for their emancipation. The age she lives in is one of political change. Years of suppression has finally made the blacks rebel. The novel is in the epistolary form as she writes to her daughter who has settled down in the U.S.

In *The Master of Petersburg* written in 1994 Coetzee introduces a fictionalised 'Dostoevsky' as the protagonist. It is about the relationship between a father and a son. The father comes to investigate the death of his son who is involved in the terrorist activities of Nechaev's group. 'Dostoevsky' is presented as a hesitant elderly man whose journey turns out to be a journey of discovery. In the novel, as Dominic Head puts it, "Dostoevsky argues for the responsibility borne by the author of ideas, whereas Nechaev aligns himself with a vertiginous freedom in which history can be accelerated."<sup>12</sup>

*Boyhood*, written in 1997, can be considered an autobiographical novel. Although it is a third person narrative, it is autobiographical in nature. We learn a lot about Coetzee's childhood, the confusions he has about his Afrikaner parentage, his prim and proper attitude as a child, his allegiance to his mother and his aloofness with his father.

In *The Lives of Animals* (1999) Coetzee uses the fictional mode to speak on animal rights. In his fable, which is presented as a Tanner lecture sponsored by Princeton University, Coetzee presents a writer giving a lecture on a very touchy

issue. The Tanner lecture is followed by responses from leading thinkers with different perspectives. The text has an introduction by the political philosopher, Amy Gutmann, essays by the scholar on religion Wendy Doniger, primatologist Barbara Smuts, literary theorist Marjorie Garber and moral philosopher Peter Singer.

*Disgrace* (1999) is about a University professor who is disillusioned with the importance given to humanities and his students who do not want his lectures. A teacher of Communication English, he feels that Romantic poetry, opera, philosophy and Greek tragedy have no place in Africa. He gets involved in an affair with a student of his and she complains of sexual harassment. Consequently, he is brought before a committee and on his refusal to apologise, he is disgracefully dismissed. Later he joins his daughter Lucy in her homestead in the Eastern Cape. Lurie is attacked and Lucy gang raped by black men. She becomes pregnant but refuses to abort the child and marries Petrus, the neighbouring black man in return for the protection she would get by giving Petrus her farm. Lurie spends his time working with sick and dying animals. *Disgrace* is a novel set in the post-apartheid era and shows South Africa in no better a position than during the apartheid era. Coetzee, in fact, shows that the withdrawal of apartheid has only resulted in the reversal of roles. The blacks who harass and victimise the whites seem to be taking it all on the whites who appear to be paying for all their atrocities committed on the blacks.

*Youth*, which was written in 2002, continues to give us details about Coetzee's life as a young man, first in the University and then as an employee in London working as a computer programmer for IBM. He is very candid about his affairs with many women, which, he feels were not at all passionate. These two novels give us a biographical sketch of Coetzee. The style is very lucid often replete with fine details. Similarly the recent novel of Coetzee, *Summertime* (2009) which was short listed for

the Booker fits into this group of fictionalised memoirs. Here Coetzee imagines five of his acquaintances in conversation with his biographer about himself, imagined to be dead.

*Elizabeth Costello* (2003) is described as *Eight Lessons* with a postscript. Two of the lessons were published earlier in *The Lives of Animals*. In this novel, Elizabeth Costello is an aging Australian writer, famous for a book she had written years ago. She has been invited to deliver lectures at an American University where her son works. Coetzee examines themes like animal rights, the Holocaust, humanism, rationalism and the role of a writer, vegetarianism and so on.

*Slow Man* (2005) is a novel about Paul, a man in his sixties who is confined to his house because of an accident when one of his legs is amputated. He is attracted to his nurse Marijana, a Croatian. Until the arrival of Costello in the novel, we see what is going on in the mind of Paul. Costello who tries to instill confidence in him is in search of a story. Coetzee here focuses on the relationship between the author and reader.

*Diary of a Bad Year* (2007) has a unique narrative structure. The pages are in a three-layer fashion, the top being the Strong Opinions, the narrative by Senor C, a retired novelist being the middle, and at the bottom is Anya's account. The essays at the top are on contemporary issues like Tony Blair, Guantanamo Bay and terrorism. The second and third are more or less diary entries. It speaks of the relationship between Senor C and Anya. Senor C has a lot of resemblance to Coetzee. His initials are J C and we learn that he is a white South African emigrant, a former academic and a vegetarian. The opinions at the top level are indeed many of Coetzee's own opinions.

Coetzee has also written many non-fictional works which throw light on many

issues of interest, his concerns and his scholarship. *Giving Offence Essays on Censorship* (1996) is a series of scholarly essays on censorship and the authors who came under censorship, whose works were thwarted by the censors. He goes into an analysis of the psyche of the censor and the impact of censorship on great writers like Mandelstam, Solzhenitsyn, Zbigniew Herbert and so on. The article 'The Work of the Censor: Censorship in South Africa' is a well researched one, critically presenting censorship in South Africa. He makes scathing remarks about censorship in South Africa. The book received mixed reactions from the critics who went to the extent of attacking what Coetzee says as irrelevant in the times of information explosion. However, the essays are fine pieces on the effects of censorship, which, according to Coetzee, stifles the writer's creativity. In truth the writer loses his creativity under censorship. People in a free society may not understand how relevant freedom of speech is, but people who have lived in dictatorial and suppressed societies will very well understand the importance of the freedom of speech. These non-fictional writings also help us in understanding Coetzee's fiction. Coetzee's non-fictional writings stand testimony to his wide and intensive reading and scholarship.

In *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*, a well researched work of academic excellence, he acquaints us with the history of white writing in South Africa, about travel literature of the 17th century and the farm novels of the 20th century. Coetzee does not in any way politicise white writing, but discusses how creative writers and artists fail to replicate the rough landscape of South Africa in their works. He further states how the white man understands the natives as idle and slothful.

In *Doubling the Point. Essays and Interviews J.M. Coetzee* (ed. by David Attwell) (1992) we have a series of articles and interviews of J.M. Coetzee with Attwell on

diverse topics like Beckett, Popular Culture, Syntax, Kafka, Autobiography and Confession, Obscenity and Censorship and South African writers. This book reveals Coetzee's depth of knowledge, his vast reading and his analytical frame of mind. We get an insight into Coetzee, the man and writer who is profound. In the interview with Attwell, he is very naïve, precise and clear when he answers the questions posed to him. He does not mince matters or beat about the bush. He is not evasive. Whatever he says is said with conviction, determination and purpose.

*Stranger Shores* (2001) is a collection of essays which Coetzee wrote between 1986 and 1999. Coetzee talks about a number of authors and writers ranging from Defoe, Richardson, Doris Lessing, Nadine Gordimer and Breyten Breytenback.

*Inner Workings* published in 2007 is yet again a collection of essays that Coetzee wrote between 2000 and 2005 in which he offers minute details about authors like Italo Stevo, Musil, Walter Benjamin, Gunter Grass, Beckett, Whitman, Faulkner, Bellow, Nadine Gordimer, Marquez and V.S. Naipaul. It is a thoroughly researched work. His penchant for details is noteworthy.

Coetzee's protagonists are simple men who have the courage to live their life away from the master-slave relationship. The protagonists in their own individual lives find answers to questions that trouble them. They feel "It is an inherent freedom, the natural right of human beings, a right that emerges almost spontaneously when people live in right relationship with one another."<sup>13</sup>

In *Life and Times of Michael K*, the protagonist feels "Perhaps the truth is that it is enough to be out of the camps, out of all the camps at the same time. Perhaps that is enough of an achievement, for the time being. How many people are there left who are neither locked up nor standing guard at the gate?"<sup>14</sup> Julian Gitzen contends:

Coetzee's works deal with race relations and the conflicts that arise when

territorial or cultural boundaries are crossed..... the themes of his novels are universal rather than provincial, and his fictional characters might, and indeed do, dwell in a multitude of locales .... His novels focus upon the processes by which history is made and recorded, emphasizing how history is registered in human consciousness through the medium of language. He reminds us that without words history, whether individual or collective, cannot be publicly recorded and little can be known either of those who make history or paradoxically, of those who are excluded from it.<sup>15</sup>

Coetzee thus holds up hope through peace. Black writers in South Africa and many white writers were harshly treated for writing against apartheid. Steve Biko was killed in detention. Novelist Alex la Guma and poet Dennis Brutus were sent to Robben Island because of their work. The works of Alan Paton and Nadine Gordimer, white writers, were banned from time to time.

However, it is quite surprising that J.M. Coetzee who powerfully condemned the apartheid government through his novels and writings was not harassed nor were his works banned. This is significant because writers like Gordimer and Alan Paton were also subject to censorship and their writings were scrupulously watched. However, Coetzee never came under the gaze of the censor. Perhaps he was too thorough an academic and literary person for the censor to take him seriously. They perhaps thought that his writings could not provoke the masses because his works were beyond the intellectual reach of the masses. Hence they had nothing to fear. The irony is that the South African government gave due recognition to his works. He received prestigious prizes from South Africa, other than the internationally acclaimed Booker and Nobel Prize. It could be because he was an academic in the university or because

he was of Afrikaner descent.

According to the Swedish Academy “Coetzee’s work, though it can give no comfort to the apartheid government, is not explicitly confrontational. He has fashioned a method of storytelling that is closer to classical myth than to modern realism.”<sup>16</sup>

Coetzee did not believe in violence to set right the injustices of the apartheid regime. On the contrary he believed in the healing of individuals and in relationships. The healing takes place in the land itself. The natives knew very well that they would outlive the empire. The land would contrive with them to send away the white man. That is what the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* thinks. In *Life and Times of Michael K*, the land becomes the source of succour for Michael as he returns to the land and lives the life of a cultivator.

Commenting on the great wealth of variety in Coetzee’s works the Swedish Academy opines: “No two books ever follow the same recipe. Extensive reading reveals a recurring pattern, the downward spiraling journeys he considers necessary for the salvation of his characters. His protagonists are overwhelmed by the urge to sink but paradoxically derive strength from being stripped of all external dignity.”<sup>17</sup>

Coetzee’s novels may not introduce new themes in the post colonial context but in each novel he has an extraordinary way of exploring the theme with great imagination and creativity. Coetzee’s answer to Jane Poyner, in an interview on the importance of artists and writers to memorialise catastrophe and atrocity such as the Holocaust or apartheid, was “surely artists and writers will decide for themselves what is important to them.”<sup>18</sup> This remark of Coetzee clarifies that he believes freedom for the artist or a writer is very important. A writer will be stifled when he has the censor breathing down his neck. When asked about his move to Australia and whether it has opened up

new possibilities for his writing, he replied in the affirmative.

In his novels Coetzee comments on the feeling of superiority of the white man and how he exercises his domination over the 'Other'. This domination is exercised either by physical or psychological control. The white man enters the space belonging to the blacks and creates an exclusive space for himself. Coetzee's works demonstrate the fact that the presence of history is undoubtedly there. But how and in what manner, depends on the way Coetzee has handled them. In his writings, Coetzee uses Western intellectual thought in the context of colonialism and apartheid. Attwell critiques: "Gordimer and Coetzee are frequently paired and contrasted for their different approaches to fiction and its relationship to society and history..."<sup>19</sup> Gordimer believed that the writer has a social responsibility. On the other hand, for Coetzee, the narrative itself is a sort of discourse. For Attwell, "Coetzee is more concerned, then, with narrative and its relation to other discourses, than he is with representation per se."<sup>20</sup>

In Coetzee's fiction we find an engagement with the historical condition in South Africa though he does not specify a particular time or space. He believes that their experience is largely colonial. Speaking about the novel being either a supplementary or rival to history Coetzee, opines that when the novel is a supplement to history, it would give first hand experience of living in a certain historical time. Rivalry would mean according to him, a novel that operates in terms of its own procedures and issues in its own conclusions. Coetzee believes that history is not reality, but a kind of discourse. His novels are thus sensitive responses to the happenings in the apartheid regime, each novel using a distinct mode to highlight the atrocities of the apartheid regime.

Though Coetzee is evidently discussing the South African situation, his perspective is very individualistic. His works are post-colonialist and also postmodernist. But we cannot precisely categorise Coetzee as belonging to any particular school. His novels use

real incidents and people from history in fictional situations. The novels are also self reflexive and therefore, Coetzee wants to establish that history is also a human construct.

Both white writers and black writers in South Africa felt that it was their bounden duty and prime responsibility to present the social and political scenario of South Africa in the finest of details, giving a realistic portrayal of the happenings in South Africa under the apartheid regime. It was felt that the writers had a social responsibility and this meant that they had to depict the happenings in their works in a realistic, true to self manner. So the form of writing that was popular was the realistic one.

Coetzee focused on contemporary issues in his non-fictional writings. These ranged from concerns such as apartheid, censorship, terrorism, advertising and so on. For the first time there was a departure from the usual variety of writing by writers in South Africa. By using travel literature and perusing the records in the library in the U.S regarding the Vietnam War, Coetzee was drawing parallels with the South African regime and the scenario there. For the first time such a technique was employed and it raised many brows especially among the academia and also the general novel reading public.

Although Coetzee does not refer to specific historical periods and he uses allegory and metafiction, the novels no doubt can be identified with certain definite historical periods, particular countries or people.

#### **1.4 Coetzee's Writings: A Critical Over-View**

When Coetzee came on to the literary scene in 1974, with the publication of his novel *Dusklands*, he was looked at with much scepticism and curiosity. Academics and readers of Coetzee could not make much of what he was trying to say. The novel was a complete break away from the hitherto existing mode of realistic writing in South Africa. However, as a writer he could not be ignored as is evident in the

comments and assessment that came his way. As years passed by and Coetzee came up with novels, academic curiosity increased further and with the publication of the third novel he obtained wide international acclaim. Alongside his works there generated critical works on his fiction also. These critical works addressed the difference in the way Coetzee had dealt with the dialectics of colonialism. Hitherto, fiction in South Africa aimed at giving a realistic documentation of the oppression faced by the blacks under the white regime. As David Attwell puts it “For Gordimer the essence of the writer’s role lies in her social responsibility, and responsibility is treated primarily as a form of witness. Fiction will ultimately be tested by its accountability to the truth of its society.”<sup>21</sup>

Rob Nixon, a junior lecturer in the University of Cape Town observes that Coetzee’s novels are never very voluminous and the prose is crisp and the sentences and words very carefully chosen.<sup>22</sup> Dominic Head is one of Coetzee’s well known critics. His work forms a fine introduction to Coetzee. Head examines Coetzee’s works in connection with colonialism. He deals with how Coetzee engages history in his novels. Why has Coetzee used fiction to discuss certain social and political issues? He says that the problems of late-colonial and post-colonial South Africa are central concerns for Coetzee. What this study would like to focus on is Coetzee’s engagement with the human condition, the effect of colonialism and apartheid on the human psyche. Dominic Head again refers to Coetzee’s focus on the text and on questions of textuality. Coetzee’s novels he says, have reached out beyond the academia. This is because his concerns are universal.

Another significant observation to be made is that although his novels engage with colonialism, apartheid and the post-apartheid situation, in his non-fictional writings we have him coming up with many contemporary issues. Dominic Head has

mentioned that Coetzee's works have been influenced by the European literary tradition. Coetzee is perhaps the first novelist in South Africa to write with the European literary tradition in the background especially the post modernist mode. It is not only the post-modernist mode, Coetzee has experimented with many literary genres. He uses allegory, motifs, monologues, allusions, parody etc in his novels.

Furthermore, David Attwell's works on Coetzee form another important critical assessment. In his work, Attwell discusses the first six novels of Coetzee as according to him, they form a postmodern metafiction and they address the ethical and political stresses of living in contemporary South Africa. The intention of this study is to highlight these ethical concerns of Coetzee who led a very isolated life and did not capture the attention of the censors so that his works were not banned. Yet, his concerns were that of a writer genuinely interested in and committed to the well being of man. David Attwell points out the fact mentioned by Coetzee's commentators that his novels are neither an analysis of the play of historical forces nor a moral anchor in the search for a human response to colonialism and apartheid. The study will focus on Coetzee's sincere engagement with the plight of man under a state of oppression. Susan Van Zantan Gallagher opines:

Much of Coetzee's own fiction operates in this fashion: rivaling historical discourse revealing its mythic qualities, undercutting its authority, such as in *Foe's* reversionary account of *Robinson Crusoe*, *Duskland's* exposure of South African colonial history and *Age of Iron's* deconstruction of both liberation and liberal rhetoric of the eighties.<sup>23</sup>

Gallagher's criticism of Coetzee throws light on his novel approach of historical deconstruction and alienation from the contemporary rhetoric and approaches. The

modernist techniques appealed to Coetzee, so he incorporated all the innovative *modus operandi* of the modernists in his writings.

Clive Barnett, yet another critic believes that Coetzee uses language in such a way that it is devoid of human quality but is invested with an “ideal meaning.”<sup>24</sup> Coetzee’s language appears simple and lucid on the surface but its intensity of meaning is hidden behind the meta narrative.

Cherry Clayton analyses the self-reflexivity of Coetzee’s writing when he says that the textuality of his novels also gives scope for their perusal of political authority.<sup>25</sup> Critics have also accused Coetzee of not being a realist writer. Most of the writings of South African writers are realistic and the decision of Coetzee not to continue in the same tradition is highly laudable. A writer need not necessarily be realistic to put across his social responsibility and Coetzee demonstrates this very well in his novels. There is no need for the reader to identify happenings and incidents in the text with real life happenings or incidents.

Most of the critical works on Coetzee focus on the deviance of his approach from his contemporaries in his dialectics of colonialism. Some of them have perused his works from the stand point of textuality, social and political issues of apartheid, modernist and post-modernist leanings, experimentation with literary genres, post-modern meta-fiction and historical deconstruction.

A close study of all the critical works on Coetzee reveals the fact that certain critical issues have not been touched upon. These issues are apropos the style of writing, language, impact of colonialism on the psyche of the coloniser, philosophical nuances of the passive resistance of the colonised and the various narrative techniques.

The major criticism of Coetzee is his break away from the realistic mode of

writing. A writer need not necessarily vault to be realistic to articulate his social responsibility and Coetzee demonstrates this amply in his novels. There is no need for the reader to discover comings and goings and incidents in the text with real life happenings or incidents. The novels themselves critique the historical happenings though they do not overtly refer to them.

The style engaged by Coetzee is not as simplistic as it appears to be, as it requires an intellectual interpretation. To cite the example of the novel *Dusklands*, a perception of the nuances involved in the dialectics of the coloniser- colonised is pertinent. The language Coetzee uses is terse, precise and well chosen conveying the point effectively.

In the novels of Coetzee, the coloniser is delineated as an oppressor. However, deep within himself he is a victim of oppression very often portrayed as an individual who is always struggling to keep up a façade of being the superior person. His psyche is frayed and subject to break at any time.

Coetzee furthermore presents the colonised as not only the oppressed but people who passively accept the cruel fate meted out to them by the colonisers. They passively resist them and are able to thwart the intentions of the colonisers. In almost all the novels this facet stands out. The passive resistance is not Kafkaesque but similar to that of the Christian notion of acceptance and the Hindu notion of total surrender without question. All the protagonists of Coetzee are highly evolved beings who have their passions under control. There is total resignation and hence they are poised and in total control of their lives. They are not pawns in the hands of anyone although their oppressors try to make them so.

Coetzee uses various narrative techniques in the novels. He makes use of the early travel writing from the archives. In the novel *In the Heart of the Country* he uses

interior monologues and the epistolary mode is used in the novel, *Age of Iron*. The deliberate absence of the mention of the locale or period in which the action takes place is strategic. All these aspects hitherto not critically addressed in toto will be examined in this study.

### **1.5 Plan of the Thesis**

The principal objective of the present work is to bring out the dynamics of the problematic relationship between the white coloniser and the black colonised. The thesis also makes an attempt to come to grips with the passive resistance proffered by the colonised as a remonstrance against the coloniser.

The focus of the study is man - man in relation to people, man in relation to family, man in relation to society and man in relation to himself. In this context of apartheid, colonialism and post- apartheid, how does power express itself? What is the strategy exercised by those in power? Does Coetzee write in a state of complicity or in a state of guilt?

This study addresses these sensitive concerns of Coetzee. He does not make any statement in his novels nor is his intention to judge or find solutions. They are subject to the interpretation of the reader. The study will focus on the characters in the novel and their role. These characters who are all silent spectators of violence with a sense of resignation offer passive resistance. Attwell analyses the theoretical and historical contexts brought into play by Coetzee's reflexive South African fictions. This study will spotlight the brunt of apartheid, colonialism, post-apartheid and decolonization on the human beings who were then endemic to that historical moment.

Moreover, the focal point will be the consequence of the political and social state of affairs in South Africa, on individual beings in particular and society in general. The thrust of this study will be mainly on how the characters struggle to maintain

their self and identity in the wake of violence, oppression and suppression.

The study will revolve around the rhetoric of coloniser/colonised and deal with torture, power, and its effect on the colonised and observe how passive resistance is offered by the colonised. This study of Coetzee will be in the context of the empire as the centre, the coloniser and the blacks as the Other, the marginalised. However, an analysis of the human condition will be made not just in this situation. Coetzee, nevertheless, addresses the human condition in a universal sense. It is the situation of what 'man has done to man' and apartheid is only an excuse. This will be the central premise of the thesis.

What has been provided till now is a brief outline of the novels of Coetzee and his non fictional writings. The chapters of this study will be as follows: The second chapter will focus on the critical framework of the thesis. The third chapter will make a study of the novels of Coetzee wherein violence and torture have been inflicted and examine its impact on the human psyche. The chapter will focus on the protagonists in the novels and their response to oppression. The nature of silence and passive resistance in the novels of Coetzee will be analysed. The suffering and humiliation of the characters will be a part of this study. In the fourth chapter the three recent novels of Coetzee *Slow Man* (2005) and *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007) and *Summertime* (2009) will be discussed. These three novels were written by Coetzee after he shifted to Adelaide, Australia. There is a paradigm shift in the perspective of these novels in that Coetzee interrogates the coloniser-colonised dialectic on a metaphysical plane. The fifth chapter will highlight the narrative strategies used by Coetzee in his novels. The concluding chapter apart from bringing all the loose threads together makes an attempt to offer a holistic perspective on Coetzee, the man and his works.

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Nadine Gordimer, "Eng-Lang.Literature and Politics in South Africa" in C.Heywood.ed., Aspects of South African Literature, (London: Heinemann, 1976): 119.
- <sup>2</sup> Jason Cowley, "The White South African Novelist" N S Profile 13 October, 2003. 5 June 2007 <<http://www.newstatesman.com>>.
- <sup>3</sup> J.M. Coetzee, "The Novel Today", Upstream Magazine (Rondebosch: South Africa, 1988): 3.
- <sup>4</sup> David Attwell ed., Doubling the Point, Essays and Interviews, J.M. Coetzee (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992) 98.
- <sup>5</sup> John Banville, "Endgame Rev. of Disgrace", The New York Review of Books Vol. 47.1 (January 20, 2000): 23-25.
- <sup>6</sup> The Nobel Prize in Lit.2003 John Maxwell Coetzee, Svenska Akademien Press Release 2 October 2003. 14 August 2005 <[http://nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/2003/press.html](http://nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2003/press.html)>.
- <sup>7</sup> The Alcalde (January /February 2004): 53. 17 August 2005 <[http://www.utexas.edu/news/2003/10/02/nr\\_coetzee/](http://www.utexas.edu/news/2003/10/02/nr_coetzee/)>.
- <sup>8</sup> David Attwell, J.M. Coetzee South Africa and the Politics of Writing (USA: University of California Press, 1993) 70.
- <sup>9</sup> Richard G Martin, "Narrative, History, Ideology: A study of Waiting for the Barbarians and Burgher's Daughter." Ariel 17.3 (1986): 35.
- <sup>10</sup> Dominic Head, J.M. Coetzee (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 2.
- <sup>11</sup> Head 112.
- <sup>12</sup> Head 147.

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<sup>13</sup> Michael Scrogin, Apocalypse and Beyond, The novels of J.M. Coetzee, Christian Century May 1988. 20 September 2005 <[www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=948](http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=948)>.

<sup>14</sup> J.M. Coetzee, Life and Times of Michael K (Great Britain: Vintage, 2004) 182.

<sup>15</sup> Julian Gitzen, The Voice of History in the Novels of JM Coetzee, Critique Vol. 35.1 (1993).

<sup>16</sup> Les Prix Nobel The Nobel Prize 2003, ed. Tore Frangsmyr (Nobel Foundation) Stockholm October 2, 2003. 15 December 2006 <<http://nobelprizes.com/nobel/2003-prizes.html#literature>>.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Jane Poyner, Interview, J.M. Coetzee in Conversation with Jane Poyner 6 September 2006. 14 January 2007. <[http://www.ohioswallow.com/extras/0821416863\\_interview.pdf](http://www.ohioswallow.com/extras/0821416863_interview.pdf)>.

<sup>19</sup> David Attwell, South Africa and the Politics of Writing (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993): 12.

<sup>20</sup> Attwell 13.

<sup>21</sup> Attwell 13.

<sup>22</sup> Rob Nixon, J.M. Coetzee South Africa's Reclusive Nobel Laureate, Slate Nov. 5, 2003. 10 February 2006 <<http://www.slate.com/id/2090790/>>.

<sup>23</sup> Susan Van Zanten Gallagher, "The Backward Glance: History and the Novel in Post-Apartheid South Africa" Studies in the Novel 29.3(1997): 376-395.

<sup>24</sup> Clive Barnett, "J.M. Coetzee: Censorship and its Doubles" Ariel 28.3 (1997): 145-162.

<sup>25</sup> Cherry Clayton, "Review article: White Writing and Post Colonial Politics" Ariel 25.4 (1994): 153-167.

## Chapter II

### The Dynamics of Violence in the Novels of J.M.Coetzee

*Non-violence means an ocean of compassion*

*M.K. Gandhi*

J.M. Coetzee situated himself in a very uncomfortable position of being a white man in South Africa who was sympathetic to the blacks. This situation was uncomfortable because although being a white man, his sympathy was with the blacks. However, he could not completely shake off his complicity regarding the manner in which the blacks were treated by the whites. In the Jerusalem Prize Acceptance Speech delivered in 1987, Coetzee makes a very pertinent statement:

The masters in South Africa form a closed hereditary caste. Everyone born with a white skin is born into the caste. Since there is no way of escaping the skin you are born with (can the leopard change its spots?), you cannot resign from the caste. You can imagine resigning, you can perform a symbolic resignation, but, short of shaking the dust off your feet, there is no way of actually doing it.<sup>1</sup>

Consequently Coetzee was fully aware that he could not escape from his complicity of being a white man, a member of a class of people who exploited the natives, although he himself had no role in it.

Akin to Coetzee, there were several writers especially whites who were sympathetic to the blacks. Several of them expressed their apprehensions about what was happening in South Africa. Accordingly their works addressed these concerns. However, they were on shaky grounds. Neither were they accepted by whites nor

were they wholeheartedly taken to be sincere by the blacks. So the position from where Coetzee wrote, was looked at with askance both by the whites and the blacks. The whites who shaped the government kept an eye on the writers and the laws of censorship curtailed their freedom. However, interestingly Coetzee's works were not banned or subjected to any censorship.

Coetzee in his novels, explores the nuances of violence which are predominantly an outcome of a colonial and post-colonial condition. Coetzee who lived in South-Africa in his childhood and youth was witness to many atrocious deeds perpetrated by the whites. The state of apartheid resorted to inhuman practices. On the basis of the colour of the skin, human beings were classified as whites, coloured and blacks, in the order of precedence. The whites nurtured the feeling that they belonged to the higher scale while the coloured and the blacks belonged to the lower rung of the society. This in itself fervidly created an occasion for violence as the whites looked down upon the coloured and the blacks and were contemptuous of them. In fact, the natives in their opinion were savages and cannibals who were denigrated by the whites as superstitious and fanatic. The colonisers were not just happy subjugating the natives. On the other hand they wanted to distort and destroy the natives' past making them feel that they were their saviours. They held forth the argument that if the colonisers were to leave the country of the natives there was no hope for them. Moreover, they expounded the idea that the natives had an absolutely barbaric past before the advent of the colonialists.

In the colonialist regime, the relationship between the whites and other races, the coloured and the blacks, was problematic. Colonialism brought the colonisers and the colonised into an unhappy relationship. The state of affairs under colonialism had an impact on the psyche of both the coloniser and the colonised. The native society was

projected as a society devoid of values. The colonial world was a biased one which was compartmentalised. While one part asserted the superiority of the whites the other vehemently upheld the inferiority of the blacks. Coetzee engages himself with the white black dialectic which positioned the white man in a location of power. Such a relationship generated a lot of violence, apparently and inherently.

The violence expounded by the whites caused severe damage both physical and mental very often creating unerasable scars thus making the damage permanent. Colonialism systematically negated the other person and deprived him of all humane qualities. The colonised thereby became defensive and constantly something brewed in the mind of both the coloniser and the colonised. It is with this inert violence that Coetzee is pre-occupied with, in his novels. Except for the last three novels written after his departure from South Africa, in almost all his novels Coetzee's engagement was with the dialectics of violence. The relationship between the coloniser and the colonised itself was bound by violence. The coloniser finding himself in alien and formidable territory nursed violence within him and whenever an opportunity came his way he did not hesitate to exhibit acts of violence.

The colonised who were fully aware of the violence latent in the coloniser were always defensive, waiting for something disturbing to flare up. Consequently the relationship between the two was based on doubt and suspicion. Neither the coloniser nor the colonised who were wary of each other trusted mutually and acts of violence were impending in both. The violence that dominated the colonial world inevitably would lead to the destruction of the colonial world. The natives also challenged the colonial world, ready to confront the coloniser at all times. The coloniser was convinced that the native wanted to take his place while the native dreamt of setting himself up in the position of the coloniser.

It is evident that Coetzee makes a subtle exploration of violence in his novels. As an individual Coetzee abhorred violence and was never happy with confrontation of any sort. He avoided any situation that would cause unpleasantness. Hence through his novels he seems to elucidate that violence was no answer to any meaningful engagement among individuals. But this did not impede him from making an in-depth study of the problematics of violence. He takes the reader through the vagaries of violence as it affected both the coloniser and the colonised. In truth, every novel set in South Africa obviously or referentially explores the concept of violence.

Coetzee is fully involved with the phenomenon of violence. He explores how the colonised effectively handled violence and how such violent treatment at times made the colonised rebellious. His focus is also on how the colonised react against violence often passively and sometimes violently as well. In truth the colonised do not often react violently. Coetzee's major preoccupation is with the manner in which the colonised handle violence. The colonised in his novels deal with violence in a very mature and sensible manner. He examines how some of them are adversely affected and get hurt in the process. While some of them accept their lot with immense tolerance, there are others who passively resist violence and some others who get embroiled in the violence.

Ania Loomba, a postcolonial critic avers "Colonialism was not an identical process in different parts of the world but everywhere it locked the original inhabitants and the newcomers into the most complex and traumatic relationships in human history."<sup>2</sup> So the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised was far from satisfactory. It is within this problematic framework that Coetzee sets his novels depicting violence which is an upshot of a traumatic relationship.

A brief look at the ideology behind the institution of colonialism is pertinent here. The British colonised many regions for their own profit and gains. However, they felt that it was the 'white man's burden' to 'civilise' the natives who were basically abominable and inferior. In the white man's repertoire the natives were loose and sexually a degenerate lot. All this was propounded and reiterated to justify colonialism. As Homi K. Bhabha argues:

The object of colonial discourse is to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction.... Colonial discourse produces the colonised as a social reality which is once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible.<sup>3</sup>

This coming together of the coloniser and the colonised under such circumstances naturally results in violence.

Homi Bhabha further contends:

What is articulated in the doubleness of colonial discourse is not simply the violence of one powerful nation writing out the history of another. 'Be the father and the oppressor..... just and unjust' is a mode of contradictory utterance that ambivalently re inscribes, across differential power relations, both coloniser and colonised.<sup>4</sup>

In the process of becoming the oppressor, the coloniser inevitably resorts to violence. He feels that violence is the only means by which he can overpower the natives.

Although initially the natives blindly obeyed their oppressors and mimicked them, they soon underwent a change. But before long the natives demonstrated that they had

a culture of their own and it was particular and specific to them alone. As Frantz Fanon avers “It came to an end; the mouths opened by themselves; the yellow and black voices still spoke of our inhumanity.”<sup>5</sup> Slowly the natives started revolting and the subsequent violence resorted to by the natives spelt doom for the oppressors. Sartre in the Preface to Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* opines that the sons of the natives had reached a stage where they no longer feared the whites as their fathers feared them, “their sons ignore you; a fire warms them and sheds light around them, and you have not lit it. Now, at a respectful distance, it is you who will feel furtive, night bound and perished with cold.... a new dawn will break....”<sup>6</sup>

It is very apt and pertinent to examine the discourse of violence in the novels of J.M. Coetzee. Ashis Nandy in his seminal work *Intimate Enemy Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* contends that “colonialism colonises minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within the colonised societies to alter their cultural priorities once for all.”<sup>7</sup> The coloniser in truth colonises the minds of the natives also. That is, the colonised are made to believe many things about themselves by the coloniser’s attitude towards them.

In such a relationship between the coloniser and the colonised which is torn apart by the dialectics of violence, the colonised are not simple or naïve people. They are not the stereotype victimised people or as Nandy posits “simple hearted victims of colonialism; they become participants in a moral and cognitive venture against oppression.”<sup>8</sup> The characters in the novels of Coetzee fit into such a description where the native recreates himself. In an environment rid with violence the native fights “his own battle for survival in his own way, sometimes consciously, sometimes by default.”<sup>9</sup> In the process of subjugating the native and exercising violence over him the coloniser becomes a “self-destructive co-victim.”<sup>10</sup>

Nandy speaks of “a world view which believed in the absolute superiority of the human over the non-human, the masculine over the feminine, the adult over the child, the historical over the ahistorical and the modern or progressive over the traditional or savage.”<sup>11</sup> Thus oppressive behaviour, savage acts by the dominant or dominating classes were justified by creating binary opposites. This gave the colonisers moral justification for their acts of violence and cruelty. They could accentuate their acts of violence on grounds of being superior people. Hence, initially the marginalised accepted their lot and the position of subservience, daring not to rebel.

Nandy asserts “Crucial to this cultural co-optation was the process psycho analysis calls identification with the aggressor.”<sup>12</sup> To the white man the native was one who only understood violence which was proved wrong. The natives also reacted eventually and entered the fighting phase, although initially they understood only violence. Sartre says “Of course; first, the only violence is the settlers; that is to say, the same violence is thrown back upon us as when our reflection comes forward to meet us when we go towards a mirror.”<sup>13</sup> The native also acted against the settler thus beginning to destroy the oppressor.

Nandy discusses how colonialism had its effect on the colonisers also. “It openly sanctified – in the name of such values as competition, achievement, control and productivity- new forms of institutionalised violence and ruthless Darwinism.”<sup>14</sup> The coloniser exonerated violence. The process of colonisation also brought a change in the internal culture of the Europeans. The qualities which were base and inhuman in them began to surface. The effect of the coloniser-colonised dialectic was reciprocal “the subjects in the colonies controlled their rulers as surely as the rulers controlled their subjects.”<sup>15</sup> So in a way the coloniser showed marks of the colonised and the colonised too moved towards possessing the qualities of the coloniser. This coloniser

–colonised dialectic was mutual and one could be identified with the other. When the coloniser practised atrocities on the colonised he also underwent a drastic transformation. Moreover, he became cruel and unsympathetic towards his men.

Nandy avers:

Colonialism as a psychological process cannot but endorse the principle of isomorphic oppressions which restates for the era of the psychological man the ancient wisdom implied in the New Testament and also perhaps in the Sauptik Parva of the Mahabharata: “Do not do unto others what you would that they do not do unto you, lest you do unto yourself what you do unto others.”<sup>16</sup>

Initially the natives feared the guns that the whites had, which were ever pointing at them. The trigger would let go anytime at the slightest provocation from the native. Sartre fervently argues: “They are cornered between our guns pointed at them and those terrifying compulsions, those desires for murder which spring from the depth of their spirits and which they do not always recognise; for at first it is not *their* violence, it is ours, which turns back on itself and rends them;...”<sup>17</sup> This attitude of the natives stemmed from the way they were treated by the whites. The whites who were fully aware of that knew it was too late to make reparations for all the excesses inflicted on the natives. The native tried to re-create himself through violence desiring to kill the white man, “to shoot down a European is to kill two birds with one stone, to destroy an oppressor and the man he oppresses at the same time...”<sup>18</sup> Ultimately the white man realised the bare truth that violence only led him towards decolonisation. “the native re-creates himself, and we, settlers and Europeans, ultras and liberals break up.”<sup>19</sup>

This process of decolonisation is dealt with by Coetzee in one of his novels when the country is in turmoil and the blacks are out to wreak vengeance on the whites. Fanon states that “decolonisation is always a violent phenomenon.”<sup>20</sup> There was a reversal of the ratio of forces when the blacks demanded this process and were very determined to see it happen. But this is noticeable only in a couple of Coetzee’s novels as is evident from the fact that the protagonists of Coetzee’s early novels passively resist violence. In fact they are not desperate or fatalistic but passive by choice.

By using violence, decolonisation brought about a change in the existing state of affairs in the colonial world. Fanon contends, “Decolonisation, which sets out to change the order of the world, is obviously, a programme of completer disorder.”<sup>21</sup> The oppressed comprised of two types of victims. One who relentlessly fought back and the other who was passive and non-co-operative. Such passive resistance is demonstrated by the protagonists of Coetzee’s novels. Decolonisation modified individuals considerably. Fanon reiterates “the ‘thing’ which has been colonised becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself.”<sup>22</sup> Thus the impact of the colonial encounter was not just unilateral. It put the coloniser in jeopardy as much as it did the colonised.

Aime Cesaire, a well known writer on colonialism argues that the treatment meted out to the natives made them feel rejected which in turn developed feelings of inferiority. When the coloniser committed atrocities, which were starkly brutal and degrading, he in turn became brutal, and was infested with all that was bad. Cesaire expounds, “a gangrene sets in, a centre of infection begins to spread; ... a poison has been instilled into the veins of Europe and, slowly but surely, the continent proceeds towards savagery.”<sup>23</sup>

Cesaire rains harsh comments on Europe which established its colonies out of reckless impunity. He says “colonisation works to *decivilise* the coloniser, to *brutalise* him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism...”<sup>24</sup> So colonisation did not leave the coloniser untouched. All the evil that he perpetrated on the colonised brutally affected him also, thus becoming the quintessence of evil.

In his novels Coetzee presents the coloniser in this light. Through the process of colonisation, the evil that lies dormant in the colonisers surfaces in a distorted and ugly manner. The most brutal qualities are kindled in the coloniser and he sets them loose without any restraint. Coetzee vehemently proves the point that violence meted out by the coloniser ultimately boomerangs on him. His character undergoes a sea-change bringing out the worst in him erasing the finer aspects of his personality steadily but surely. He becomes a brute; a synonym for all that is heinous.

Having engendered such qualities in a troubled society, it is imperative that the maintenance of peace becomes inevitable. Hence the police force is constantly in vigil though they are only an agent of the government. Fanon avers that the coloniser is “the bringer of violence into the home and into the mind of the native.”<sup>25</sup> Cesaire perceives that colonisation “dehumanises even the most civilised man; ...that the coloniser, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as *an animal*, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform *himself* into an animal.”<sup>26</sup> The coloniser degrades the colonised by making them feel inferior and instilling fear in them. Cesaire further says that they were made to “tremble, kneel, despair and behave like flunkies.”<sup>27</sup> The colonised are made to feel that they are base and degraded. They are positioned as subjects and are subjugated by the white man. This transaction between the coloniser

and the colonised does not leave the coloniser unaffected. He in turn becomes merciless.

In the novels of Coetzee, the impact of colonialism on the white man is seen very clearly. To remain in the location of power, the white man puts on a pretension of being superior to the native. He constantly struggles to uphold this position of superiority. Colonial discourse construed the colonised as a degenerate lot on the basis of racial origin. They did this to justify the conquest of the native's land and the exploitation of the native. On the one hand the coloniser establishes that the native is inferior and has to be ruled over and on the other, he is very much aware of the position that he is in vis a vis the colonised. He is in a precarious position that can explode any time. The reaction of the subjugated native is not always mild and submissive. There is also resistance from their side. They also speak against the dominating power. Rey Chow a critic on Coetzee reiterates this point:

Contrary to the model of western hegemony in which the coloniser is seen as a primary active, 'gaze' subjugating the native as passive 'object', I want to argue that it is actually the coloniser who feels looked at by the native's gaze. This gaze which is neither a threat nor a retaliation, makes the coloniser 'conscious' of himself, leading to his need to turn his gaze around and look at himself, henceforth 'reflected' in the native object.<sup>28</sup>

The coloniser destroys the world of the colonised by trying to erase their culture and tradition. However, the colonised also desire to wreck the world of the coloniser. The coloniser sets up the native as evil to justify his acts of exploitation.

Thus the coloniser is not totally comfortable in the new environment he puts himself in. He is always feigning superiority by considering the natives as inferior.

He is equally uncomfortable by the gaze of the native, as the native is by his. The native also becomes aggressive wanting to oust the settler and “substitute himself for the settler.”<sup>29</sup>

In the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised, the native is never fatalistic. He is well aware that the violence meted out to him by the coloniser is the cause of his suffering. As a result he does not hesitate to use violence against the oppressor. He remonstrates that violence is the only way by which he can wreak vengeance on the coloniser. The violence that the colonised experiences and its impact on him even leads him to a feeling of “I don’t give a damn for him.”<sup>30</sup> He even gets enlightened by thoughts like “my life is worth as much as the settlers, his glance no longer shrivels me up nor freezes me, and his voice no longer turns me into stone.”<sup>31</sup>

However, such feelings vacillate. Many a time, the colonised sees himself in a helpless state. Initially the native feels nostalgic and tries to retrieve his past. But soon he realises that it is not truly necessary to establish that identity. When the colonised tries to erase the barrier between him and the coloniser he is resisted by the latter. The white man tries to maintain a distance and remain in a position of power. The colonised at times react angrily towards the coloniser or may also remain passive. Nevertheless, the violence that the coloniser perpetrates on the colonised, makes him live in constant fear of the safety of his women who live in the proximity of the natives. He hates the natives and never trusts them.

To justify violence, the coloniser embarks on a mission of constructing the ‘Other’. The colonised according to the coloniser is the ‘Other’ because he is different in many ways from him. He is all that the coloniser is not. The coloniser carves a space for himself from where he exhibits his violence to dominate and exploit the

'Other'. He possesses power and knowledge. As a result he chooses to exert his power over the native and most often the native becomes a mute spectator which of course is only a façade as he has seething anger in him. The native's violence within himself is often stirred by the various acts and statements of the coloniser. The native is told that "he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values.... he is the deforming element, disfiguring all that has to do with beauty or morality; he is the depository of maleficent powers...."<sup>32</sup> Such statements against him perturb the native and he waits for an opportunity to hit back at the coloniser.

Fanon further expounds that when the natives are made aware of their denigrating nature by the colonisers they are slowly exposed to Western values. However, Fanon states:

But every time Western values are mentioned they produce in the native a sort of stiffening or muscular lock-jaw.... in revenge, the native laughs in mockery when Western values are mentioned in front of him.... In the period of decolonisation, the colonised masses mock at these very values, insult them and vomit them up.<sup>33</sup>

The native harbours revengeful thoughts which he will let loose at the slightest instigation. He waits for an occasion to retaliate against the oppressors. There are instances where on the slightest provocation, the native expresses his suppressed and repressed emotions. At such times the violence is discernible in the body language of the native.

As Fanon contends, there are also visible changes in the way the native looks at the oppressor at the slightest provocation. It is here that passivity and indifference play a significant role. Some of the natives remain passive not being provoked. This is

a proof and an indication that the oppressor means nothing to them. Any act of provocation by the oppressor fails to register any protest in the native.

Living in South Africa, Coetzee was a witness to the apartheid regime. Hence his novels deal with protagonists locked in an uneasy relationship where they are face to face with the apartheid regime. Coetzee addresses such concerns in his novels. The early novels deal with the manner in which the natives remain unperturbed even when subject to physical harm or torture. The natives do not shy away from physical harm; they face it with grit and determination. Wearing a mask of defiance they do not exhibit any sign of pain or suffering.

However, there are also instances where the natives postulate violence. This is because the natives believe that violence can be encountered only with violence. Several Apartheid laws segregating the whites and the blacks like the Population Registration Act, the Mixed Amenities Act, Group Areas Act, and the Immorality Act engendered serious complications in white-black relationship. The blacks felt cheated in their own land and these laws enabled the whites to blatantly exploit them. These Acts justified and legalised discrimination. However, the natives of South Africa were unhappy with them. As Fanon remarks, "The well known principle that all men are equal will be illustrated in the colonies from the moment that the native claims that he is the equal of the settler. In fact he has already decided to eject him and to take his place; as we see it, it is a whole material and moral universe which is breaking up."<sup>34</sup>

The moment the native learns that he also has an upper hand, he does not hesitate to wreak violence against the oppressor sparing none. Any act of exploitation is mercilessly defied. Reacting violently, he is forever ready to fight the oppressor.

Coetzee's engagement with violence in his novels is with aggression leading to passivity and acceptance. In all his novels the coloniser-colonised dialectic is either

aggressive as in the early novels, or passive as in the later novels culminating in acceptance of their lot. But the change in the attitude of the protagonists of the various novels is slow and throws light on Coetzee's engagement with apartheid in the country where he lived.

In the colonial enterprise, what was peculiar to South Africa was that the colonialists added another dimension to exploitation with the introduction of the system of segregation called 'apartheid'. The natives were treated as second rate subjects who lacked the capacity racially and culturally to live a decent life. The white man spoke "of the stink of the native quarter, of breeding swarms, of foulness, of spawn, of gesticulation."<sup>35</sup> The whites used violence to negate the natives. Fanon argues, "Violence in the colonies does not only have for its aim the keeping of these enslaved men at arm's length; it seeks to dehumanise them. Everything will be done to wipe out their traditions, to substitute our language for theirs and to destroy their culture without giving them ours."<sup>36</sup>

Thus, by resorting to violence the coloniser attempts to even wipe out the traditions of the native. This struggle to make the native forget his customs and traditions creates a lot of unpleasantness. The native is told that his myths and legends are all made up and the only truth is the Christian religion. However, when the truth dawns on the native, he forsakes all that the white man has told him. As Fanon contends:

The native is a being hemmed in; apartheid is simply one form of the division into compartments of the colonial world. ... the dreams of the native are always of muscular prowess; his dreams are of action and of aggression....The colonised man will first manifest this aggressiveness which has been deposited in his bones against his own people... the

settler's world is a hostile world, which spurns the native, but at the same time it is a world of which he is envious.<sup>37</sup>

The native always dreams of taking the settler's place. However, in the novels of Coetzee, apart from the earlier ones, the protagonists do not make any attempt to identify themselves with their oppressors. They demonstrate neither the slightest anger nor retaliation, evidently accepting their lot. Perhaps as Fanon avers, "A belief in fatality removes all blame from the oppressor; the cause of misfortunes and of poverty is attributed to God; He is Fate."<sup>38</sup> However, this state is not permanent. Slowly resistance builds up and the native reacts against the whites viewing the coloniser as their oppressor.

Nevertheless, the white man carries with him the assumption that the native whether he is black, yellow or white was as Fanon states, "a sly-boots, a lazy bones and a thief, who lives on nothing, and who understands only violence."<sup>39</sup> However, in course of time the native imbibes all the traits of the settler like his cruelty and his violence and begins to react against the settler. The suppressed anger is let loose one day and very soon, they start attacking the whites. The violence shown by the whites on them does not repress them forever. They are no longer willing to endure any exploitation from the whites thus making their stance very clear.

Fanon clearly reiterates, "decolonisation is quite simply the replacing of a certain 'species' of men by another 'species' of men."<sup>40</sup> The substitution is total and absolute. Thus decolonisation creates a situation where the coloniser becomes the colonised and vice versa. There is a reversal of roles and the violence perpetrated by the colonisers is now perpetrated by the colonised on their oppressors. The colonisers find themselves in a frightful situation. But they had to admit that they were only paying for what they had done to the natives.

Coetzee, in his novels illustrates that in the process of decolonisation the colonised wants to take over the land of the coloniser. He reckons that it is his right to take back the land that was usurped by the coloniser. Violence is handled in a different manner by the whites. They do not think of retaliation but live in constant fear of the natives. Thus it is observed that in the subsequent period of decolonisation the whites do not retaliate, they remain passive and suffer the violence inflicted on them. The white victims feel that the blacks were only taking revenge for what the whites had earlier done to them. Fanon posits, "The native who decides to put the programme into practice and to become its moving force is ready for violence at all times."<sup>41</sup>

The black youth of South Africa were defiant towards the whites. They were ready to even sacrifice their lives for the cause of freedom. They were passionate about their ideology and were ready to stand up to the police who resorted to extreme means of torture. The elders who could not plunge themselves intensely into the fray however, supported and encouraged the young. As a result of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa, the youth from schools and colleges, rebelled against the whites.

The coloniser constantly maintained that he established control over the natives in order to civilise them. However, the coloniser, according to Aime Cesaire, did not exhibit a single human value. By colonizing the natives the colonisers themselves became a sick civilization. By violence, hatred and racial discrimination he postulates, "slowly but surely, the continent proceeds towards savagery."<sup>42</sup> By wreaking his anger on the natives the coloniser satiated his sadistic pleasure. Cesaire continues to say that every individual "has a Hitler inside him."<sup>43</sup> The effect of colonisation can be seen on the coloniser too.

“Colonisation’, argues Césaire, “dehumanises even the most civilised man; that colonial activity, colonial enterprise, colonial conquest, which is based on contempt for the native and justified by that contempt, inevitably tends to change him who undertakes it.”<sup>44</sup> We find this transformation taking place in Coetzee’s first novel. Although colonisation makes the colonised cringe, the protagonists of Coetzee do not do so. They face adversity with poise and dignity accepting their lot without any resistance. But in some of the later novels Coetzee presents the colonised who want to take the place of the coloniser.

Fanon refers to a leaflet that was distributed in Algeria where trouble was brewing which stated that “Colonialism is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence.”<sup>45</sup> Interestingly Coetzee, in his novels deals with the colonisers who succumb to violence.

In the Jerusalem Prize Acceptance Speech (1987) Coetzee vehemently puts forth the following argument, “In a society of masters and slaves, no one is free. The slave is not free, because he is not his own master; the master is not free, because he cannot do without the slave. For centuries South Africa was a society of masters and serfs; now it is a land where the serfs are in open rebellion and the masters are in disarray.”<sup>46</sup> Accordingly violence has erupted in South Africa because of the change in power and this puts the master, the coloniser in an uneasy state. Coetzee opines that the relationship between the whites and the blacks has created “stunted and deformed”<sup>47</sup> individuals. Coetzee speaks uncompromisingly about the literature that comes from South Africa. “It is a less than fully human literature, unnaturally preoccupied with power and the torsions of power, unable to move from elementary

relations of contestation, domination and subjugation to the vast and complex human world that lies beyond them.”<sup>48</sup>

The imperial state was ready to use any means by which they could exercise complete mastery over the natives. Hence they came out with their own preposterous assumptions not hesitating to use any base method to dehumanise the native. The natives were constantly reminded that they were uncivilised by resorting to violence to subjugate them.

Violence was used by the coloniser to control and suppress the native since it had a terrible impact on the colonised. However, it was not a permanent phenomenon. The victimised soon began to assert and even defy the coloniser. Nevertheless, we note that even when the colonised are able to overpower the coloniser, there still lurks violence in the colonised which cannot be completely wiped out. It becomes a part of his consciousness just as it is a part of the consciousness of the coloniser.

Although Coetzee overtly does not refer to the real accounts of violence in South Africa in his novels, he echoes the social and political happenings in his homeland which caught the attention of the world. The violence in South Africa was even more intense because of the inhuman practice of the apartheid system. The entire world condemned this practice and vociferously opposed the inhuman violence resorted to by the colonisers.

Fanon pertinently observes that “The violence of the colonial regime and the counter-violence of the native balance each other and respond to each other in an extraordinary reciprocal homogeneity.”<sup>49</sup> There is hatred generated among the colonised, terror and counter terror, violence and counter violence. Fanon continues to argue that “for the colonised people this violence, because it constitutes their only work, invests their characters with positive and creative qualities.”<sup>50</sup>

Most of the characters of Coetzee do not demonstrate any overt violence. In fact they accept the violence meted out to them. The protagonists in the novels suffer, but their suffering leads them towards finding a philosophical meaning of life without in the least displaying any hatred for the whites. However, the whites in the novels of Coetzee are ruthless in the treatment of the blacks. But they too are very uneasy in this position although they put up a brave front. The colonised know that they can hardly get justice in the colonial framework by peaceful means. As a result some of them retaliate like the young leaders in the Black Consciousness Movement.

The colonised man tries to find his freedom in and through violence. As Fanon avers, "The practice of violence binds them together as a whole, since each individual forms a violent link in the great chain, a part of the great organism of violence which has surged upwards in reaction to the settler's violence in the beginning."<sup>51</sup> So violence has the role of uniting the colonised. They shed their differences, they are ready to die for a cause and they stand united. Coetzee mirrors such a stand of the young natives in his novels. As Fanon states, "At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect."<sup>52</sup>

By resorting to violence which is aimed at the coloniser, the colonised assert themselves and try to regain their lost sense of self-respect. By a show of violence, the native tries to find a space for himself. He becomes fearless which enables him to legitimise his rights trying to acquire all that he has been denied resulting in a sense of defiance. In the colonised, psychological violence if not physical violence is seen ever since the coloniser started treating him like dirt. This psychological violence may at times lead to violence from his part; it may also be suppressed and kept under control. The native may be seething with anger or he may brush off the attitude of the white

man in a philosophic manner. The violence may silence him and this silence may not necessarily be a forced one. It is a silence of understanding, rather a conscious one on the part of the colonised.

In his novels, Coetzee presents the hapless victims of colonisation as the 'Other' in the binary opposites. The native is the coloniser's 'Other' in the novels of Coetzee. Coetzee writes using the middle voice which distances the 'Other' from the author and gives him the advantage of impersonal writing. Thus he engages with violence in his novels without commenting about it in his own terms. Attwell interprets Coetzee's novels as "explosive and aggressive work which replays some of the dominating, rationalistic discourses of the West in an attempt to understand forces, both violent and epistemic, which were determining Coetzee's historical experience and social identity."<sup>53</sup> Coetzee's understanding of the divisive forces in South African society is based on his observation of the aggressive behaviour of the whites and the response that ensued from the natives. The experience that he has, being part of that society which resorted to violence and aggression pervades his novels. The violence in South Africa causes a lot of trauma both to the coloniser and the colonised. Coetzee uses the framework of violence to write his novels; violence wreaked not only on the individual but also on the earth. In his first novel, the enemy tries to destroy the land of the victimised by using chemicals which would destroy the fertility of the land and make it fit for nothing. In the second novella in the same novel the protagonist resorts to violence, to silence and subjugate the native. In the novels of Coetzee, the body is a seat of contestation and is always subject to violence. The body is an embodiment of suffering and pain. The colonisers use guns to self validate their actions. We find that the power that one individual exercises over the other also leads to violence and this

has been analysed in many of his novels. The violence around an individual furthermore makes him withdraw from the society and people.

Coetzee also deals with domestic violence. For instance in one of his novels, he discusses the violence inflicted by a father on his daughter. Psychological violence affects the master-servant relationship. The violence in the white man is one generated out of fear which is displayed for the sake of self defence. Basically the coloniser fears the native and he feels that if he exercises violence on the native, the native can be subjugated easily. To some extent he has achieved this objective but it has also made the violence latent in the native surface. All that is needed for the native is the trigger to let loose his violence.

In his novels Coetzee envisages violence against women who are subject to physical violence. The body of the woman becomes the seat of violence and the oppressor gets pleasure in causing pain to the woman's body. The oppressor wants a claim over the body just as the empire wants a claim over the colonised land. The description of violence in the novels of Coetzee is implicit. The oppressors behave brutally and act mercilessly. The coloniser exercises utmost violence on the body of the native. The brutality inflicted affects the person not only physically but mentally as well.

Coetzee's novels clearly stipulate that the violence perpetrated by the empire will finally bring about its own annihilation. Through his novels he illustrates that violence is self-destructive and can never be a solution to the problems of life. The native is excluded from the advantages brought in by the colonial enterprise and ironically the coloniser enjoys the outcome of exploitation. However, this is not perpetual.

Violence only perpetrates violence. Gandhi who fought for freedom from the colonialists in India believed that violence could be outdone by non-violence. Here

we can recall how Gandhi resorted to nonviolence to achieve his end. Coetzee also seems to hint at such non-violence through most of his protagonists. Kailash C. Baral a critic on Coetzee says that J.M Coetzee, is perhaps the only one among contemporary novelists who is rigorously engaged in exploring the ontological and other issues crucial to the fictional discourse.

The violence at first emanated from the centre and it was targeted at the margin which later boomeranged from the margin to the centre. The very act of segregation by the whites led to violent psychological reaction. However, the natives were helpless and there was nothing much they could do. The whites felt that the presence of the blacks near their dwellings was a threat to them. They surmised that they were the originators of disease. Their attitude to the blacks was demeaning. Naturally such segregation and the callous attitude to the blacks slowly built up violence among the blacks.

The whites enjoyed several privileges whereas the blacks in their own land were denied even the basic amenities. These contributing factors were responsible for a building up of resistance against the whites. The anger of the blacks was seething as they were treated as third rate citizens. This led to segregation on a large basis and the natives were made to live under unhygienic conditions. Fanon postulates:

The town belonging to the colonised people... is a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute.... It is a world without spaciousness; men live there on top of each other, and their huts are built one on top of the other... The look that the native turns on the settler's town is a look of lust, a look of envy: it expresses his dreams of possession - all manner of possession: to sit at the settler's table, to sleep in the settler's bed, with his wife if possible. The colonised man is an envious man.<sup>54</sup>

The urban space in South Africa was set apart mainly for the whites. The natives were treated as “strangers, migrants, cultural innocents and laboring subjects who lack the capacity, racially and culturally to ever attain European privileges.”<sup>55</sup> Gradually the blacks became suspicious of any move on the part of the whites to shift them to different locations. However, the suspicion was righteous as the blacks were displaced during the outbreak of plague in Cape Town. The blacks complained of the inadequate compensation that was paid to them for their properties that were confiscated. They refused to move and slowly black resentment was building up.

Francis Strode a critic avers, “Black homes were quarantined and white-owned homes were not; possessions of blacks were burned, while the goods, the stores, and the warehouses where they worked and contracted the plague had not been touched, because those belonged to whites.”<sup>56</sup> This was all done out of the fear of the whites that the blacks would take over and gain control over them. Consequently they segregated the blacks by moving them to locations outside the city. These calculated acts of the whites created a lot of seething resentment in the blacks.

The best areas in Cape Town were kept for the whites as they did not want to be outnumbered within their cities. Therefore the resentment from the blacks was only natural. Coetzee in his novels examines the violent repressive measures used by the State against the blacks. The state of emergency gave unbridled power to the police. They had as Strode remarks, “The right to arrest anyone search any place and seize any property without a warrant; detain any person for at least 14 days while forbidding that person to see a lawyer or to have families notified of detention; ban any person from entering or leaving any area at any time.”<sup>57</sup> Moreover the press was under heavy censorship. Coetzee contends:

Having lived through the heyday of South Africa censorship, seen its

consequences not only on the careers of fellow-writers but on the totality of public discourse, and felt within myself some of its more secret and shameful effects, I have every reason to suspect that whatever infected Arenas or Mangakis or Kis, whether real or delusional, has infected me too. That is to say, this very writing may be a specimen of the kind of paranoid discourse it seeks to describe.<sup>58</sup>

Therefore, through the clamping of censorship the whites sowed seeds of violence in the minds of the writers too. Coetzee says that all the writers, even those who were not censored were affected by censorship. The whites exhibited violence because of their paranoia. Coetzee further argues, "Paranoids behave as though the air is filled with coded messages deriding them or plotting their destruction. For decades the South African State lived in a state of paranoia.... This diffusion of paranoia is not inadvertent: it is used as a technique of control."<sup>59</sup> As a result of this there was violence in the mind of the white man and also the blacks and the society broke up. Censorship affected the writers of the time making them highly turbulent and belligerent.

Censorship exercised control over the writers in a violent manner. As Coetzee put it "Working under censorship is like being intimate with someone who does not love you, with whom you want no intimacy, but who presses himself in upon you" (*GO* 38). Hence the censor is one who makes the writer internally violent. The writer detests him. Yet he is helpless.

The State of South Africa, Coetzee reiterates broke the freedom of writers who questioned the atrocities committed by the State. The writers were arrested and consequently abominable violence was inflicted upon them. They were made to apologise for writing against the State. However, in the long run it was the writers

who emerged victorious as they made the people sensitive to the violence practised by the State through their writings. Coetzee discussing apartheid remarks:

It did indeed flower out of self-interest and greed, but also out of desire, and the denial of desire. In its greed, it demanded black bodies in all their physicality in order to burn up their energy as labour. In its anxiety about black bodies; it also made laws to banish them from sight. Apartheid did not understand itself and could not afford to understand itself. Its essence from the beginning was confusion, a confusion it displaced widely all around itself. (*GO* 164)

The novelist illustrates how the system of apartheid itself is a source of violence. The institution of apartheid was so rigid that, those who upheld it themselves were in a state of confusion. Their sole purpose was to subjugate the blacks and they felt that they could achieve it by clamping repressive measures.

Coetzee analyses apartheid from the point of view of force. The whites are assured that they can get men to do things by force and therefore use force. Coetzee's protagonists who become victims of brute force do not retaliate. Their response is similar to the path followed by Gandhi. They embraced non violence. There is all likelihood that Coetzee would have read and heard about Gandhi's non violence. He echoes Gandhi's sentiments through his protagonists that "There is harm in the exercise of brute force, never in that of pity."<sup>60</sup>

Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj* opines, "Passive resistance is a method of securing rights by personal suffering; it is the reverse of resistance by arms.....Everybody admits that sacrifice of self is infinitely superior to sacrifice of others."<sup>61</sup> This is the method used by Coetzee's protagonists when they oppose the whites, the settlers. The protagonists of Coetzee offer resistance to the atrocities of the colonisers. However,

they do so by appropriating a passive stance. Gandhi goes on to say that passive resistance is not merely a weapon of the weak. We find that Coetzee's characters who use passive resistance are actually very strong characters. Coetzee's attitude towards the white characters in his novels who harmed the blacks is similar to what Bhikhu Parekh, an authority on Gandhi, avers, "all Hindu thinkers insisted that in harming others, the moral agent harmed himself as well."<sup>62</sup>

Coetzee's black characters who refused to cause harm were actually like the followers of non violence of Gandhi. Bhikhu Parekh contends:

In Gandhi's view, it was the wish not to cause harm or destruction, that is, the 'element of conscious compassion' that constituted the 'essence' of non-violence..... In the Indian traditions, harm was defined widely to include not only physical but also psychological, moral and others forms of pida or klesa (pain) Gandhi accepted this broad definition of it.<sup>63</sup>

Insulting others, humiliating them, reducing their self respect and expression of anger were also forms of violence. The whites in Coetzee used this as well.

Parekh argues that Gandhi "was convinced that the reign of violence could not be ended by adding to it and that non violent struggle was the only answer. However, he realised that non-violence did not come easily to those not fully trained in and committed to it, and that most ordinary men and women resorted to violence when provoked beyond endurance."<sup>64</sup> Thus we see that Coetzee's characters who do not resort to violence even when they encounter aggression are evolved beings. The violence that humiliates and brutalises them gives them immense moral power and strength.

Coetzee thus explores this sort of violence in his later novels when the blacks started to react against the oppression of the whites. In some of the novels, Coetzee's

characters resort to violence against the whites. "Every oppressive and exploitative system ultimately depended on the cooperation of its victims, and it would not last a day without their active or passive material and moral support."<sup>65</sup>

The violence of the whites was a result of intense selfishness. But the violence depicted by the blacks was born out of the need to preserve self-respect and dignity.

Parekh rightly points out:

Gandhi argued that although non violence was far superior to violence, the latter was 'infinitely' better than cowardice. A coward lacked 'manliness' and was committed to nothing more elevated than sheer survival. By contrast, a man prepared to use violence had pride and self-respect and was prepared to die rather than surrender what he held dear.<sup>66</sup>

In Coetzee's novels the youth of South Africa take to violent means against the whites. Coetzee, writing about such acts of the youth, without overtly referring to the political and social movements in South Africa, seems to justify the violence used by the black youth. The stance taken by Coetzee echoes Gandhi's views on violence. Gandhi also knew that one could not always abide by non-violence. Violence many a time was necessary and unavoidable especially as Parekh reiterates "when used in the pursuit of such values as individual and social life, justice, and the assertion of human dignity and the development of courage or when provoked by unbearable oppression."<sup>67</sup> Coetzee unquestionably seems to have been influenced by Gandhi in his views on violence.

Coetzee's condemnation of violence is similar to what the Hindu thinkers expounded. These thinkers disapproved of violence mainly on four grounds. Parekh contends:

For one set of thinkers, all life was a manifestation of Brahman, and hence sacred. For another, all living beings were rightful members of the cosmos and, as such, entitled to respect and autonomy to be interfered with only when they transgressed their naturally ordained boundaries and threatened to harm others. For some others, the use of violence necessarily involved strong passions, especially anger and hatred, and disturbed the equanimity and moral harmony of the agent. For yet others, it corrupted his consciousness, defiled his soul and hindered his spiritual progress. While the first two arguments rejected violence for what it did to *others*, the last two were primarily concerned with what it did to the moral *agent*. ...However, the emphasis varied considerably, some preferring to concentrate on the harm done to the victim, others on that done to the agent.<sup>68</sup>

In Coetzee also we find a similar engagement with violence. He believes that in harming others the person or persons who perpetrate violence are harmed as well. And he illustrates through his novels that although the victims suffer, there is a moral triumph for them and for the victimiser there is a degeneration of the self.

Parekh opines, “For the Hindus, if causing harm or destruction was inescapable or required, to maintain cosmic or social order, and not born out of ill will or malice, it was fully justified.”<sup>69</sup> Coetzee justified violence perpetrated by the young black boys who believed that they were fighting for the freedom of their country.

The white man in South Africa indulged in violence that was malevolent. Malevolence meant ill will towards or hatred of others, a wish to harm them even when they posed no threat to one’s interests. That is what the white man did in South Africa and Coetzee illustrates this in his novels. For Gandhi, Parekh says “the thought

of harming another itself was violence.”<sup>70</sup> Coetzee also refers to such violence in his novels. In his first novel the protagonist contemplates revenge and comes back to wreak vengeance on the natives. However, the violence of the blacks in another novel was not of the contemplated kind; it was a fight against the whites to protect themselves from ignominy. The violence of the blacks was for the pursuit of legitimate and just self-interest.

Gandhi, argues Parekh, also believed “that all life was equally sacred...he argued that since men were self conscious, rational and moral beings they had a greater moral worth. This did not give them an ‘absolute’ superiority over animals and a right to do with them what they like, for animals too were legitimate members of the cosmos.”<sup>71</sup> We see such a stand taken by Coetzee in his book *The Lives of Animals*, whose protagonist airs similar views about man’s treatment of animals. Coetzee engages himself ethically with the idea of pain and suffering of animals in this novel.

Gandhi’s views on untouchability were first vented in South Africa. He claimed equality for the Indians with the whites. The whites in South Africa maintained that for centuries Hindus had been treating large masses of their own people as untouchables. However, Gandhi organised a struggle against the whites through peaceful means.

The non violence Gandhi followed “was born of conviction and was based on the purification of the body and mind...anchoring life on moral principles and higher ideals.”<sup>72</sup> Coetzee moulds his characters on these lines. Though they are not lofty people they have imbibed principles that make them emerge out of the violence afflicted on them with equanimity and poise. Making non violence a way of life and an attitude of the mind they do not seem to have any offensive thought or ill will or anger against their enemies. They are examples of human beings who do not think

violence, or show violence in their action. There is no hatred in them. This is the framework Coetzee uses in his novels to represent some of his protagonists who passively resist the atrocities of the whites.

It is a fact of history that on September 11, 1906, the Indians gathered in the Empire Theatre of Johannesburg (South Africa) and took a pledge under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi that they would offer Satyagraha against the injustices perpetuated against Indians by the South African government. Coetzee would certainly have heard about Gandhi and his leadership in South Africa. Perhaps that could be the reason why he wanted to address the inhuman practice of apartheid and make his protagonists resist such practices in a non violent manner.

The non violent struggle started by Gandhi in South Africa produced wonderful results. It created a new way of handling violence. This was continued by Nelson Mandela in South Africa. Undoubtedly Coetzee may have been influenced both by Gandhi and Mandela and therefore he makes his characters use passive resistance to protest against the whites.

The characters in Coetzee also use the weapon of non co-operation. The protagonist in one of his novels refuses to talk even when he is asked to. He maintains silence as a protest and being truthful, he has peace of mind. Gandhi also held that non violence cannot be put on like a garment but should reside in the heart of the individual. Coetzee uses this framework making his protagonists not to resort to violence even when provoked. However, in some of his novels the youth especially are highly volatile. The protagonists of Coetzee who revolt against the white regime are also ready to fight it out all by themselves. This is one characteristic that Gandhi wanted in those who were ready to fight against violence.

Thus, Coetzee's handling of violence in his novels enables us to analyse his novels from the point of view of the coloniser/colonised dialectic. The white man by introducing the inhuman practice of apartheid and by securing it by passing laws is able to subjugate the blacks. He resorts to brutal ways to demean the blacks. The practices he employs to inflict pain are atrocious. The blacks in the novels of Coetzee are a mute lot who passively resist the whites. Some of the protagonists even remain silent as a sort of defiance. The passive resistance which Coetzee writes about is used to secure rights by personal suffering. We find many such examples in the works of Coetzee. His novels will be analysed keeping in mind his interrogation of violence and engagement with it.

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> David Attwell, ed., Doubling the Point Essays and Interviews (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992) 96.
- <sup>2</sup> Ania Loomba, Colonialism /Post Colonialism (London:Routledge, 1990) 2.
- <sup>3</sup> Homi K.Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London:Routledge, 1990) 70.
- <sup>4</sup> Bhabha 95-96.
- <sup>5</sup> Frantz Fanon, preface, The Wretched of the Earth (London: Penguin Classics, 2001) 7.
- <sup>6</sup> Fanon, preface 12.
- <sup>7</sup> Ashis Nandy, preface, Intimate Enemy :Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism (Delhi:Oxford University Press, 1983) xi.
- <sup>8</sup> Nandy xiv.
- <sup>9</sup> ibid xv.
- <sup>10</sup> ibid xv.
- <sup>11</sup> ibid x.
- <sup>12</sup> ibid 7.
- <sup>13</sup> Fanon 15.
- <sup>14</sup> Nandy 32.
- <sup>15</sup> ibid 39.
- <sup>16</sup> ibid 31.
- <sup>17</sup> Fanon 16.
- <sup>18</sup> ibid 19.

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<sup>19</sup> ibid 23.

<sup>20</sup> ibid 27.

<sup>21</sup> ibid 27.

<sup>22</sup> ibid 28.

<sup>23</sup> Aime Cesaire, Discourse on Colonialism, trans. John Pinkham (New York: Presence Africane, 1972)13.

<sup>24</sup> ibid 13.

<sup>25</sup> Fanon 29.

<sup>26</sup> Cesaire 21.

<sup>27</sup> ibid 22.

<sup>28</sup> Rey Chow, “Where Have All the Natives Gone?”, in Contemporary Post Colonial Theory, ed., Padmini Mongia (New Delhi:OUP, 1997)

<sup>29</sup> Fanon 41.

<sup>30</sup> ibid 35.

<sup>31</sup> ibid 35.

<sup>32</sup> ibid 32.

<sup>33</sup> ibid 33.

<sup>34</sup> ibid 34.

<sup>35</sup> ibid 33.

<sup>36</sup> ibid 13.

<sup>37</sup> ibid 40-41.

<sup>38</sup> ibid 42.

<sup>39</sup> ibid 14.

<sup>40</sup> ibid 27.

<sup>41</sup> ibid 29.

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<sup>42</sup> Cesaire 13.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid* 14.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid* 20.

<sup>45</sup> Fanon 48.

<sup>46</sup> David Attwell, ed., 96.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid* 98.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid* 98.

<sup>49</sup> Fanon 69.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid* 73.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid* 73.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid* 74.

<sup>53</sup> Attwell 5.

<sup>54</sup> Fanon 30.

<sup>55</sup> Timothy Francis Strode, The Ethics of Exile Colonialism in the Fictions of Charles Brockden Brown and J.M Coetzee (New York: Routledge, 2005)147.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid* 148.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid* 149.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid* 195.

<sup>59</sup> J.M Coetzee, Giving Offence Essays on Censorship (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996) 34.

<sup>60</sup> M K Gandhi, Hind Swaraj (Ahmedabad: Navjivan Publishing House, 1933)75.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid* 79.

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<sup>62</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, Colonialism, Tradition and Reform An Analysis of Gandhi's Political Discourse (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1989)109.

<sup>63</sup> ibid 117.

<sup>64</sup> ibid 134.

<sup>65</sup> ibid 133.

<sup>66</sup> ibid 135.

<sup>67</sup> ibid 137.

<sup>68</sup> ibid 109.

<sup>69</sup> ibid 109.

<sup>70</sup> ibid 118.

<sup>71</sup> ibid 118.

<sup>72</sup> P.V. Sarma ed., Gandhian Philosophy and Human Development (New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, Distributors, 2008)57.

## Chapter III

### The Anatomy of Violence in Coetzee's Fiction

*I am not a herald of community or anything else....I am someone who has intimations of freedom.... of people slipping their chains and turning their faces to the light.*

*J. M. Coetzee*

#### 3.1 Introduction

The present chapter makes an attempt to come to grips with Coetzee's novels as studies in the problematics between the coloniser and the colonised. The novels of Coetzee, especially the early novels are commonly referred to as post modern metafiction. Coetzee uses the fictional form in a novel manner to address the political and ethical issues of South Africa. He appears to be very much apprehensive of the political and social situation in his country. Coetzee's attempt to emigrate to the U.S did not succeed for various reasons. One among them was his involvement in the demonstrations against the presence of the U S in Vietnam, held on the campus where he was working. He invariably had to return to South Africa where he ventured on an academic career in the University of Cape Town. Naturally, because of the awareness he had about what was going on in the country, and as an intellectual, he addressed the tribulations the society was subject to, through his novels. Kailash C Baral in the introduction to *J.M.Coetzee Critical Perspectives* states thus:

J.M.Coetzee (1940), the South African novelist and Nobel laureate, among the contemporary novelists is perhaps the only one who is rigorously engaged in exploring the ontological and other issues crucial to the fictional discourse. This engagement is primarily for

marking his “authorial position”, choosing his own voice of articulation and, in particular, locating himself in the complex historical past and in the fractured social present of post-apartheid South Africa.<sup>1</sup>

The novels of Coetzee expose the position he takes when he writes about the past and post-apartheid Africa. The state of affairs in his homeland engaged him intellectually. He was conscious that the system of apartheid was a shameful institution. But he did not embark on fighting against it like an activist. His contribution surfaced on the literary level. He took to writing fiction as a vehicle to give vent to his thoughts and misgivings about the whites and to express his anger and frustration against the wrathful governing agencies. He is often termed as an elusive writer. The outcome is his mastery as a writer of fiction. Consequently he received wide commendation both in South Africa and on the international gamut as a significant fiction writer in the twentieth century.

Coetzee as a white South African writer engaged with the confrontation between the ruler and the ruled in his novels. This intriguing theme was the recurrent preoccupation of most of the black and white writers. But the techniques and methods they employed in writing about such themes were different. The genre Coetzee employed was new to South Africa. Hence, he ushered in a new era in fiction writing. Writers and academics admitted that his works were unlike that of the fiction writers of his time. Coetzee situated himself between the solely political writer and the realistic writer. His novels vociferously examine human nature although they are about specific situations or individuals. Though his novels are predominantly about South Africa they also fit into the larger discourse which transcends South Africa.

The impact that the colonial encounter created was traumatic for both the ruler and the ruled. Neither the coloniser nor the colonised experienced happiness in this new order. The coloniser found himself in a land, milieu and climate which were unfamiliar to him. He was positioned in the midst of strange people belonging to a different race with diverse habits, language and so on. He assessed the inhabitants who amused and repulsed him with a very different perspective and this proved to be a strange one for him. Uncomfortable in such a relationship nevertheless, he chose to remain there. The colonised came under the influence of an entirely new people who considered them inferior and treated them in a very high handed manner. These people who took control over them turned out to be very successful in brain-washing them. The colonised felt that the coloniser was out there to usurp his position. The coloniser eventually succeeded in spite of resentment from the natives. The natives however, were powerless to do anything about these altered equations though they were not happy with the white masters. Consequently, the relationship between the two was always very tense and strained.

The coloniser's main aim was to assert his position in the new set up, establish the fact that he was supreme, convince the natives that they should in any case accept their position and without protest obey the new master. Thus the master-slave dialogue was established. The coloniser's aim was to maximize his profit in the new zone and make himself as comfortable as he could at the expense of the native and for this he employed varied means, almost always unjustifiable. The natives were victimised. The white man had already shown them that he was undeniably supreme and perhaps even infallible. Such a state of affairs put the colonised in the position of the victim in his land, ironically by people who came from elsewhere. These people gave a semblance of being superior to

them economically and socially and the natives became subject to the highhanded behaviour of the colonisers.

The colonisers established themselves as superior beings within a very short period of time. They were able to usurp the land, the economy in fact, the very being of the natives. They used the natives as cheap labour putting them in segregated compounds near their dwellings in order to avail themselves of their services as and when they wanted. The natives being made to do all the menial work were repeatedly told that they were not fit for anything else. Criticising their habits and their natural mannerisms, feelings of inferiority were indoctrinated in them. The whites emphatically made them believe that they had come to civilize and redeem them. They were told that it was the 'white man's burden' to rescue them from their damnation. It was a very pitiable situation for the colonised, to see people from elsewhere usurping power and wealth. However, they could do nothing as they were vulnerable. The colonisers had already taken away their land and now they even controlled their very being. The slightest opposition from the native was nipped in the bud by the coloniser and he struck terror upon them. The natives were there to obey their masters and this was made very clear to them. The white man would dictate terms and the native had no other choice than to act as he was told.

The colonisers became the perpetrators of violence in such a strained relationship. The very nature of violence was so grotesque that it frightened the wits out of the natives and acted as a deterrent. The whites could bring about univocal submission in the natives easily by a show of violence which brought out the worst in the coloniser. They were easily convinced that violence was very effective in subduing the blacks. Anybody who was defiant was severely dealt with and even silenced forever. In his novels Coetzee

highlights the aspects of violence and torture perpetrated by the dominating class on the natives. He is mainly concerned with what ensued out of such a relationship.

Coetzee, very sensitively, brings out the trauma that the oppressed go through in such a situation. He examines colonialism and the way in which power works under colonialism. It is very evident that it is South Africa that he is referring to, but he does not specify the place or time. Therefore, it could happen anywhere around the world. The oppressor that is, the whites, act like autocrats without commiseration. Their relationship with the natives brings out the latent brutal qualities in them. The wickedness in them surfaces without any restraint and they become synonymous with evil itself. These men have absolutely no feelings for the people whom they have colonised. They presume that the native men and women are uncouth, uncivilised and hence they ought to be treated in a violent manner. They envisage the natives as different beings and believe that ill treatment and pain may not have any effect on them. Hence they treat them with total contempt and recklessness believing that they have the prerogative to be violent and to cause pain to the helpless lot. The show of violence recorded in history during the apartheid era in South Africa is atrocious and unprecedented. The government did its best to hush up all the mayhem by not allowing the brutalities to be reported or talked about.

The white government of South Africa isolated itself from the rest of the world so as not to expose themselves. In fact, it makes people wonder whether human beings can ever be so cruel and pitiless and how a supposedly enlightened and 'civilised' country like Britain, could support such evil for their gain. Coetzee illustrates in his novels that man, though the 'supreme' of all beings, is capable of the worst inhuman acts and can exert violence without any guilt. The coloniser has no feeling of guilt and does not feel

culpable about what he is doing. He believes that what he is doing is right, so there is no question of guilt.

The novels also express the constraints and difficulties faced by a writer living in South Africa. Coetzee, the intellectual and writer of fiction is troubled about and very much against the apartheid regime. His novels engage with this issue. Kailash C Baral, the critic avers “He is not for the radiance of fiction but for its starkness; not to protect the *being* but to ensure *becoming*; not to make writing of fiction an end in itself but a means to explore the unexplored; going beyond the real to have the grasp of the unreal in representing the unrepresentable.”<sup>2</sup> His novels are a fine study of exploring reality, thus being able to understand the unreal. Coetzee comments on the relations of power at various levels in South Africa during the colonial period and in the process of decolonization. Although Coetzee came under criticism by many of his contemporaries for not openly reacting against the atrocities perpetrated by the apartheid regime, his novels are a fine testimony to the fact that he is a writer concerned with the oppression that is going on in the society. But his engagement is on an intellectual level. He is not an activist in the true sense of the term. Being a white writer also made things more complex for him. He knew that he also carried the guilt of complicity in him.

Yet, through a reading of Coetzee’s novels we can see the earnestness with which he handles the issue. Only a person, who empathises with the natives, can get beneath the skin of the natives and experience what the native feels. Coetzee substantiates this in his novels and all his novels of the South African period closely examine the feelings of the blacks in his characteristic manner. He is able to put himself in their position and empathise with them without making long statements or writing tediously about their suffering. Coetzee also gives his black characters a very humane outlook and perspective.

They are all very sober individuals even though they are vagrants belonging to the lower rung of society. This seems to be a deliberate attempt on the part of Coetzee so that the whites learn a lesson or two from them. These characters can make the white men hang their heads in shame. Such is the moral strength of these characters who suffer oppression from the whites. They are able to withstand the heinous crimes committed on them by the whites. The white man is incapable of shattering them emotionally. The blacks who are indifferent to the white man and his harsh behaviour seem to be getting the strength to do so from an understanding of the psyche of the white man. In many of his novels, Coetzee engages himself with the question of black-white dialectics. The natives are delineated in a better light than the whites. The whites appear to be vile, gross and base and if at all there is a white man who sympathises with black characters in the novels, we find that he too suffers the wrath of the whites becoming a misfit in the white society. He is looked at with suspicion and is accorded the same treatment that is given to the blacks. There is absolutely no difference. The colonisers are an embodiment of evil itself. Although, Coetzee's focus is on the black man and his oppression by the whites, the white man's vicious character surfaces in the course of the plot in the novels. Unwittingly the white man emerges as a villain and he is portrayed as mean and merciless. Kailash C Baral argues "Coetzee's fictions might have followed different narrative styles or patterns but some basic issues such as writing, authorship, language, domination, marginalization etc. run through all of them."<sup>3</sup> We see that Coetzee engages himself with these issues in his novels.

### 3.2 Violence in the Novels of J.M.Coetzee

Coetzee wrote his first novel *Dusklands* in 1974. The title is symbolic of the foggy atmosphere that was settling on South Africa. As Tony Morphet a South African critic in his essay *Reading Coetzee in South Africa* articulates:

The reading, however, convinced me that *Dusklands* was a herald. A new form of narration, a new way of imagination-a new prose had entered South African Literature. The novel is recognised as sounding a new post modernist note in the South African novel, a new fictional engagement with the problems of colonialism at the level of discourse.<sup>4</sup>

Tony Morphet recalls how Alan Paton another distinguished South African writer had given him the novel *Dusklands* for his perusal, chuckling that he could not make anything of it! But everyone knew that here was a writer with a difference.

Coetzee's first novel *Dusklands* (1974) breaks away from the hitherto used mode of realistic fiction in South Africa. It was received with both confusion and awe. For the first time academics and readers in South Africa saw a novel which was very different from the likes they had previously read. For the academician, analysing it was a challenge, and for the common reader it was baffling, as they had not until then, come across such a novel. Both the academic and the reader were amused by this new form of writing. But they did not brush it off because they knew that, here was a writer, who had to be read and watched, how so ever intellectually challenging he was. They knew there was something new and unique about this writer. He definitely had a promising career as a writer of fiction and Coetzee proved them right with all the accolades he won eventually. When Coetzee wrote *Dusklands*, the war in Vietnam was coming to an end

and in South Africa there was extreme violence and censorship. Stephen Biko, leader of the Black Consciousness Movement was banished in 1973. Sharpeville Massacre and the State of Emergency resulted in further violence in South Africa. Dominic Head remarks “The typical Coetzeean preoccupations are all present in this first novel: the analysis of the colonizing psyche; the emphasis on textual structures; the challenge to novelistic conventions; and the self-critique.”<sup>5</sup>

The novel is divided into two novellas well separated in time, though thematically similar. The first novella posits itself in the twentieth century and the second in the sixteenth. The first is an account of the Vietnam War as seen by Eugene Dawn, the protagonist who has been entrusted with the task of writing a report. Eugene lives by himself, writing the report. It “is a twentieth century narrative of Eugene Dawn, who is devising a plan for the psychological subjugation of the Vietnamese through the use of radio broadcasts with devastating effect on his mind.”<sup>6</sup> When he submits the report to his superior, he is dissatisfied with it. He is asked to rewrite the report according to his superior’s requirements as the truth has to be concealed. Coetzee puts across the fact that history is being distorted. Eugene wants to give a sincere and fact centred report. The work takes its toll on Eugene. His personal life suffers and he begins to suspect his wife having a discreet affair. He even feels he is jealous about the man who desires his wife. His sexual relationship with his wife is uninteresting and lacks vitality. Eugene becomes insane in -course of time and ends up in the mental asylum. The intensity of the demands of the project that is given to him shatters him. He becomes a victim of the system that he finds himself in. *Dusklands* reveals the deteriorating effect violence has on the mind and body. Coetzee means to say that man is not basically made for mind taxing and conflicting work. He needs a peaceful atmosphere to live and cannot do so with

confrontation. Both the protagonists of the two novellas succumb to defeat in the face of conflict.

The second novella is the narrative of Jacobus Coetzee, an eighteenth century explorer of Africa who has set out into the wilderness. He is an elephant hunter and his entry into the land of the native is with the intention of amassing ivory and also to exercise control. He believes that his encounter with the natives is an encounter with evil. He has total contempt for the natives, the Hottentots. Although initially he is patient with them, he cannot remain so for long. The façade is soon torn off. All the vile qualities in him surface when he enters into conflict with the natives. In order to assert his superiority the white man embarks on an enterprise of establishing order through violence which becomes reciprocal.

Both Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee are carrying out the colonial project. Both are in a way, like the coloniser. Eugene Dawn is writing a report for the U S Defence department about the Vietnam War. In his description of the Vietnamese throughout his report, Eugene shows them as inferior. Eugene Dawn who is writing a plan for subjugating the Vietnamese through psychological warfare finds himself affected by this work. It has a debilitating effect on his mind. Eugene is so burdened with the work which requires a lot of mental strain that he even goes to the extent of stabbing his son. Likewise Jacobus Coetzee resorts to violence and killing to bring order in a supposedly disorderly world. He is a traveller into the territory of the Namaquas, a native tribe. The savage native is constructed to justify colonial exploitation. Similarly Jacobus portrays Hottentots and Bushmen as inferiors, relegating them to the role of the 'Other'. Both resort to violence. The human body is violated and brutalised. The suffering caused by such a violation is highlighted in the novel. The perpetrators of violence do not go

unscathed. Violence has a dehumanizing effect on them too. The ruthless acts leave a mark on them, in fact a deep scar. They can never see the “Other” as a human being who needs to be treated with compassion. Therefore, they become the target of their violence. According to them anything can be done to the ‘Other’ and they could do so without being questioned. In an interview with David Attwell a critic, Coetzee articulates:

Nevertheless, *Dusklands* didn’t emerge from a reading of Beckett. What was more immediately behind it, was the spectacle of what was going on in Vietnam and my gathering sense, as I read back in South African history but more particularly in the annals of the exploration of Southern Africa, of what had been going on there.<sup>7</sup>

Coetzee’s reading of the early history of South Africa from the travellers’ tales gave him material for the second novella.

Eugene Dawn carries with him photographs depicting violence by the American soldiers on young Vietnamese girls. These photographs which are a symbol of imperialist violence disturb him. In a photograph of a heavily built sergeant copulating with a Vietnamese girl, the girl looks like a child. Another photograph shows two smiling sergeants brandishing the severed heads of three Vietnamese. Though this is a horrifying picture, the reaction of Eugene Dawn is one which lacks humaneness:

One’s heartstrings may be tugged by photographs of weeping women come to claim the bodies of their slain; a handcart bearing a coffin or even a man-size plastic bag may have its elemental dignity; but can one say the same of a mother with her son’s head in a sack, carrying it off like a small purchase from the supermarket? I giggle.<sup>8</sup>

The third photograph is of a prisoner in a cage and a commander jabs him with a cane calling him a bad man over the microphone. Dawn has an enlarged picture of the prisoner. He describes the eyes of the prisoner:

The glint in the eye, which in a moment luckily never to arrive will through the camera look into my eyes, is bland and opaque under my fingers, yielding no passage into the interior of this obscure but indubitable man. I keep exploring. Under the persistent pressure of my imagination, acute and morbid in the night, it may yet yield. (*DL* 16-17)

Here the desire for domination is very clear. Coetzee is referring to the coloniser's desire for domination which turns out to be very ironic. Dawn articulates the U.S policy "We forced ourselves deeper than we had ever gone before into their women; but when we came back we were still alone, and the women like stones" (*DL* 18). Hence domination does not always have the desired effect. The dominating power may feel he has the upper hand, but the reaction may not always be the same as he expects it to be. The women who become like stone are indifferent to the wickedness of the white man. The imperialists find themselves in a ridiculous position. The exercise of brute force does not help them in any way.

The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee, the second novella is a parallel to the account of Eugene Dawn's report. We see a similarity between the American imperialism and the domination of the white man in Africa. Jacobus goes into the wild with ulterior motives. He goes into the interior in search of ivory. He considers the Hottentots as inferior and their women merely, "a rag you wipe yourself on and throw away" (*DL* 61). This attitude towards the native woman shows how he sought to establish his superiority as a white man. But he does not see the Dutch woman through the same filter. He cannot just brush

them off. Jacobus sees only monetary benefits in the wild. “Our commerce with the wild is a tireless enterprise of turning it into orchard and farm” (*DL* 80). So like the white man civilizing the uncivilised natives, Jacobus will convert the wild into orchards and farms so that they bring him income. His assertion of supremacy with the native is also to amass wealth. So the similarity is evident here. The wild for him is a means for amassing wealth. As he looks out for ivory, he thinks of himself as a god-like explorer. However, he reaches a state of baseness when among the Hottentots of Namaqualand he is treated with absolutely no respect. He is called “Long - Nose” (*DL* 72) much to his chagrin. One of the women performs a lewd dance to irritate him. He has come into Namaqualand with a feeling of superiority and this is not what he expected. When he suffers with the carbuncle, he is forced to retire to one of the huts kept for menstruating women. The natives do not show any concern for him and humiliate him. Jacobus prefers to die rather than be like them because as a white man he could not be in such a situation. Coetzee deconstructs the myth of the white man as a superior being here by showing Jacobus in a humiliating situation. Thus Coetzee de-romanticises the picture that the white man has of himself. The natives do not make much of the white man or show any respect for him. It is only the expression of violence that defeats them.

In order to take revenge Jacobus returns to Namaqualand and kills the servants who have deserted him and also destroys the village. Parag Sarma a writer avers, “Death therefore is a necessary condition for bringing about order and comprehensibility onto an alien geography.”<sup>9</sup> In the case of Jacobus Coetzee such a reaction brings out the worst in him. He cannot rest until all his pent up rage is spent. When Jacobus becomes violent he has absolutely no control over himself. In order not to be destroyed by the natives he kills them:

Roaring like a lion and enveloped in spray like Aphrodite, I fell upon them. My claws raked welts of skin and flesh from their fleeing backs. A massive fist thundered one to the ground. Jehovah I fell upon his back, and while his little playmates scattered in the bushes and regrouped, I ground his face on the stones, wrenched him upright, kicked him down (with the ball of my foot, lest I break the toe), wrenched him up, kicked him down...(DL 90)

Jacobus becomes mad in his anger. This uncontrollable violence exhibited is an indication of the frustration of the white man to be accepted as superior. The violence of the Hop expedition in Jacobus Coetzee's narrative is shocking. However, violence does not leave the perpetrator unaffected. Jacobus says "Through their deaths I, who after they had expelled me had wandered the desert like a pallid symbol, again asserted my reality. No more than any other man do I enjoy killing..." (DL 106). Here Coetzee ruminates that even a wicked man has an element of goodness in him. Violence ruffles the mental equanimity and Jacobus who thinks of himself as a superior being is deromanticised.

Coetzee, through the character of Jacobus Coetzee, reveals that violence takes its toll on the one who resorts to it also. It affects Jacobus tremendously and he suffers mentally though he may not appear to do so. The brutality of Jacobus Coetzee corresponds with Eugene Dawn's stabbing of his son. Both are acts of violence and self-assertion. This desire for violence in Jacobus is similar to his longing for colonial domination. But both acts demoralize the perpetrator of the violence. The Americans in their subjugation of the Vietnamese try to revalidate their position as imperialistic. This is also the preoccupation of Jacobus Coetzee. The stabbing of his son is narrated in a very impersonal manner by

Eugene Dawn, whereby Coetzee establishes that the discourse of imperialism has such a detrimental effect on the perpetrator of violence.

Thus in these two novellas we see the impact of the white-black encounter. The two narratives signify the theme of domination and subjugation. “Violation of the earth and the beings that populate it is a very strong motif in *Dusklands*”<sup>10</sup> avers Sarma. The whites are set in opposition to the Vietnamese. The white man tries to define himself in relation to the natives, like the Bushmen and Hottentots. The Bushmen and Hottentots who are portrayed as inferior are, according to the white man, primitive in nature. They are relegated to the position of the ‘Other’. However, it is significant to note that the white man establishes his superiority only by force and aggression. He has no other way to attain mastery over them. He has sophisticated weapons that the native does not have. It is this ability to kill which makes him superior. The domination is exerted through the power of the gun. The native does not have any sophisticated weapon. His indigenous weapons are not a match for the gun. The fear of the gun makes the native submissive. The native never willingly accepts him as superior because a strong resentment reigns in him. However, it is inevitable for him to bow down as the white man is powerful.

Jacobus’ feeling of superiority finally leads to his self-destruction. He cannot accept any lack of deference from the natives whom he considers as his subjects. Any show of impertinence infuriates him and he becomes insane. His barbaric behaviour leads to the killing of his servants. He wants total surrender and acceptance of his authority from the natives and will not settle for anything less than that. When he shows his displeasure he loses complete control over himself and raving madness takes over. He thinks of himself as a demigod and initially though his attitude is patronizing, subsequently he wreaks vengeance on the natives. He justifies it asserting that it is very much necessary for the

redemption of the native. In this context Coetzee comes down heavily on western imperialism.

Attwell in his book *J.M.Coetzee South Africa and the Politics of Writing* posits, "The novel therefore juxtaposes subject-positions within twentieth century American imperialism and eighteenth century Dutch colonialism, finding them co-extensive in their quest for self-realization through dominance."<sup>11</sup>

There is a similarity between Jacobus Coetzee's second expedition where he wreaks vengeance on the natives and his servants and Eugene Dawn's stabbing of his son as the police arrive. Eugene who has taken his son along with him is staying in a motel with his son. He has done this, out of spite for his wife. But she gets the help of the police and tracks him down. Both Eugene and Jacobus cannot tolerate disrespect. The only way they think they can get respect is by a show of violence. This reveals the baseness of their character because violence surely is a cowardly exercise of power. It is only through violence that both Eugene and Jacobus assert their power and both show acts of self-assertion.

Colonisation gives immense power to the whites and they use it to destroy and kill mercilessly. This is exhibited by Jacobus when he brutally shoots his servants, in spite of their agonizing pleas. He has no sympathy even for the servants who have been faithful to him all along. However, a minor mistake or omission on their part brings out all the anger in him. He cannot forgive them as forgiveness is beyond him. He feels he is a superior being and all he wants is the gratification of his ego as he cannot tolerate anything that hurts his ego. Even the heart rending pleas of the servants fall on deaf ears. Overcome by fury nothing changes his decision. The white man is ready to do anything for the sake of establishing his power. Although these servants have been loyal to him, he is undeterred

by their pleas. This is a sure sign of the deep rooted evil in him. He goes away, being sure of coming back to take revenge and this decision to seek vengeance is premeditated. The decision to do away with them is not –spontaneous but wholly deliberate. The violence and desperation in him is exhibited through his ghastly acts. All he wants is revenge for having lost his self esteem, for his ego being hurt. In his anger he loses control over his mind, over himself and kills the servants and the natives without remorse. The coloniser makes no distinction between men and children who also become victims of his cruelty. He is heartless with them as well. Their innocence does not move him. When– children play tricks on Jacobus, he maliciously bites off an ear of one of the boys. We find such an attitude of the whites towards the youth in the novel *Age of Iron* too. Their acts being heinous, they do not hesitate to resort to violent behavior towards the youth. Coetzee brings out the fact that violence boomerangs on the perpetrator. Jacobus who resorts to violence becomes evil itself.

Jacobus justifies his violence as a projection of the colonizing process, whereby the ‘Other’ has to be subdued by violence. Coetzee in his book *White Writing* lists a number of characteristics that the natives possess according to the travel writers. They are mainly about their physical appearance, dress, diet, medicine, crafts, customs and habitation and so on. These are very different from that of the white man. Accordingly the coloniser tries to identify these characteristics in the natives and when they compare them with the Europeans they (the natives) appear to be inferior in every way. In their physical appearance they are very different from the whites. They are ugly to look at, dirty and carry a stench with them with eating habits which are very different. Moreover, they like to be idle and have very slothful ways. In fact, for the white man the native is everything that he is not; the native can only be a repository of evil and all that is base.

Jacobus, a psychologically deformed character exhibits his acts of uncontrolled violence. He considers himself 'civilised' as opposed to the natives who are 'barbarians'. However, his acts of violence bring out the barbarian in him. He has all the qualities that can easily label him as savage. There is absolutely no fineness about him. He imagines himself to appear as a god-like figure to the natives. All his thoughts are centred on himself as he feels he is an embodiment of all that is the best.

Coetzee does not present any barbaric act of the natives who are constantly subject to violence. These so called 'barbarians' have their own code of existence and values which may not be similar to that of the whites. They may not be so sophisticated in their behavior or in their ways. But they do live by certain codes of conduct. Coetzee in his novels seems to advocate that, the natives' values are even better than that of the whites. He exposes Jacobus who thinks he is superior to the barbarians and has no sympathy for those who have served him, or respect for their women or love for the children. He acts in a brutal manner with everyone, absolutely devoid of character with nothing of the civilised man in him. Unlike the other protagonists of Coetzee's novels Jacobus is the only white man who undertakes the role of civilizing the natives. All the other white protagonists sympathise with the blacks. So the novel talks about American imperialism and eighteenth century colonialism. "The two stories are complementary even if separated in time and space, but signify the theme of dominance, hegemony and subjugation."<sup>12</sup>

When Coetzee wrote *Waiting for the Barbarians* the prevailing socio-political conditions in South Africa were very bleak. Though the frontier is unspecified and the protagonist, the Magistrate is unidentified, the novel is clearly about the contemporary realities in South Africa. There is large scale violence between the State security forces

and certain black townships which were always susceptible to violence and riots. A small incident somewhere would trigger a riot. It was as if someone was waiting for the button to be pressed. The riots were of unimaginable proportions. The police had the freedom to shoot the people down without a second thought. The State was there to stand by the police who acted according to its bidding. In such a situation the natives were the hapless victims. The Soweto Riots of 1976 were unparalleled wherein many young blacks including children were brutally massacred. In response to the violent repressive measures adopted by the state the blacks also reacted violently. There was world wide opposition to what was happening in South Africa. But there was none to question the whites. As the violence spread to different parts of the society the government took more and more repressive measures. People were arrested and detained without any warrant. Many died unnatural deaths and deaths in detention were innumerable.

Many of the writers in South Africa were in detention or exile. The media was suppressed; hence details about the riots could not be published. The foreign journalists were asked to leave the country. Many prisoners died under mysterious circumstances. The death of Stephen Biko in 1977 in detention focused international attention on state-sponsored violence and torture. Coetzee in *Giving Offence: Essays on Censorship* contends, "The institution of censorship puts power into the hands of persons with a judgmental, bureaucratic cast of mind that is bad for the cultural and even spiritual life of the community."<sup>13</sup> The censors behaved in a reckless manner. The crime and atrocities in South Africa were not allowed to be reported and the writers were watched scrupulously and anything that would affect the image of the State was curbed heavily. The government had not an iota of remorse or guilt about the suffering they caused and

justified what they did. Every death that happened because of them was made to appear like a natural death or a suicide.

The white regime was so paranoid about the blacks that, "it sought to control the dissemination of signs in whatever form .... Not only books, magazines, films and plays, but T-shirts, key-rings, dolls ... had to pass the scrutiny of the censorship bureaucracy before it could be made public"(GO 34). For this they resorted to the strictest of measures and did not spare anyone. Writers, journalists, reporters all came under close scrutiny. The slightest suspicion was dealt with mercilessly. Everywhere there was a debate about the conditions in South Africa. Coetzee wrote *Waiting for the Barbarians* during his stay in the United States in 1980. As the time and place in the novel is indeterminate, it gives the novel a highly allegorical dimension. The novel focuses allegorically on the South African condition although it does not overtly refer to it. The events in the novel are universal and can happen anywhere. The way the Government reacts to the blacks is unprecedented. A number of deaths take place under mysterious circumstances in South Africa. Coetzee interrogates power and torture in the novel. The novel received rich response from everywhere and established Coetzee as an international writer.

Coetzee is concerned with the human predicament, whether it is apartheid Africa or post-apartheid Africa. The individual is of prime importance to him. The novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* received wide publicity and international response. All sympathisers of human rights could identify the novel with what was exactly going on in South Africa which touched the hearts of people everywhere. The work is from a writer, who has first hand experience of the goings-on in South Africa and reading it proved to be an intellectual exercise. Although the novel does not specify any particular place or time, the events in the novel generally represent whatever is happening in South Africa and all

over the world. The novel deals with the theme of apartheid in a singular manner. A Magistrate, the protagonist of the novel is posted in the Outpost of the 'Empire' to collect rent and levy taxes. He is at ease in the frontier land. His relationship with the natives being largely cordial, he does not fear any threat from them nor does he look at them with suspicion. Relations between the Magistrate who is the representative of the Empire and the natives are trouble free as both exist in peace and calm. There is absolutely no tension between the empire and the natives. However as Seth B Pardick speaking about the novel states, "Coetzee is emphasizing the fact that a member of a dominant culture cannot truly see himself as a member of a marginalised culture because the dominant culture's national discourse has tacitly trained him to believe that its dominance is a result of its superiority, or vice versa."<sup>14</sup> Therefore although the Magistrate sympathises with the natives, his position as the domineering person remains, no matter how he sees himself.

Life has been going on at a tranquil pace, the natives do not exhibit any sort of rebellion and the whites have nothing to complain of. But all these do not last long. With the arrival of Colonel Joll and his men of the Third Bureau, an important division of the Civil Guard, things change. Labib, a critic on Coetzee argues, "From the very first appearance of Colonel Joll, then, the reader realises that he personifies the consciousness of the Empire ...he tries to impose himself as the master."<sup>15</sup> Colonel Joll and his men are convinced that the Outpost faced danger from the barbarians. Seth B. Pardick avers, "Joll is essentially the Empire's hegemonic apparatus, bemoaning the inevitable barbarian invasions, stressing the need for a pre-emptive strike, and censuring all those who question the legitimacy of his discourse, particularly the Magistrate."<sup>16</sup> Nothing or no one can convince them that everything was well in the Outpost. They are bent on causing unrest. They cannot believe or accept that everything is going on well. They act on the

rumour that the barbarians are planning an attack. Colonel Joll just acts on suspicion and rumour. The origin of the rumour and the reasons for suspicion are not explicit. It is just that Colonel Joll wants to believe so and will think so at any cost. It seems to be his whim and fancy to be the torturer who would get the 'truth' out of the natives. He wants some reason to exercise violence on the natives. It is also because of his fear, confusion and insecurity that he behaves so. Even though there is no reason, rumour or suspicion, he plans to attack them. There is nothing else for him to fear the natives. The threat is only perceived by Colonel Joll and his men.

Colonel Joll insists that there is a threat even when the Magistrate tries to convince him that there is no threat as such from the so called barbarians. He tries to tell the Colonel that the barbarians keep their peace, are harmless and have no plans of an attack. However, Joll is not convinced. He does not want anyone to convince him as he has come with the purpose of destroying the barbarians and he will do that and leave only after this mission is accomplished. Nevertheless in spite of the Magistrate's sympathy for the natives, throughout the novel, he too refers to them as 'the barbarians'.

The Magistrate becomes a witness to the acts of cruelty of Colonel Joll. He does not remain a passive witness. In spite of his attempts to convince Joll, he is not successful. An old man and a young boy who supposedly have come to town to seek medical help are rounded up by the soldiers and later on Colonel Joll interrogates them, fully convinced that they are barbarians. The torture that the old man and the boy are subject to is deplorable. However, nothing can stop Colonel Joll who finds pleasure in inflicting pain on the two. Unmindful of the fact that he is guilty, all he wants to do is to torture them. By inflicting pain on his victims, he wants to send a message of caution to the other natives that they too can be subjected to such torment. When the Magistrate asks the

Colonel about extracting the truth from the 'enemy' Colonel Joll states, "There is a certain tone. A certain tone enters the voice of a man who is telling the truth.... First I get lies; you see this is what happens- first lies, then pressure, then more lies, then more pressure, then the break, then more pressure, then the truth. That is how you get the truth."<sup>17</sup>

The torture by Joll leads to the death of the old man. He is bundled up in a shroud and the small boy is made to sleep next to the corpse. However, there is no remorse on the part of Joll or his men. The life of a native is not at all valuable. They ruthlessly deal with the natives to satisfy their desire to oppress them for no obvious reason as such. In exhibiting violence they give vent to their innate need to subjugate the natives.

Coetzee in an article 'Into The Dark Chamber' published in *Doubling the Point* argues, "In the torture room unlimited force is exerted upon the physical being of an individual in a twilight of legal illegality, with the purpose, if not of destroying him, then at least of destroying the kernel of resistance within him."<sup>18</sup> The white man acts with impunity on the natives. They do not want any act of assertion from the natives. Hence they are subject to torture.

The report of the death of the old man deliberately hushes up the fact that he is actually killed. There is no record of the torture inflicted by Colonel Joll and his men. The torment inflicted on the old man and the young boy is not recorded at all. Such things were common in South Africa during those days. Thousand of blacks were killed in detention. The Magistrate knowing very well that the old man died of intense torture, tears open the shroud and sees that the old man's beard is caked with blood, his lips crushed and his teeth broken. He gets the corpse removed. The boy is so terribly shaken and terrified that when the Magistrate tries to touch his cheeks he trembles with fear.

In South Africa, maintenance of records of the atrocities committed by the police in connivance with the State was most conveniently ignored. Many detainees in prison, died unnatural deaths and their deaths were hushed up. Steve Biko, a prominent black leader also died under mysterious circumstances while in detention. This brought South Africa under scanner. There was widespread condemnation of the atrocities committed in detention. Hence, Coetzee very obviously alludes to the highhandedness of the police and the government, in the manner in which they handled those natives who were in detention. The police and the government were hand in hand and the natives were helpless. Even though, sanctions against the government were brought in by the rest of the world, the South African government remained undeterred. They were bent on continuing with their policy of apartheid and injustice, not letting go power from their hands at any cost. In fact, they wanted to hang on to power, as long as they could, with the thought that they could do so for a long time more.

The 'Other' was depicted to be cruel, barbaric and hence the Empire, the 'centre', had to take precautionary measures against the barbarians who were the construct of the empire. The barbarian was invented so that the white man could usurp and take over his land and rule. Coetzee states, "There is no woman living along the frontier who has not dreamed of a dark barbarian hand coming from under the bed to grip her ankle, no man who has not frightened himself with visions of the barbarians carousing in his home, breaking the plates, setting fire to the curtains, raping his daughters" (*WB* 9).

The white man was paranoid about the barbarians. As a result of this paranoia Colonel Joll and his men arrived at the Outpost. The boy confessed to all the statements put forth by Colonel Joll, as he no longer cared about pain and suffering. His stance was one of passivity and surrender to the unbearable torture he was subjected to. The boy had

reached a stage where the torture that he had experienced in the hands of Colonel Joll and his men had wiped out every trace of hope in him. He accepted his lot without any complaint. The unbearable torture meted out to him had killed every fine sentiment in him and he writhed in pain.

However, in spite of it all, he never turned violent. He did not retaliate like the white man Jacobus in the novel *Dusklands* when he was insulted. Coetzee, thus, delineates the character of the black boy who remained quiet even when he suffered extremely, to highlight the reaction of the natives to suffering.

Colonel Joll who is bent upon a raid on the nomads refuses to believe the Magistrate when he tells him that the nomads are harmless and that they only move from place to place depending on the seasons. However, Colonel Joll does not believe this, or rather, he does not want to believe it. After four days the prisoners are brought to the Outpost. The Magistrate tries to dissuade Colonel Joll and also tries to convince the soldiers that these prisoners are not barbarians, but fisher folk. However, Colonel Joll wants to believe that the barbarians are lurking out there. Joll knows very well that in order to establish an identity for himself he needs the native. So the vile native has to be there. The 'centre' can have validity only if the 'margin' exists. The barbarian has to be created to validate the 'centre'. So at any cost Joll and his men need to have barbarians who have to pose problems for them, so that they can act. They can thus authenticate their position and find something to work on to establish their distinctiveness.

Colonel Joll interrogates the prisoners and leaves fairly satisfied with what he has done. After the men leave, the Magistrate finds a barbarian girl begging in the town. He takes her to his room and washes her body. Her ankles have been broken by the soldiers and she has also been blinded by them. Rosemary Jane Jolly a critic argues, "His

fascination for the blind barbarian girl stems from this curiosity: he treats her body as a surface, a map of a surface, a text.”<sup>19</sup> Even though the Magistrate is sympathetic, he ironically is like the white man as he is only curious to know how the girl has sustained the wounds. The Magistrate realises that he has no desire for this stocky girl. Pardick analyzing the novel contends, “It is clear that the Magistrate finds it impossible to accept the woman as she is; for the Magistrate, she is incapable of being anything other than “the Other” or the “deficient body”. ”<sup>20</sup> He finds her some work to do in the kitchen which makes her happy. He keeps her with him out of curiosity, as he wants to read the marks on her body left by her torturers and know how she suffered the wounds.

Although he spends time with her, washing her feet and her body, the Magistrate feels that “the distance between myself and her torturers, I realize, is negligible” (*WB* 29). He has no desire for her. He remains indifferent to her and is not sexually aroused by her presence. Nevertheless, he sleeps with her every night. He is unable to remember how the girl looks like. Pardick further contends “The very body of the barbarian girl is something that the Magistrate feels he must conquer, something into which he must insert his standard-bearing beam and claim in the name of the Empire.”<sup>21</sup>

When the second group of conscripts of soldiers arrive, the Magistrate tries to convince the officer that the barbarians are not a threat. However, the young officer is convinced that they are a threat. The Magistrate remaining sympathetic to the barbarians argues, “Where civilization entailed the corruption of barbarian virtues and the creation of a dependent people, I decided, I was opposed to civilization; and upon this resolution I based the conduct of my administration” (*WB* 41). The Magistrate, although aware that it would be detrimental to his existence states, “I wish that these barbarians would rise up and teach us a lesson, so that we would learn to respect them” (*WB* 55). Overcome with

helplessness the Magistrate only hopes that the white man is taught a lesson by the blacks as he is the only one among the whites who sympathises with the natives and all he can do is wishfully hope that the natives retaliate. He cannot do anything about his inability to prevent Colonel Joll and his men from unnecessarily torturing the natives. His position being one against so many of them, the only option left for him is to hope for the natives themselves to rise against the whites. Thus the Magistrate in a way has to admit his complicity in the imperial enterprise. Pardick argues further, “The Empire and the national narrative it has created as a means of self- legitimation are, for the Magistrate and other people of the Empire, thought of as something that exists beyond their capacity to question.”<sup>22</sup>

This reminds us of Coetzee’s statement that the white man cannot shed his complicity in what happened in South Africa. He contends, “The whites in South Africa participated in various degrees, actively or passively, in an audacious and well planned crime against Africa.”<sup>23</sup> The Magistrate though aware of his complicity cannot do anything about it.

The Magistrate decides to take the barbarian girl to her people telling her that the physical intimacy between them would end for the time being and she accepts this without any comment. Both of them embark on a long and tiresome journey. Before he goes away with three men he writes a note saying that, he is leaving to repair the damage caused by the Third Bureau and to restore the good will that existed previously between them and the barbarians. When he tells the girl that he is taking her to her people, she shows no sign of joy. The weather is bad and they have to withstand the cold wind. They have brought food with them so they could appease their hunger. But the horse refuses to move one day and the Magistrate has to slash the horse and let it bleed to death.

The Magistrate notices that the barbarian girl is very happy in the company of men of her race with whom she talks joyfully. One day the relationship between her and the Magistrate is consummated. He feels that, it is because they are going to part, that she has come to him and a physical intimacy has ensued. "For Bhabha" avers John Mcleod "the border is the place where conventional patterns of thought are disturbed and can be disrupted by the possibility of crossing. At the border, past and present, inside and outside, no longer remain separated as binary opposites but instead co-mingle and conflict."<sup>24</sup>

When the Magistrate returns to the Outpost, he finds that the army is stationed there and the attack against the barbarians is soon to come. The empire suspects that he is one with the natives and he is considered an enemy. Any act of the white man that is in favour of the blacks is seriously dealt with. It is the Magistrate's relationship with the barbarian girl that makes him the object of their suspicion. The warrant officer charges him of "treasonously consorting" with the barbarians (*WB* 85). Imprisoned in the same room where the natives are tortured, he sleeps day in and day out. Tortured and questioned about the meaning of the wooden slips that are found in his room, he is fed the same food that is given to the common soldiers. Life in the cell proves to be taxing for him. Charges are levelled against him regarding his character and the way he maintains the accounts. The modus operandi of levelling charges is the same as done to the natives.

They suspect the Magistrate of conniving with the natives using the wooden slips. He is asked to interpret the writing on the slips and he uses this opportunity to expose the atrocities of the empire. He is humiliated, punished and tortured. "They came to my cell to show me the meaning of humanity and in the space of an hour showed me a great deal" (*WB* 126). The whites cause him immense suffering. This is the price he pays for being

sympathetic to the natives. Colonel Joll and his men are unsympathetic to the Magistrate who is made to run naked around the yard, jump back and forth a rope and prodded with a cane when he stopped. He suffers humiliation in the hands of Joll's men. "It cost me agonies of shame the first time I had to come out of my den and stand naked before these idlers or jerk my body about for their amusement. Now I am past shame" articulates the Magistrate (*WB* 128). The Magistrate's morale is completely broken and he suffers alone. This tactic is often followed by the whites to break the natives' morale. We find a similar episode in *Dusklands* when Jacobus wreaks vengeance on the Hottentots.

The Magistrate goes through immense suffering and shame on being treated like another native. He is made to wear a smock which is again terribly humiliating for a man to be in a woman's clothes. They tie his hands behind his back and a salt bag is put over his head and tied around his neck with a string. They hang a noose under his ear and make him climb a ladder kept against a tree. The noose is slipped from his neck and knotted around the cord that binds his wrist and he is pulled up. When he roars and shouts in pain, the men taunt amidst laughter "That is barbarian language you hear" (*WB* 132). Even the people who once respected him, watch with amusement. The torture meted out to him brings out the ruthlessness in the colonisers. The Magistrate realises that the empire derives its power by distorting justice and legality to get what they want. They look for a reason to exercise violence and establish their superiority.

The Magistrate asks Mandel who has tortured him, "How do you find it possible to eat afterwards, after you have been....working with people" (*WB* 138). He argues, "I have imagined that one would want to wash one's hands. But no ordinary washing would be enough, one would require priestly intervention, a ceremonial of cleansing, don't you think?" (*WB* 138) This reminds us of Lady Macbeth who tries to do away with her guilt of

murder by constantly washing her hands. That is how the Magistrate feels about Joll and his men. He opines that acts of violence make one's hands unclean and one will have to wash several times to remove the taint of injustice. A man of conscience will not be able to go on with his life without remorse after such torment. However, Colonel Joll and his men have no such qualms. The Magistrate knows that there is no hope for him. He accuses Joll of being the enemy and tells him that the barbarians are innocent.

However, soon Joll and his men are forced to make an ignominious withdrawal. The imperial army being shamefully defeated by the natives, Joll flees out of fear of the barbarians. The Magistrate sees Joll sitting in the carriage and makes it a point to mouth some words at Joll who is looking at him through the glass of the carriage. The barbarians have led them into the desert and vanished. The army has no food with them and finally they are forced to retreat. Coetzee illustrates how violence boomerangs on the perpetrators of violence.

The exit of Colonel Joll and his men from the Outpost is shameful and an act of cowardice. They flee out of fear of the natives. But by then they have already caused the damage to the natives. The Outpost which is until then calm and peaceful has become a centre of violence and suffering. For no reason, the peace loving inhabitants have been disturbed and tortured. Irreparable damage has been inflicted on them. However, the novel ends on an optimistic note. The Magistrate sees children at play in the middle of the square, building a snowman. Thus the Magistrate goes through three different experiences. When Joll arrives at the Outpost he is in charge of the Outpost. Subsequently he is treated like a prisoner and humiliated. With the retreat of Joll and his men, he regains control of the Outpost.

Thus, *Waiting for the Barbarians* echoes the social and political scenes in South Africa. The novel is clear about what violence does to its perpetrator. Dominic Head, a well known critic of Coetzee opines, “This novel about the destructiveness (and self-destructiveness) of an imperial regime – obstructed by one man of conscience has obvious ramifications for the white opponent of apartheid South Africa in 1980, the year of publication.”<sup>25</sup>

In his non fictional writing, *White Writing*, Coetzee avers, “In one sense, the wilderness is a world where the law of nature reigns, a world over which the first act of culture, Adam’s act of naming, has not been performed.... can be loosely associated with British colonialism and the effort to maintain a border separating a region of order and culture – the colony – from the barbarian wilderness.”<sup>26</sup>

Coetzee’s idea that the interior is wilderness clearly echoes Conrad. Similarly, the term Outpost has reference to Conrad’s Outpost in the *Heart of Darkness*. Similarities can be drawn between Kurtz’s native woman and the Magistrate’s barbarian girl. Kurtz’s native woman is elegant and composed and has held Kurtz under her sway. Similarly, though the barbarian girl does not enamour the Magistrate, in some way, she binds herself to him. Labib, a critic on Coetzee remarks “to an extent the bond between the Magistrate and the barbarian girl can be seen as a paternal (if patronizing) relationship.”<sup>27</sup> He cannot let go of her although there is no physical relationship between them because he feels that he is in a way part of the damage done to her by the Colonel and his men.

Hence in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Coetzee exposes the cruelty and atrocity of the white man. What is significant to note is the effect of such cruelty on the ‘Other’. The so called ‘barbarians’ are more ‘civilised’ than the so called ‘civilised’ white men. The young boy, the old man, the barbarian girl and the prisoners who are tortured, accept their

lot without any show of resistance. Is this acceptance because of helplessness or is it because they accept the vicissitudes of life? The barbarian girl when questioned by the Magistrate does not even want to discuss what the torturers have done to her. There is no anger or sorrow in her, but only acceptance of and resignation to what has happened to her. She narrates, "They did not burn me. They said they would burn my eyes out, but they did not. The man brought it very close to my face and made me look at it. They held my eyelids open. But I had nothing to tell them. That was all" (*WB* 44).

When the Magistrate asks her "What do you feel towards the men who did this?" she lies thinking for a long time and says, "I am tired of talking" (*WB* 44). Perhaps many thoughts would have gone through her mind. But she prefers to keep the thoughts to herself. It is not that she is unaffected by what the torturers have done to her. She only chooses to remain silent as she is cognizant that nothing can undo what has been done to her. No one can alter what she has gone through. So she wants to remain silent. This indifference to suffering is that of an evolved person. There is neither hatred nor self-pity. It is total detachment to pain and suffering. By such an attitude, she indeed has a moral victory over the perpetrators of violence. Similarly the protagonist of the novel *Life and Times of Michael K*, Michael displays indifference to suffering. He wants to live a life of solitude and does not want sympathy from anyone.

The barbarian girl has no choice other than to serve the Magistrate. However, she is not subservient in spirit to him. When he ridicules her comparing her to the silver fox he has in his room, she expresses her annoyance at this comparison and lets him know that. She conveys the fact to him that he cannot take her for granted and ridicule her. The Magistrate, therefore apologises. This attitude shows that she could be assertive. In spite of being considered the 'Other', the natives are not without defiance and resistance. The

barbarian girl does not give in to the Magistrate because she knows that he too is no different from the other white men. He is just curious to know about the scars on her body. Coetzee gives his characters such a depth of understanding although they are physically debilitated. In spite of broken ankles and almost being made blind, the girl shows no hatred or vengeance. But Coetzee has shown us how the white man has behaved in *Dusklands* when under pressure. Both Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee have no control over their emotions. Anger turns them mad and makes them vengeful. As against them we have Michael K the protagonist of *Life and Times of Michael K* a native who remains very much in control of his emotions even in adversity.

When the Magistrate speaks to the young military officer about the barbarians who, the officers are planning to attack, the officer makes a mental assessment of him. The Magistrate contends “I think I know what he sees before him, a minor civilian administrator sunk, after years in this backwater, in slothful native ways” (*WB* 54). The whites in their homeland always believe that proximity to the natives will make people of their kind also idle and slothful. They will naturally imbibe the superfluous qualities of the natives by living in their land. That is the whole purpose of apartheid – to segregate the blacks from the whites.

Coetzee in *White Writing*, in the essay ‘Idleness in South Africa’ mentions how the Immorality Act and Mixed Marriages Act is introduced to prevent the whites from marrying the blacks, thereby preventing them to “settle down to more or less idle, shiftless, improvident lives and engender troops of ragged children....”( *WW* 37). Thus Coetzee incorporates whatever he has learnt from his research on the travel stories into his novels. This gives authenticity to whatever he discusses in the novel.

David Attwell in *J.M.Coetzee South Africa and the Politics of Writing* avers:

So the barbarian girl will simply not be delivered up to the Magistrate's probings; her otherness cannot be domesticated...the Magistrate's desire in *Barbarians* brings in train all the dominating implications of the colonial episteme. The desired, female colonised is well known as a trope of colonial discourse, whether she represents the interior and its material riches, the landscape, or the purely psychic abundance of the unknown. In disallowing penetration, therefore, Coetzee both acknowledges and refuses to perpetuate these generalised implications of dominance.<sup>28</sup>

By accepting her lot silently, the barbarian girl evolves as an individual, but finally defeats the one in power because violence has no effect on the tortured. She remains undeterred as she has no anger or hatred and keeps all her suffering to herself.

*Life and Times of Michael K* written in the backdrop of the civil war in South Africa is influenced by the political events of the years 1978 to 1982. However, Coetzee is more interested in following the life of an individual called Michael K, who refuses to be part of the system and the war. In all his novels Coetzee centres his plot on the individual rather than on a group of people. Mike Marais, a critic states thus, "Indeed, the novel consists of a series of replicated episodes, each of which brings Michael K into contact with a character who attempts to assert himself by negating K's alterity."<sup>29</sup> Michael K works as a gardener and lives with his mother who works as a domestic help. However, his mother falls sick and wishes to return to her home town. Michael takes her in a make-shift barrow. As he moves along with his mother he encounters many difficulties because they do not carry a permit to leave the town. All his efforts are to stay out of the war. There is no direct confrontation of Michael with violence. It is only once that he is threatened by a soldier who is only greedy to confiscate the things he is carrying.

The Medical Officer who wants Michael to conform to the system tries to persuade him to open his heart and speak. But Michael refuses to eat and his resistance is only physical. However, he does everything the camp expects him to do. Labib, the critic states, "Michael, however, shows incredible insight and demonstrates he has understood that behind the doctor's facade there hides a coloniser who, in spite of everything, keeps perceiving the 'Other; as the different 'Other', thereby constructing him as inferior."<sup>30</sup> Michael wants to stay out of the war and the society. He does not want the company of people as he wants to be by himself. The conflict and violence make no sense to him. In the character of Michael K, Coetzee illustrates that one can live in a society and not be a part of that society; one can live in the midst of war and still not be a party to it. This possibility can become a reality if one is ready to be in solitude and this requires tremendous will power, as it is but human to seek the company of others.

Even in the camps, no violence is discussed by Coetzee. In fact according to the camp authorities, life in the camp is better than in the world outside which is full of violence. However, what Michael desires, is to live away from society, from people, and be close to nature. He achieves this by escaping the camp. He does not want to be a part of the war torn society. He stays away from everything that will lead to a violent way of life. Michael succeeds living in solitude though there are times when he feels like having the company of people. Nevertheless he is comfortable with himself. He remains happy with his way of life although he is exposed to the indignities of the time. He does not expect anything from anyone as he seems to have found a meaning in his life. Throughout the novel we hardly see Michael in conversation. Coetzee only reveals his thoughts to us. Thus we get to know Michael more from what he thinks than from what he speaks.

“The ratio of forces has been inverted; decolonization has begun; all that our hired soldiers can do is to delay its completion.”<sup>31</sup> This statement is pertinent to the novel *Age of Iron*. The novel begins with Mrs. Curren being told by her doctor that she is suffering from cancer. This is symbolic of the unrest in South Africa. When Coetzee wrote this novel, turmoil and violence in South Africa was at its peak. When Mrs. Curren returns from the hospital after being diagnosed with cancer she sees a vagrant, Vercueil by name, settled comfortably in a shelter in the yard near her garage. The cancer she is suffering from is symbolic of the unrest that is widespread in South Africa.

Timothy Francis Strode argues:

It is not insignificant to note here that J.M.Coetzee will offer as one symptom of the breakdown of apartheid the appearance of a vagrant – one of whose cardinal characteristics is his offensive odour – in the backyard of a “respectable” middle class white woman.... *Age of Iron*, for example, will register the unraveling of a spatial strategy, and, simultaneously detail the fragmenting of sanitised white consciousness.<sup>32</sup>

A black would never have dared to enter the space of the white. This would never have happened in South Africa under apartheid. But now the blacks who have started protesting are defiant and assertive. The occupying of the space belonging to the white man is a sure sign of this assertion.

Vercueil becomes a sort of an ‘angel’ for Mrs. Curren who until then has not been involved in the social or political issues of South Africa, living a secluded life. She is an academician and does not have to mingle with the masses. Hence she does not know much about the conflict-ridden society. Nevertheless she is sympathetic to the blacks and

is unlike the whites who look down upon the blacks and treat them as inferior beings. Mrs. Curren's daughter has left the country and is in the U.S.

Florence, Mrs. Curren's help, brings her son and two daughters with her. She learns from her that the schools have been burnt down. But all this is not reported as it is censored. Mrs Curren gets to know what is happening around her from Florence and also by watching the black township which she can see at a distance from her house. She is upset that Florence's son behaves in a callous manner. Florence believes that it is the whites who made them so cruel and is proud of the violent behavior of her son Bheki and his friend. "These are good children, they are like iron, we are proud of them"<sup>33</sup> she says. However, Mrs Curren does not like this attitude of Florence as she feels that it will kill the fine sentiments in the children and there will be no hope for the future. She believes that children ought not to behave in such a manner.

Bheki and his friend while riding on their bicycles are deliberately pushed towards a parked van by two policemen in a van. As a result the friend is unconscious and Bheki is wounded. Atrocities of this kind were common in South Africa. The police were deliberately cruel with the blacks. Coetzee refers to the power that the police wielded in South Africa, dehumanising the people there. Coetzee is not referring just to South Africa. It can happen anywhere in the world when power is used in a distorted manner. Mrs. Curren wants to lodge a complaint against the two policemen. But only parties directly affected are permitted to do so. She finds herself in a helpless position about what is going on in the society, although she knows that the action of the police is totally unjust and unlawful. Coetzee refers to the shooting in the town and how the 'witdoeke' are given guns to shoot. This is exactly what happened in South Africa during the unrest. Even the whites who are sympathetic to the blacks could do nothing about such atrocities.

Mrs Curren is one of those whites who finds herself helpless against the atrocities of the whites.

Mrs. Curren sees the town of Guguletu burning. She is distressed to see Bheki lying dead. "We shoot these people as if they are waste, but in the end it is we whose lives are not worth living" (*AI* 104) she contends. About the violence she writes "You know this country. There is madness in the air here" (*AI* 117). Mrs. Curren writes about what is happening in South Africa, to her daughter who has no inkling about what she is going through and what is happening in South Africa. Mike Marais opines "After Bheki's death and her visit to Guguletu, however, Mrs Curren appears to realize that the system of Western values and ethics in terms of which she judges and acts has lost all validity and relevance in the historical context she finds herself."<sup>34</sup> She finds that the blacks have their own sense of what is righteous. Mrs Curren tries to overcome the unhealthy relationship between the blacks and the whites which is brought in by the practice of apartheid, by trying to love the black boys. Mike Marais further avers, "Since it is the relations of contestation imposed by the state which dehumanise people, it follows that "love", in undermining the subject-centred consciousness which underpins such relations of power, has the ability to humanise that which has been brutalised."<sup>35</sup>

In Bheki's death and in the death of hundreds of black men, Mrs. Curren feels the age of iron will return. Mrs. Curren is surprised that young boys are part of the violence. She tells Bheki's friend "You are still children. You are throwing away your lives before you know what life can be.... Fifteen is too young to die..." (*AI* 143). She is in great despair when the police shoots Bheki's friend in her own home. Finally Mrs. Curren dies in the arms of Vercueil to whom she entrusts a packet to be posted to her daughter.

The novel belongs to the epistolary genre and Mrs. Curren writes to her daughter, as testimony of her last days and of what is happening in South Africa. Mrs. Curren moves from a state of ignorance to knowledge. She is hitherto kept away from the political and social turmoil, being an academic and when she learns about the violence in the society through her maid Florence, whose son and friends are fighting the authority of the whites, she finds herself sympathising with the underdogs. However, she is unable to do anything and she becomes only a witness to the violence around her. The novel expresses her solitude and disappointment. Coetzee delineates a white character accepting the blacks, yet unable to do anything more than that. Many whites in South Africa including writers upheld the rights of the blacks though they could not do anything more than that.

The nation-wide unrest in South Africa in the 1980s finds echoes in the novel. The repressive measures taken by the government were brutal. A series of boycotts were organised by the black youth and children and the white regime targeted them mercilessly. The government controlled the media and there was nothing to watch on the TV or read in newspapers other than propaganda by the white regime.

Mrs. Curren is not interested in turning the TV on. She like everyone else is aware that the real happenings in the society would not be telecast. The people have no access to the truth and reality as the censors have their iron grip on the media where nothing escaped their scrutiny. Coetzee in his novels brings out the various faces of censorship.

Although Mrs. Curren, seems to be pessimistic about the future of South Africa, the fact that she establishes a harmonious relationship with Vercueil, proves that Coetzee is not altogether cynical. There seems to be a better understanding between the two races. Although Coetzee does not specify Vercueil's race, it is obvious that he belongs to the inferior race. Vercueil is always described as being dirty and smelly. Nevertheless he

does not fall short of humane qualities. He is around whenever Mrs. Curren needs him. She trusts him to post the packet to her daughter after her death, so that her daughter could be aware of what she went through and what exactly had happened in South Africa. Coetzee seems to say that though there may be no hope for the country as such, one can see hope at the level of individuals. The relationship between the white and the black individual, the quality of love between them can definitely heal the enmity between them and in turn heal the society and the country. Here the optimistic approach of Coetzee is evident.

Coetzee's use of the epistolary genre is significant because Mrs. Curren gets the freedom to put forth all her thoughts and feelings in these letters, to her daughter, who is away from South Africa. In the letters, she opens out to her daughter and we get to know the sufferings she goes through as a white citizen of South Africa. She expresses her helplessness and surprise at the intensity of purpose of the young blacks. She tolerates a black living in her yard. However, he seems to be the only one around in time of need. There is a sense of bonding between them. Throughout the novel, Mrs. Curren is astonished that black parents let their children grow up ready to face violence. She is astonished that the youth are ready to die for freedom and for comradeship. She cannot come to terms with it. However, eventually she acknowledges the complicity of the white man which led to the unrest in the society.

On the other hand in the novel *Disgrace* which is written in the post apartheid era, we see a reversal of violence. This novel is written after the decolonization of the South African state. Being a shrewd observer, Coetzee's novel echoes the impact of decolonization, although he came under heavy criticism by the government and also fellow writers. It was felt that he was only highlighting something which was not very

predominant, that is, the whites being molested by the blacks. David Lurie is a professor at a University and he is unceremoniously dismissed from service, for his alleged misbehavior towards one of his students, Melanie Isaac. His house is vandalised by miscreants. The post apartheid era, showed much violence and assertion by the blacks. The blacks were out to show the whites what they meant.

David Lurie leaves Cape Town and comes to reside with his daughter Lucy, on her farm. Here, he and his daughter become subject to violence from the blacks. One day under the pretext of using the telephone, two black men and a young boy enter the farm, assault Lurie and lock him up, pour alcohol on him, set fire, and gang rape Lucy. This act of the blacks is deliberate as they want to assert their position in the wake of decolonization. The blacks choose to wreak vengeance on the whites and they are ruthless. They want to show that they are also capable of inflicting violence. No one comes to the rescue of Lucy or Lurie. The three men after shooting the dogs in the kennel drive off in Lurie's car. Lucy's neighbour Petrus, a black is nowhere around when this incident takes place. It looks as if he has conveniently been away from the scene of violence. Petrus owns a farm which is adjacent to Lucy's. He has an eye on Lucy's land. This is something, which all blacks want. They want to take back the land, which to them, is equivalent to reclaiming power.

Lucy is pregnant, as a result of the rape and decides to keep the child. She agrees to marry Petrus, so that she can get protection. It is agreed upon by him that, she will have the right to stay in her house and nobody will have the right to enter the house without her permission. David is astounded to learn about this compromising gesture of his daughter. But Lucy feels that she has only paid the price for what the whites have done to the blacks all these years. "They see me as owing something. They see themselves as

debt collectors. Why should I be allowed to live here without paying? Perhaps that is what they tell themselves.”<sup>36</sup> Suresh Raval in his essay ‘Coetzee’s *Disgrace*’ contends “While Lurie does not think he is personally liable for apartheid’s evils, Lucy recognizes that the apartheid was a catastrophic social, economic, and cultural undertaking that caused immense human suffering.”<sup>37</sup> Coetzee was criticised by other writers and also by the government for making Lucy accept her plight. But that nevertheless was the reality. However, the whites did not want to accept the reality as it was a stigma on the image of democratic South Africa.

Decolonisation brought about a reversal in the equations of power. The whites found themselves in a precarious condition as they knew that they were no longer safe in South Africa. Those whites who lived there, lived in constant fear of the blacks. They knew that anything could happen anytime and they had to face the reality. The blacks aggressively waited for an opportunity to settle scores, to teach the whites a lesson and they did it with exceptional zeal. They had absolutely no commiseration for the whites and the whites knew that they could not expect anything less than revenge from the blacks.

The boy who is one among the three blacks who had molested Lucy, is a relative of Petrus, Lucy’s neighbour and has the audacity to return and be part of the party thrown by Petrus for which both David and Lucy are invited. David Lurie cannot contain his anger. However, he has no moral right to accuse this boy. He has also behaved in a similar manner with his student, Melanie Isaacs. He has also misused his power as a teacher. One wonders whether Coetzee advocates that one pays for one’s sins and that was the reason why David’s daughter Lucy, has to pay the price.

The blacks wreak vengeance on Lucy but she shows no anger. Although she is not the same person that she was, we find that she accepts what has happened to her very

submissively. She does not report the rape to the police and she even decides to have the child which is conceived out of the rape. This is a tremendous change that we see in a white. Those who have hitherto acted with impunity are now passive. Lucy even believes that what she is doing is right. The decision to keep the child is also surprising. Why will a white woman want to carry the child of a black and that too one that is a result of rape? Raval avers, "Lucy's project, insofar as it is a self-consciously conceived project after her rape, appears to be an attempt at atonement for an appalling history of domination and violence."<sup>38</sup> *Disgrace* is a bleak novel, but a powerful one. Lurie comes to a state of self knowledge. The novel draws an uncompromising portrait of the events unfolding in South Africa. Even though apartheid was lifted, South Africa was still not at ease with itself. The blacks were still resentful of the whites and resentment was smouldering. They were seething with indignation, vociferous of their contempt for and anger against the whites which Coetzee captures effectively in his novel. Raval furthermore states "Lucy, unlike Lurie, acknowledges that, as a product and beneficiary of apartheid, she cannot negotiate her position, that it is Petrus who now has moved into a position of authority to rewrite history."<sup>39</sup>

Having analysed the depiction of violence in the novels we now turn to the relevance of violence illustrated in the novels. The novels clearly demonstrate the binary opposites – 'us' versus 'they', 'civilised' versus 'uncivilised,' 'good versus 'evil' and so on. In the novels one witnesses violence that is perpetrated by those who are in a position of power on the powerless. Almost all the novels show the white man exercising his authority but the impact of power varies. Eugene who tries to inhabit a place of omnipotence, finds himself in a pitiable situation. He is constantly chided by his superior. As a father, his relationship with his son does not elicit envy. In other words, in all his positions of power

he appears to be ineffective. His sense of inferiority makes him consciously stab his son, when his wife comes with the policemen to claim his son. The child becomes the victim of his anger and frustration, just as the natives become the victims of Jacobus' rage at being humiliated. He would never have done that under normal circumstances. This is the result of the imperialistic stance he is propagating by being a party to it. Coetzee dehumanizes the character of Eugene Dawn and Jacobus.

Similarly in the second novella, Jacobus the protagonist too wants to place himself in a position of power. Jacobus thinks of himself as a person who can exercise his power over the natives but soon finds himself in a ridiculous position when he is among them. He becomes very frantic on realising that he cannot exhibit his power or when he comprehends that the natives are not in awe of him. This is the typical reaction of a coloniser who finds himself in a situation where his power is not acknowledged and the exercise of authority takes a brutal turn. Power brings out the revengeful character of Jacobus but it is not without having an impact on his psyche. He tries to justify the bloodshed by saying, "I am a tool in the hands of history" (*DL* 106).

Jacobus exercises his power only to keep the distinction between himself and the 'Other'. His exercise of power is to establish his difference from the 'Other' and it also reveals his fear of the 'Other'. Power is exercised as a tool of defence. He establishes his superiority by a show of violence. By exercising power he treats the natives as inferiors and thereby, gives them the place of the 'Other'. Both Eugene and Jacobus exercise power by being violent. Juxtaposing these two characters, Coetzee comes down heavily on the imperialistic stand of the West, which finds its expression in South Africa in the inhuman practice of apartheid.

However, in the novel *In the Heart of the Country*, Magda the protagonist seeks a life for herself. She does not try to assert herself as a white woman. She does not want to be one among the forgotten ones in history. As a white woman, she denounces her position of power and tries to have a meaningful relationship with her servants, Hendrik and his wife Klein Anna. She is not one who perpetrates the viciousness of colonialism. Nevertheless, she resides in the state of colonialism which definitely is not her creation. She tries to find a life for herself, but finds no sense of bonding. Her mother is apparently dead and her father estranges himself from her. In fact, she becomes both the victim and the victimiser. Magda's father, being a white is in a position of power and she lives in fear of her father. He exerts patriarchal power on her. Similarly he wields power on the blacks on the farm and even uses the native woman for his sexual gratification.

Initially, though Magda distances herself from the natives, later on she assumes the role of the subject in relation to Hendrik, her servant. The roles are reversed and Hendrik now inhabits the position of power. Hendrik and Anna even refuse to communicate with her and finally Hendrik rapes Magda. So, even though Magda tries to establish a meaningful relationship with the blacks, the power that she vests in them, by being kind to them is misused. The authority that they have, makes Hendrik misuse it. He indulges in the heinous act of raping Lucy. Hence one wonders whether Coetzee is trying to say that power corrupts a person irrespective of whether he is black or white. Hendrik stands testimony to this. Could it be that he is taking revenge on Magda's father, his master who had sexual relations with his wife as he stood in a position of power. This probably may be the motive behind Hendrik's act. At the close of the novel we find Magda trying to communicate with the sky-gods because she has failed to communicate with anyone else.

Coetzee touches upon this difficulty of communication which is a result of the white-black encounter. She cannot commune with her father or the black servants.

The novel *In the Heart of the Country* explores the theme of complicity. Magda, the protagonist looks within her for answers for certain questions regarding the white man's presence in South Africa. She represents the colonial enterprise. Though Magda's reports are inconsistent, she exhibits her complicity in the colonial enterprise. In her report about Hendrik and Klein Anna she fails to establish any rapport between her and the black servants. Magda becomes a target of exploitation. She emerges as a construct of the colonial enterprise and an alienated individual, trying to come to terms with her existential problems. The world that she inhabits is a world that is lost to her and the stories she tells which are often contradictory, reveal the thoughts that she debates.

In *Waiting for the Barbarians* violence is perpetrated by the State. The fear that the State has for the blacks makes them self-defensive thereby resorting to violent means to suppress the natives. They feel that their power may be usurped. The government feels that there is a threat to political and social stability, "believing that the situation could lead to the overthrow of white minority rule in South Africa and bring about the end of the world of privilege they had carefully constructed for themselves, the government resolved to hold on to power at all costs."<sup>40</sup> However, Colonel Joll and his men, representatives of the Third Bureau, who are very suspicious of the natives exercise their power over them. This fear makes them ruthless. They only want to achieve their ends and are prepared to do anything. Coetzee vehemently condemns the atrocities of the white man in the novel. Though the time and milieu is not specified it is obvious that the novel is a critique of the conditions in South Africa. The Magistrate faces the complicity of the white man in the apartheid regime.

Talking about the repressive measures taken by the whites, Coetzee refers to the Miscegenation Act whereby sexual relations between masters and slaves are considered a crime. Coetzee contends, "Its origins, it seems to me lie in fear and denial: denial of an unacknowledgeable desire to embrace Africa, embrace the body of Africa, and fear of being embraced in return."<sup>41</sup> They only want to achieve their ends and for this they are prepared to do anything. Coetzee vehemently condemns the atrocities of the white man in the novel.

In *Life and Times of Michael K*, the State exerts its authority by introducing various laws to curb the freedom of the individual. Michael K cannot leave Sea Point because he does not have a permit. Consequently, the officials stop him. However, not much of power is exerted. The Medical officer tries to exert his power by putting himself in the position of authority and by treating Michael K as the powerless. He tries to persuade him to talk but Michael does not yield. Michael ultimately gains his freedom by escaping from the camp. He thinks "I have escaped the camps; perhaps, if I lie low, I will escape the charity too."<sup>42</sup>

Michael does not want charity from anyone. All he wants is freedom and he achieves this by going back to nature. By a return to nature Michael establishes his freedom. Thus in *Life and Times of Michael K*, the impact of power is negated because of Michael's resolve not to be dominated. He will not let anyone take his freedom and lives his life the way he wants to. He asserts himself in a very passive manner without clash or conflict. The novel is significant because it is concerned with the suffering and redemption of humanity as a whole.

Coetzee's *Foe* is a reworking of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. But the Crusoe of Coetzee is different from the Crusoe of Defoe. Coetzee rewrites the canonical text of Defoe. In

*Robinson Crusoe*, Crusoe is in the position of domination and he domesticates Friday. However, the Cruso of Coetzee has a harmonious relationship with Friday. The difference is that Friday's tongue has been mutilated. Labib, the critic remarks about Coetzee:

...on the one hand he uses intertextuality to show that what previous texts were based on was not reality, but simply a construction of it, which was historically and socially determined. In addition, by making readers look at old texts from a different perspective, he achieves a defamiliarization which comes close to achieving what was the aim of structuralism, that is to bring to consciousness what is taken as natural and reveal it as a construct. On the other, he simultaneously refutes some of its fundamental notions such as the idea of 'structure' and the pure linguistic existence of the subject.<sup>43</sup>

So unlike Defoe's Friday, Coetzee's Friday remains mute. Coetzee does not reveal as to who cut his tongue. Coetzee's Cruso teaches him certain words which are enough for Friday to live in the island. Susan's understanding of Friday is from a position of power. She tries to make Friday speak, just as the Medical Officer in *Life and Times of Michael K* tries to make Michael speak. She feels she is superior to this native as she tries to teach him to write. But Friday is not interested to learn. Coetzee's Cruso is also different from Defoe's Crusoe. Defoe's Crusoe tries to create a civilization but Coetzee's Cruso is happy with the existing state of affairs on the island. Susan Barton's position in society is also one of the marginalised. Although she is a white woman she is marginalised. When she wants to write her story she seeks out a male writer. She cannot be heard as she is considered inferior to the male. Hence she chooses Mr. Foe to write her story.

Dominic Head, a critic on Coetzee avers, "Where Defoe's Crusoe is the archetypal imperialist, governed by economic self-aggrandizement, Coetzee's Cruso is concerned merely with subsistence and sterile work."<sup>44</sup> Coetzee's Friday has no ambition. He does not enter into any conflict with anyone. One does not know whether he is happy in the company of Cruso. He lives with him without any confrontation. His relationship with Susan Barton is also devoid of any feeling. He definitely does not show any conflict or dislike. He accepts his position and is contented to be so.

In London, both Susan and Friday are insulted. She is the half-colonised and Friday, the 'Other' is the oppressed. Friday's silence represents the silencing of the 'Other' in the colonial discourse. Friday in the novel becomes symbolic of the suffering of the repressed blacks in South Africa.

*Age of Iron* reveals the white woman's involvement in the violence which hitherto she has kept out of. She finds herself drawn into the turmoil in the society. However, the blacks do not treat her sympathetically. Here, her position of power is lost and even her space and time is taken over by the 'Other'. For the first time she comes face to face with violence. Mrs. Curren also realises that she cannot have any thought of comradeship. Unlike the case of David Lurie and Lucy in the novel *Disgrace*, who are molested by the blacks, the black man is the one who shows his compassion for Mrs. Curren.

In *Disgrace*, thus we see a reversal of roles of the whites and blacks. Political freedom gives the blacks unbridled freedom. They take law into their hands and do not spare the whites. They take all opportunity to wreak vengeance on the whites. In the assault of Lurie and the rape of Lucy by the three blacks who enter the premises of the whites, Coetzee shows the reversal of power. The blacks during the period of decolonization resort to violence to assert their rights.

Coetzee's novels testify to the sufferings of human beings under the inhuman practice of apartheid where we find domination and subservience. The people who dominate are ruthless, indifferent to human suffering. The suffering is the aftermath of their act but it does not trouble them. They do not feel guilty of having caused the suffering. They cannot empathize with the sufferer or rather they do not want to empathize with the one who suffers. It is the torment meted out by them which puts them in a position of power. In causing suffering they only derive vicarious pleasure. It does not affect them in any way although we as readers are able to see that there is a moral degeneration in the character of those who perpetrate suffering.

However, this suffering is perpetrated because of the empire's fear of the native and the trepidation of its position being unstable in the colony. It was a defensive tactic followed by the whites so that the blacks could not react and take their place. This apprehension in the coloniser led to the suppression of the culture and beliefs of the natives. The natives were told that their culture and beliefs were savage and it was the whites only who could help redeem themselves from such a state of degeneration. The native's religion was shunned and Christianity was introduced to the natives as a religion that could save them from damnation. The empire had to put itself in a position of power. So the native had to be the 'Other' on whom its will could be exercised.

In the first novella of *Dusklands*, the conflict between the Americans and Vietnamese brings suffering. The Americans use lethal weapons to cause suffering to the Vietnamese. Many are annihilated. However, in the process of writing a report on the propaganda tactics used by the Americans, the protagonist Eugene Dawn also suffers. He loses his mental balance and is sent to a mental asylum. In any colonial encounter, the whites try to convince the natives that they are on a civilizing mission, to lead them from darkness

to light. This is the stance taken by Jacobus Coetzee in the second novella. In order to subdue the natives, he resorts to violence. Initially the natives pay no attention to him. However, when he uses the gun and inflicts violence on them they are alarmed. The Hottentot servants who have deserted Jacobus are brutally attacked, killed and treated as objects without a will of their own. The question that arises is whether in their suffering the natives emerge as better people or not. The distress caused to them is dreadful. It clearly brings out the policy of discrimination followed by the whites. The natives whom Jacobus attacks cannot resist violence because they do not have guns. The white man is able to exert his superiority easily because of the weapons he possesses and he subjects the native to suffering and anguish.

In the second novel *In the Heart of the Country*, the protagonist Magda lives on a farm. The suffering is self inflicted unlike the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* who is made to suffer. No doubt, she is a victim of the whims of her dominating father, but later on, she puts herself in the position of the victimised in her relationship with her servants, Hendrik and Klein Anna. Her suffering is caused by alienation. She fails to understand the meaning of life thereby losing clarity of what is real and what is unreal. She goes into a series of monologues, loathing her lonely existence which makes the novel inward looking. Through her monologues, Magda reveals many things about herself. Though Magda's reports are inconsistent, she exhibits her complicity in the colonial enterprise. She cannot establish a rapport between Hendrik, Anna and herself. This is symbolic of the white man's failure to maintain a positive relationship with the blacks. She is raped by Hendrik and left alone on the farm. Her 'spinster fate' is supposed to represent South Africa's international isolation during the apartheid regime. Just as South Africa remained unaffected even by being isolated, no one bothers about Magda's

isolation. Magda is subordinate to the male in a hierarchical society and she is victimized when Hendrik rapes her. As Dominic Head avers “the coloniser is necessarily the instigator of revolutionary counter violence.”<sup>45</sup>

In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the novel which put Coetzee on the international scene, suffering is the lot of the natives. This suffering is meted out by Colonel Joll and his men who arrive at the Outpost with the feeling that the barbarians would invade their territory any time and inflict violence. The old man dies after being tortured and the boy suffers in silence, the barbarian girl almost blinded and her ankles broken, suffers without showing any reaction. The Magistrate has sympathy for the girl but does nothing beyond this. He acknowledges his complicity. Coetzee by showing the Magistrate’s complicity, means to say that everyone shares the responsibility for the suffering by passively accepting injustice. Coetzee makes a scathing remark through his novels on those people who lived in South Africa, doing nothing about the atrocities meted out to the natives. When Colonel Joll realises that the Magistrate has taken the girl back to her people he feels that the Magistrate has colluded with them against the empire. Hence the torture by Mandel, Colonel Joll’s subordinate.

Although the Magistrate has sympathy for the barbarians, he considers them to be different. His attitude to the barbarian girl is patronising, as his liking for the girl is for his self redemption. So there is only a degree of difference between him and Colonel Joll. The Magistrate perpetrates the concept of ‘we’ and the ‘Other’. He looks after the girl to overcome his guilt in inflicting violence on the ‘Other’. Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* though allegorical in nature is a strong indictment on torture and its implications.

But this is not the case in the novel *Life and Times of Michael K*. The protagonist Michael shows his indifference to suffering. He does not want the charity of anyone. He does not ask for any attention. He wants to keep away from the social and political milieu. It is a war torn South Africa that is projected and there is severe State control everywhere. As Michael takes his mother to her home town she dies on the way. Although he is pacified by the hospital staff, he only wishes that they leave him alone. His suffering connotes acceptance and he does not want sympathy from anyone nor does he expect anything from life. He seems to be contented and without any desires only wanting to be left alone. However, towards the end of the novel he is in the company of some tramps, a man, two women and a child and he seems to enjoy their company.

Michael exemplifies the truism that man is basically alone. The civil war is going on. The blacks are not allowed to move without passes. Michael, when stopped by the police and interrogated for the permit that is required for non whites to move from one town to another, suffers the indignities and the harsh treatment with equanimity. There is absolutely no response from him. His attitude to the acts of the whites is one of indifference. He does not show any sorrow when he is treated badly. It is as if he believes that he is destined to put up with whatever he goes through. K is picked up by the police and sent to a resettlement camp. He escapes from there, as camp life causes a lot of suffering for him. Again, he is caught and sent to the Kenilworth camp. The Medical Officer shows sincere interest in Michael and wants him to open up and tell him his story. However, Michael refuses to be influenced by him.

Coetzee was very much influenced by Kafka and the K in Michael K has allusions to 'Josef K' of Kafka which has the theme of alienation. Michael K who has a strong personality is not concerned about suffering and alienates himself from society. No one

can influence him. He only does what he wants to do, unwilling to make any compromise and finally he wins his freedom.

In the novel *Foe*, the silence of the 'Other', that is, Friday's does not imply suffering. He seems to be not bothered about anything. However, this makes us think of the circumstances that led to the mutilating of his tongue. Crusoe is quite happy on the island and does not want to go back to his country. On the other hand, for Susan Barton who is marooned on the island, the only thought is to get back to her country. Crusoe's reluctance to go back leads to his death on the voyage and when Susan does get back to England, she longs to be on the island. Friday is unlike Daniel Defoe's Friday. His silence is the result of a physical mutilation caused deliberately.

In *The Master of Petersburg* the fictionalised Dostoevsky suffers the loss of his son who perhaps is killed by the revolutionaries. He comes to Petersburg to collect the papers and belongings of his son. He gets involved with Nechaev, a revolutionary and has an affair with the landlady where his step son lived. He feels a sense of loneliness for his lost son. It is after the death of his stepson that he longs for him.

In *Age of Iron*, Mrs. Curren the protagonist of the novel suffers from cancer which is eating her. At the same time the society is also being eaten with unrest and violence. The cancer in her body is emblematic of the cancer in the society that is causing all the turmoil and aggression. Just as there is no cure for the cancer that is eating her bones, there seems to be no cure for the violence in the South African society.

A number of blacks organize themselves against the apartheid government, fearless about what will happen to them. The youth are not afraid to die because they are dying for a cause. The rebels are mercilessly killed and Mrs. Curren cannot understand why the youth offer themselves to the atrocities of the security police.

*Age of Iron* was written when Emergency was clamped on South Africa. Everywhere repressive measures were introduced. Violent deaths were very common as the State resorted to violent means to suppress any sign of rebellion from the blacks.

Bheki's death moves Mrs. Curren. So too his friend John's, although she never liked him. She feels responsible as a white for the suffering of these young men. She feels sad that these young men have never had a happy childhood. It is sad to note that Mrs. Curren has no one to talk to or confess. Vercueil, the vagrant, hardly listens to her talk. Thus this novel deals with Coetzee's exposure of violence and the impact of it on the protagonist.

After having commented on Coetzee's views on suffering it is pertinent to discuss Coetzee's novel *The Lives of Animals* which argues for the cause of animals that are treated with utmost cruelty by human beings. The novel is in the form of lectures given by one Mrs. Costello, a well known novelist. She is invited to Appleton University to deliver two lectures of her choice. In this novel we have Coetzee's views on the killing of animals by human beings. Elizabeth Costello has been invited by the university to give two lectures. As she is well known for her novel *The House on Eccles Street* it is presumed that she will speak on literature.

However, Mrs. Costello chooses to speak on her favourite topic 'Animal Rights'. She delivers two lectures 'The Philosophers and the Animals' and 'The Poets and the Animals'. As a strong advocate of vegetarianism and animal rights she is appalled by the cruelty meted out by human beings on animals. She feels that human beings do not have the right to be cruel to animals. She is also very much against the eating of meat because she believes that unlike some animals, man does not need to eat meat. She considers that what is happening in abattoirs, in trawlers, in laboratories all over the world is horrifying. She strongly says that the killing of animals is unjustified. At one point Mrs. Costello

equates the killing of animals to the killing of Jews in Germany. She feels that “we are surrounded by an enterprise of degradation, cruelty and killing which rivals anything that the Third Reich was capable of, indeed dwarfs it, in that ours is an enterprise without end, self-generating, bringing rabbits, rats, poultry, live-stock ceaselessly into the world for the purpose of killing them.”<sup>46</sup>

Costello’s daughter-in-law is not happy with what Costello says, she tells her husband that there is no need for his mother to preach her beliefs and that she should keep her thoughts about eating meat to herself instead of trying to make others feel guilty of eating meat. Costello feels that if human beings imagined themselves into the being of animals and put themselves into the place of the victims, they will not want to kill the animals. She believes that sympathy should flow from the heart. “There are people who have the capacity to imagine themselves as someone else, there are people who have no such capacity (when the lack is extreme, we call them psychopaths), and there are people who have the capacity but choose not to exercise it” (*LA* 35). Thus Coetzee makes Costello speak about the views he has in his mind about the killing of animals. Coetzee himself was a vegetarian and it is very likely that the views expressed by Costello are his too. The technique used by Coetzee in the novel, a lecture within a lecture is unique. In this genre Coetzee is able to take the role of an animal rights activist. The views aired by Costello are very profound and can generate a debate on the rights of animals and the need for human beings to stop killing animals for food.

Costello articulates that the cruelty man shows on animals is because he feels he has the capacity to do anything and get away with it. One of the men in the audience asks Mrs. Costello whether she means that the factories should close down, whether people

should stop eating meat or whether animals should be killed humanely. For this, Costello retorts that one should follow one's heart.

One of the participants in the Seminar is a Jew and he strongly opposes the comparison of the killing of animals to the Holocaust. Coetzee is cautious when he places his arguments in the novel through the protagonist Costello. We are not sure whether the arguments are his or Costello's. But ultimately we realize that the book is as much about the use of literature as about animals. Elizabeth Costello is asked by her son whether she really believes that poetry classes will close down slaughter houses. Resigned, she has to admit that they probably will not.

Maren Meinhardt, a critic, commenting about *The Lives of Animals* opines, "But fiction has the power to disturb and inspire strong emotions, and this book, thoughtfully argued and committed, is certainly a case in point."<sup>47</sup>

Coetzee, being a sensitive writer is concerned with human suffering in his novels. The individual is of utmost importance to Coetzee. Almost all his novels explore this theme of personal anguish. By highlighting personal agony Coetzee throws light on the suffering of humanity in general. The individuals he highlights are very ordinary men or women who are just a part of the society. But they are different in their own way. Although they are ordinary individuals, with their strengths, they make the reader think about them seriously. They have their individualistic temperament and the reader responds to them curiously. However, they are all characters who undergo suffering, though the degree of distress they go through varies. This is significant because the novels show how Coetzee responds to the suffering of the ordinary man. All these characters successfully emerge out of the agonising experiences.

Coetzee himself has stated on several occasions that he does not like friction and that he avoids such situations. He is by nature a very solitary person and avoids any sort of friction. The protagonist in *Dusklands* is also a man who does not like to be in a situation which will bring about conflict. He expounds how humiliation can break a human being. In *Dusklands*, Eugene Dawn, the protagonist is asked to write a report about Vietnam. His superior is not happy with the report he has written. He asks him to revise the report and Eugene feels humiliated. He says "I would not have embarked on the Vietnam Project if I had guessed it was going to bring me into conflict with a superior. Conflict brings unhappiness, unhappiness poisons existence. ...I brood, I am a thinker, a creative person, one not without value to the world. I would have expected more understanding..." (DL 2). Similarly talking about his marriage he says "People who believe in themselves are worthier of love than people who doubt themselves" (DL 2). When his superior summons him to his office and speaks about the report, Eugene is apprehensive of the rejection of the report. He is asked to "work revising the tone of your argument" (DL 3). Eugene feels humiliated and is upset that his superior has lost his opinion about him "I know I am a disappointment to him, that he no longer believes in me. And when no one believes in you, how hard it is to believe in yourself" (DL 15). Eugene wants recognition and feels that his wife Marilyn does not understand him. He is unhappy about her attitude towards him and even knows that she is cheating on him. Eugene finds his relationship with her humiliating. Their sexual life is dull and unexciting. "Casual sex means to Marilyn four cold feet, foreplay by rote, fingers among her dry wattles, blushes and charity in the dark, the familiar flood of disgrace" (DL 12).

Eugene is a disillusioned man because he feels no sense of achievement. Although he has been asked to submit a report on behalf of the U.S Government, he feels that the

activities and presence of the U.S force is not fully justified. He is not happy with the presence of the Americans in Vietnam. When he expresses this in his report he is asked to revise the report.

We also know that Coetzee himself was against the war and he had joined the demonstrations against the war in Vietnam when he was a student in America.

Eugene talks about the torture meted out to the Vietnamese. "Their eyes are closed to the world by a wall of what may be tears. They are ghosts or absences of themselves: where they had once been is now only a black hole through which they have been sucked" (*DL* 17). They are in a pitiable state because of the way they are treated. The Americans wage a psychological warfare "to destroy the morale of the enemy" (*DL* 19). The enemies break their morale. "After phases of insecurity and anxiety their subjects settled into a state known as High Threshold, with affect traits of apathy, despondency and despair" (*DL* 23).

The enemies attack the self-esteem of the Vietnamese not as a group but as individuals. So the victim has no hope and lives in constant fear of who may be the next person to be subjected to torture. "The emotional support of the group falls into irrelevance as he sees that war is being waged on him in his isolation. He has become a victim and begins to behave like one" (*DL* 23). These are the strategies followed by the colonisers. Much of post colonial literature explores such atrocities of the colonisers. They use violence and terror to subdue the victims.

When Eugene attacks his son with a knife, he is institutionalised and treated by the doctors. Eugene himself says, "intimate contact with the design of war made me callous to suffering and created in me a need for violent solutions to problems of living...that showed themselves in nervous symptoms" (*DL* 48). Therefore Coetzee illustrates that

mental suffering and stress can lead to crime. The origin of crime is in suffering and humiliation. Coetzee is sadly concerned about what violence can do to man. Man according to him needs to live in peaceful surroundings, as violence is not in his nature. Coetzee believed in the essential goodness of man and that, he is meant for something more enlightening. Coetzee is preoccupied with this idea in many of his novels.

Ania Loomba avers, "Right from its earliest years it (colonialism) deployed diverse strategies and methods of control and of representation."<sup>48</sup> This was a strategy used by the Americans in Vietnam to break the morale of the Vietnamese. By exposing the individual to torture and violence the Americans broke his mental stability and made him helpless.

In the second part of the Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee, we see the high handed attitude of Jacobus Coetzee towards the natives. We see that his exploits not only dehumanise the natives but also degrades them. He is full of contempt for the Hottentots. They are described in a manner that one would describe animals. He refers to the "Hottentot smell" (*DL* 57). In *White Writing* in the chapter 'Idleness in South Africa' Coetzee exposes how the travellers have recorded details about the Hottentots. Almost all of them refer to their idleness and sloth. Coetzee quotes Christopher Fryke's writing of a visit to the Cape in the year 1685. "I made all haste to be gone, because of the nasty stench..." (*WW* 16).

He has nothing but contempt for the Bushmen. "You have become Power itself now and she nothing, a rag you wipe yourself on and throw away. She is completely disposable" (*DL* 61). This is the white man's attitude to the native women. He has absolutely no respect or sympathy for the native or the native women.

However, when Jacobus Coetzee comes face to face with the Hottentots asking for friendship, they do not seem to bother about what he is saying. They only want the presents in the wagon. Jacobus finds himself in a humiliating position. It is the white man who is humiliated by the Hottentots. They want the tobacco. "There was scrambling and jostling in the crowd, and a murmur which resolved into the cry "More! More!"..."(*DL* 69). Jacobus feels humiliated. "We find our servants treated with scorn, our cattle driven off, our gifts trampled underfoot as of no value. What report of the Namaqua should we carry back to our own people in the south. That they do not know how to welcome strangers and lack all hospitableness" (*DL* 70).

He promises the Namaquas that he will not be carrying any negative report about them and henceforth they shall "behave like men" and "respect each other's property" (*DL* 70). However, the Hottentots are least bothered about what Jacobus says. The act of the woman who moves towards him shaking her body and making a weird noise makes Jacobus fire into the ground. As a result the woman lies flat on the ground, terrified and unnerved and later she scrambles away.

When Jacobus is sick, he is isolated and he feels extremely humiliated. His servants desert him. Only Klauer comes to him. When a boil erupts on his buttock he feels all the more humiliated. "I did not mind dying but I did not wish to die of a putrefying backside" (*DL* 82). Jacobus' servants humiliate him with jibes. The white man never wishes to be laughed at by the natives. He endeavours to assert superiority over the blacks. It is to seek revenge on the Hottentots that Jacobus undertakes a second journey to Namaqualand and he kills his servants who has deserted him.

"Through their deaths, I, who after they had expelled me had wandered the desert like a pallid symbol, again asserted my reality" (*DL* 106). He resorts to violence for the

desertion of his servants. He feels that only through violence and by killing them could he assert his power over them.

The novel *Waiting for the Barbarians*, highlights suffering and humiliation. Coetzee deliberately drops 'the' from Empire which is strategic, as the place could be anywhere. But we know that Coetzee's empire stands for that period in the history of South Africa when the rulers were especially paranoid. There is a similarity between the death of the prisoners under the custody of Colonel Joll and the death of the prisoners in the apartheid era. Both the natives and the white man suffer humiliation. The Magistrate who is a white man suffers because he speaks on behalf of the natives. He is an odd man out. The very fact that he is compassionate to the natives, invites suffering for him. The white man is constantly afraid of the natives and in the process, they adopt defensive measures to keep them out of their way. Colonel Joll and his men of the Third Bureau arrive at the Outpost as they have heard of the possibility of an invasion by the barbarians. The Empire projects the evil latent in it onto the 'Other'. The Magistrate tells Colonel Joll "The crime that is latent in us we must inflict on ourselves...Not on others" (*DL* 160). The Magistrate wants to tell Joll that the evil in him should be targeted on himself and not on the helpless barbarians.

The two prisoners are tortured and abused by Colonel Joll. The Magistrate hears painful screams from the granary. He states "At every moment that evening as I go about my business I am aware of what might be happening, and my ear is even tuned to the pitch of human pain" (*DL* 5). The Magistrate is aware of the suffering caused by Colonel Joll but he cannot do anything about it. He is helpless although he knows that the old man and the boy have nothing to do with the raid. However, Colonel Joll enjoys making the old man and the boy suffer. The torture leads to the death of the old man. Colonel Joll has

no remorse whatsoever. He feels it is his prerogative to cause suffering and degradation. For the boy the suffering is so much that he does not respond even to a sympathetic person like the Magistrate. "He rolls on his back and brings his bound hands up before his face. They are puffy and purple" (*WB* 7). He is appalled by the suffering of the boy. Though sympathetic to the boy he cannot do anything against the Empire.

Colonel Joll and his men cause suffering on suspicion. "The barbarian tribes were arming, the rumour went; the empire should take precautionary measures, for there would certainly be war" (*WB* 8-9). So the repressive measures are purely an act of self-defence. The boy is made to suffer. The suffering is so much that finally the boy admits that he and the old man and other men have stolen sheep and horses. The Magistrate knows that the confession is made out of duress to escape further suffering. When he asks the boy whether he knows what the confession will mean, "he looks back vacantly at all this vehemence, like someone tired after running a great distance" (*WB* 11). There is nothing the Magistrate can do. He finds himself in a helpless situation. He cannot stop the suffering because Colonel Joll is powerful. The power that Joll exercises is of immense proportion. He can indict the Magistrate and cause him humiliation and suffering.

Although Colonel Joll is dissuaded by the Magistrate not to attack the natives, he does not listen. He has come with a purpose and he will implement it at any cost. The Colonel has no sympathy for the natives and the desire to cause suffering is uppermost in him. He has come with the sole purpose of conducting a raid and he will not go back with anything less than that. It is as though he gets vicarious pleasure by causing suffering. The Magistrate feels that indulging in torture was like "trespassing into the forbidden" (*WB* 13).

He wonders about the torture “Does he wash his hands very carefully, perhaps, or change all his clothes; or has the Bureau created new men who can pass without disquiet between the unclean and the clean?” (*WB* 13) The suffering caused by Colonel Joll and his men is unthinkable for the Magistrate. He cannot picture as to how they can go about with their life after having caused such intense suffering.

After four days of their departure, Colonel Joll sends prisoners to the Outpost who are actually fisher folk. However, Colonel Joll cannot be convinced. They are made to assemble in the yard. The soldiers spend time making obscene comments. The ‘Other’ has already been constructed in the mind of the white man and he is looked at with suspicion. The white man causes suffering to the ‘Other’ as he is in a position of domination. He feels he can do anything with these men as they were helpless. What is interesting to note is that there is no sort of resistance or reaction from the natives. They suffer in silence. They are fed bread and they are happy with it. When the rumour goes round that the prisoners are diseased, the kitchen staff refuse to give them utensils and “begin to toss them their food from the doorway as if they were animals” (*WB* 21).

Colonel Joll returns from the expedition with “prisoners roped together neck to neck” (*WB* 22). This description echoes Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Marlowe, the protagonist in *Heart of Darkness* sees the natives walking tied to each other by a chain which passes through a ring on their necks. The suffering of the prisoners disturbs the Magistrate. “The joy has gone from my life” (*WB* 24) he says. He sees a file of men, barbarians, “tied neck to neck, ...A simple loop of wire runs through the flesh of each man’s hands and through holes pierced in his cheeks” (*WB* 113). He wants this painful episode to be wiped out so that they can “make a new start, to run an empire in which there would be no more injustice, no more pain” (*WB* 26). But not everybody in the empire thinks this way. He is

the only one who thinks so and he suffers for this attitude. He is punished by the officers of the Empire because he is sympathetic to the natives.

The barbarian girl who is blinded and whose ankles are broken walks with the help of sticks. This is the torture meted out by Colonel Joll and his men. However, the girl has accepted her suffering. She is not eager to speak of what the men have done to her. She shows no anger towards the perpetrators of the crime. It is as though she has reached a state where she has accepted the wrong doings of the white man. She has become indifferent to pain and suffering. The Magistrate tries to read the marks on her body. However, he is not successful in deciphering it. He keeps questioning her. But she is evasive. The Magistrate's attempts at reading the marks, is similar to his attempts at trying to read the script on the wooden slips.

The suffering of the girl makes the Magistrate take an interest in her. He "pours the water into the basin, and begins to wash her feet" (*WB* 30). This act reminds us of the incident in the Bible where Jesus washes the feet of his disciples and also the feet of Judas, who Jesus knows will betray him. The Magistrate does this act of washing the feet everyday. He learns from the soldiers that the girl is beaten by Colonel Joll and his men. He comes to know how the girl has been blinded. Although earlier she is reluctant to speak, she tells him that they made her to look at a red hot fork which blinded her. When asked what she thinks of the men who have caused so much suffering, she evades the question. The barbarian girl is the creation of Coetzee to highlight the passivity of the blacks. She has no hatred or anger against the whites who tortured her. She accepts her plight without even complaining. Coetzee brings out the total state of acceptance by the blacks.

The Magistrate sometimes feels that his behaviour with the barbarian girl is no better than that of her torturers. "I behave in some ways like a lover - I undress her, I bathe her, I stroke her, I sleep beside her - but I might equally well tie her to a chair and beat her, it would be no less intimate"(WB 46). Although he sleeps with her every night, their relationship is not consummated. He does not have any desire for her but it is only compassion that makes him bring the girl to his quarters. One wonders whether it makes him feel good by showing her his sympathy. It is only the Magistrate who is sympathetic to the natives on whom atrocities are perpetuated by the whites. He feels disgusted and only hopes that there would be retaliation from the barbarians. This is a thought that comes to his mind. However, he suffers the same fate as that of the barbarians, in the hands of Colonel Joll and his men.

The Magistrate becomes defiant. He is put in the barracks, the same room where earlier the prisoners are put. It is a comedown for the once respected Magistrate. "Many I recognize, but no one greets me" (WB 87). He is left by himself to suffer. The Magistrate says "I look forward with craving to exercise times, when I can feel the wind on my face and the earth under my soles, see other faces and hear human speech....Truly, man was not made to live alone" (WB 87). These are Coetzee's views about how man needs the company of other fellow beings. Coetzee, by nature, it is known, is a very reticent person. But he is well aware that man is never made to live alone. The Magistrate understands the meaning of freedom, the freedom to be by oneself, doing things that one wants to do. He values freedom when it is denied to him.

The Magistrate is told about the charges against him. The allegations against the Magistrate are many - that he has not maintained proper accounts and that he has a liaison with a barbarian girl. One of the men who travelled with him while he took the barbarian

girl has given a totally distorted account of what has happened. He even says that the Magistrate's purpose is to warn the barbarians of the forthcoming campaign of the Third Bureau. Coetzee here shows how a case is built up against the blacks in South Africa to suit the police and their activities against them. Although here, it is the Magistrate, his plight is similar to the blacks as he has estranged himself from the whites. The Magistrate is aware that they will use the law against him. He cannot accept the humiliation of imprisonment. "Then I respond with movements of vertiginous terror in which I rush around the cell jerking my arms about, pulling my beard, stamping my feet, doing anything to surprise myself, to remind myself of a world beyond that is various and rich" (*WB* 93). The Magistrate cannot live in the cell away from other people.

He is not given clean clothes and the food he is given is only soup, porridge and tea. In being imprisoned, he realises the value of freedom. When the Magistrate objects to the torture on the barbarians, he is slapped on the face which sends him staggering. When he pretends to translate the writings on the popular slips accusing Joll of his atrocities, he is tortured.

Coetzee means to say that in the colonial enterprise there is no room for sensitivity or empathy. The colonizers are ruthless. They have no concern for the 'Other' and they are ready to do anything to cause suffering and humiliation. However, the Magistrate wants to be remembered thus, "in the farthest Outpost of the Empire of light there existed one man who in his heart was not a barbarian" (*WB* 114).

*Life and Times of Michael K* is about the life of Michael who faces a lot of suffering because he is hare-lipped and different from the others. He is brought up by his mother who works as a domestic help. He grows up in an institution for afflicted and unfortunate children called Huis Norenus, the rules of which he considers to be his father. In the

midst of the civil war, Michael tries to live in solitude away from people. He works as a gardener and when his mother's health starts failing, on her request, he decides to take her to her home-town Prince Albert, where she has spent her youth. On the way he faces a lot of obstacles as they do not carry the pass required for coloureds and blacks to move from one city to another. The civil war leads to a lot of violence. The house where Michael's mother works is ransacked and the things destroyed. Michael's mother is upset and her employers flee in panic.

He decides to take his mother on a make-shift barrow. He is stopped on the way and asked for the permit. He is forced to return to Sea Point where he is treated very rudely by the officers. "I don't care who you are, who your mother is, if you haven't got a permit you can't leave the area, finished" (*MK 23*). Coetzee comments on the ruthless attitude of the soldiers. Although the police know that Michael and his mother are harmless, they do not care about them. Michael's mother falls ill on the way and he takes her to the hospital in Stellenbosch. The nurses on duty are indifferent. When Michael is worried about his mother, the nurse yells at him.

Michael is very hungry and when one of the men asks him to get something from the bakery, he buys two chicken pies for a rand. "The pie was so delicious that tears came to his eyes" (*MK 30*). When he is told that his mother is dead, he does not know what to do. He finds himself at a loss. The second day after his mother's death, he is handed over two parcels, one containing his mother's ash and the other some clothes for him.

As he goes along, he is stopped by a soldier with a gun and his suitcase is emptied and K is robbed of his money. He moves from place to place towards Prince Albert. However, he is caught by the police as he is not carrying a permit and sent with others to

work in the railway track. He toils with the rest till midnight and the next day they are set free.

K reaches the Visagie farm and starts living a solitary life there. But when the Visagie son comes there and tries to dominate him, he goes away, as he does not want to lose his freedom. As he moves he is caught by the police and brought to Jakkalsdrif camp, a resettlement camp for those who are unemployed. Coetzee is talking about the various areas in South Africa which the whites reserved for the blacks. In the South Africa of the civil war period, the government set up several camps to keep the unemployed and troubleshooters away from the society. He gets to know about the suffering of the inmates in the camp. The men in the camp are exploited by the Railways and the farmers as they get cheap labour.

Although, for the inmates, being in the Jakkalsdrif camp is favourable, Michael never wishes to be there. He wants his freedom even at the prospect of going hungry. "I don't want to be in a camp, that's all" he says (*MK* 85). Michael does not want to be an object of sympathy and refuses to let anyone show pity on him as he cherishes freedom.

One day all the inmates are taken to a farm to harvest the grain. K's back hurt terribly and he is angry. But he is helpless. When one of the police stations is burnt, the policemen descend upon Jakkalsdrif camp and start beating up the men, women and children. When the inmates are counted, three are found missing. The captain loses his temper "What are we keeping here in our backyard", he shouts "A nest of criminals! Criminals and saboteurs and idlers! ...You are ungrateful bastards... Who gives you tents and blankets when you are shivering with cold? Who nurses you, who takes care of you...? And how do you repay us?" (*MK* 91-92) The inmates are left to fend for themselves. One of the inmates says "That fire was the excuse they were looking for.

Now they are going to do what they wanted -- lock us up and wait for us to die" (*MK* 94). The whites require only the slightest provocation to attack the natives. It is as if they are waiting to be goaded. By a show of violence the whites try to strike terror in the natives.

This is the attitude of the whites towards the blacks. The blacks very well know that the whites are just waiting for an excuse to wreak vengeance on them. Their only desire is to torture them physically and mentally.

When K escapes from the camp and goes back to the Visagie farm he starts cultivating again. K makes himself comfortable in a hole as he does not want to take a risk living in the farmhouse, for fear of the police. One day some men come and camp near the dam. These are the guerrillas. K almost wants to join these men who are heading for the mountains. However, he stays back. Later one day he is caught by the police, who believe that he is a supplier of food for the men who are planning to attack the whites. They want him to own up. "So tell us about your friends", the soldier said. K shook his head. He was hit a terrific blow in the pit of the stomach and fainted" (*MK* 122). K tries to convince them that he had nothing to do with the men. "I'm not what you think" he said. "I was sleeping and you woke me, that's all" (*MK* 123). But the soldiers do not believe him. The next day Oosthuisen, an officer who has seen Michael K at the Jakkalsdrif camp arrives and he feels Michael is playing games with them. The police leave after they blow up the Visagie farm and lay mines near Michael's burrow so that they will explode when the men come back and walk on them.

In the second part of the novel, we see the doctor who tries to make Michael talk. He is sure that Michael is not an insurgent and is not growing food for the guerrillas. Michael does not understand why the Medical Officer is so concerned about him. Michael does not yield and refuses to speak. Michael does not feel humiliated and wants to be left

alone. He declines to eat camp food thus showing his defiance. Though he does not resort to violence, he is defiant. The Medical Officer asks Michael to tell the truth and says that he knows that he is not an insurgent. However, Michael still does not speak. When he is questioned about the garden, Michael gives very philosophical answers. Asked for whom he grows the vegetables and whom he gives them to, he replies that they are not his "They came from the earth" (MK 139) and says "What grows is for all of us; we are all the children of the earth" (WB 139). The Medical Officer feels that Michael becomes "an albatross around my neck" (MK 146). Michael refuses to eat camp food and the Medical Officer says that perhaps he eats only "the bread of freedom" (MK 146). Michael's presence unnerves the Medical Officer. In a way Michael's indifference is a sort of suffering for the Medical Officer too and later when Michael escapes from the camp, the doctor feels that he too should have followed him.

Mrs. Curren in the novel *Age of Iron* is suffering from cancer and for the first time she becomes involved with the happenings in society. The blacks are in open rebellion with the whites and it is the youth among them, who are even prepared to lose their life in the course of fighting for the cause of freedom. Mrs. Curren writes about her experiences to her daughter who lives in America.

She gives food to the vagrant who lives in her yard and who calls himself Vercueil. He does not want to work and spends his time drinking and sleeping, looking at his hands. She writes to her daughter, "There were not so many of these homeless people in your time. But now they are part of life here. Do they frighten me? On the whole, no. A little begging, a little thieving, dirt, noise, drunkenness; no worse" (AI 7).

Although she is suffering from cancer, there is in her an urge to help those in distress. Coetzee says "Out of their withered bodies even the old try to squeeze one last drop. A

stubborn will to give, to nourish" (AI 8). In *Age of Iron*, "the police have a free hand under emergency regulations to dispense casual injury or death at random, and they do so; on the other side, the young militants of the townships have resorted to a hardened rhetoric of absolutes, sacrificing their youth to the all encompassing demands of the struggle."<sup>49</sup> South Africa under apartheid was a chaotic society where acts of violence were the order of the day.

Bheki, Mrs. Curren's maid's son and his friend authoritatively take refuge in the space that belongs to Mrs. Curren. They do not even ask her permission to do so. When she questions them, Bheki arrogantly asks her "Must we have a pass to come in here?" (AI 47) Coetzee discusses the squalor of the black settlements and the brutal force exhibited by the police on the black youth who they ruthlessly kill. Coetzee presents how the tenements of the blacks are burnt down and how Bheki and his friend John are gunned down.

Here, the blacks have become, merciless in resorting to violence like the whites. The young boys have no respect for elders. They have total contempt for the whites and are defiant. However, the black woman, Florence does not think so. "These are good children, they are like iron, we are proud of them" she argues (AI 50). Mrs. Curren is also helpless when Vercueil brings a woman home. When she shouts at him, he does not react but only looks at her coolly. The young boys and Vercueil taking advantage of Mrs. Curren's helpless state walk into her house. Times have changed in South Africa and the blacks are out and out against the whites.

Later when Bheki and John are deliberately hit by the police van on the road, the ambulance is called which takes its own time to arrive. Meanwhile John is bleeding heavily. Mrs. Curren is upset about the behaviour of the policemen and the suffering

caused by them. "It's appalling, quite appalling. It was the same two policemen who were here yesterday" (AI 61) she says. When John is admitted to the hospital, he is put in a ward with old men. In the same ward is also a mad man ranting and raving and Mrs. Curren finds this atrocious.

Florence receives a telephone call, in the middle of the night that her son Bheki was in trouble. There is shooting in Guguletu, the township where the blacks lived. The shacks are set ablaze. "Like mourners at a funeral they stood in the downpour, men, women and children, sodden, hardly bothering to protect themselves, watching the destruction"(AI 95). Mrs. Curren becomes desperate when she sees the chaos. She fervently expresses her desire to go home to Mr. Thabane, the school teacher. He is angry with her. "'You want to go home," he said. "But what of the people who live here. When they want to go home this is where they must go. What do you think of that?'" (AI 97)

Mr Thabane thinks that Mrs. Curren has no concern for the blacks whereas we know that she is sympathetic to them. When Mrs. Curren says that she finds things going on, condemnable, she says, "But I cannot denounce them in other people's words. I must find my own words myself. Otherwise it is not truth" (AI 99). The reaction she gets from the crowd is "This woman talks shit" (AI 99).

When she sees the bodies of Bheki and four other boys left in the rain, she asks them whether they cannot be shifted. But Thabane answers, "Yes, they must lie there. So that everyone can see" (AI 102). Everybody looks with askance at Mrs. Curren because she is white. Although she suffers, no one really understands her. When she reaches home she cries for Bheki. "Head on arms I sobbed, grieving for him, for what had been taken from him, for what had been taken from me. Such a good thing, life!" (AI 109) This reaction

comes from Mrs. Curren because she knows the meaning of life. She will soon face death, as she is suffering from cancer eating into her bones.

Mrs. Curren feels desperate about the killing and degradation around her. This is a sensitive portrayal by Coetzee. The values expressed by Mrs. Curren are nevertheless Coetzee's too. He means to say that only love and brotherhood can bring about a change in the world. Being a serious thinker, Coetzee through his characters also airs his views on life. Although Mrs. Curren does not like John, Bheki's friend, her heart goes out to him when she sees his suffering, "I must love for instance, this child. Not bright little Bheki, but this one. He is here for a reason. He is part of my salvation, I must love him"(AI 136).

Although Mrs Curren tries to impress upon John that his life is at risk, there is no change in him. He is determined to fight. When Mrs. Curren tells Thabane that she does not approve of violence and killing in the name of comradeship, he tells her, "I don't think you understand very much about comradeship"(AI 149). Mrs. Curren answers that it was "a death-driven male construction"(AI 150). She is horrified when John is shot at by the soldiers in the room of her house and that she, being white is also a part of the crime committed on the blacks. Mrs Curren believes that only love can redeem them. Therefore, she goes out to show her love for the black boys who are attacked.

"A crime was committed long ago. How long ago? I do not know. But longer ago than 1916, certainly. So long ago, that I was born into it. It is part of my inheritance. It is part of me, I am a part of it"(AI 164). Coetzee thus acknowledges the complicity of the whites through his characters. As days pass by, Mrs. Curren is in great pain because of the cancer. This is symbolic of the way the African society is being annihilated with force and brutality. Through her suffering, a strange relationship develops between her and

Vercueil, the vagrant. She feels, “There has always been in him a certain hovering if undependable solicitude for me, a solicitude, he knows no way of expressing” (*AI* 196). Finally she dies in his arms. Mrs Curren’s relationship with Vercueil hints at the hope that peace can be achieved at the level of human beings.

### 3.3 The Discourse of ‘Othering’ in the Novels of Coetzee

In his first novel *Dusklands* Eugene Dawn, the protagonist of the first novella sees himself as distinct from the Vietnamese about whom he is writing a report. He describes the Vietnamese as different from himself. He sees himself as one who is entrusted with the civilizing mission. This is similar to the European ‘construct’ of the ‘Other’ as enunciated by Edward Said in his pioneering work *Orientalism*. “The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying, degrees of a complex hegemony...”<sup>50</sup> Coetzee had begun writing the novel in the USA where he lived between 1965 and 1971. At the same time in South Africa there was an increase in state violence and censorship. The Black Consciousness Movement was gaining momentum. Coetzee found parallels with U.S. aggression and the Vietnam War. The other novella is about 18<sup>th</sup> century South Africa based on travel writing. It is about the explorer Jacobus Coetzee who tries to subjugate the Hottentots. Here he also feels that his purpose in entering the territory of the Hottentots is to civilize them.

The Vietnamese are demoralised by the presence of the U.S there. The U.S. has advanced technology that it uses in the Vietnam War. The war strategies are modern, a gas PROP 12 poisons the soil and destroys the land, powerful drugs destroy the people and through the “voice of the father” (*DL* 21), a psychological impact is brought about. In the second novella, ‘The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee’ we get to know about Jacobus’s views of the Hottentots. He thinks of them as dirty and inferior and savage like. They are

relegated to the position of the 'Other'. Jacobus asserts his superiority because he carries a gun. When one of the Hottentot advances towards him menacingly, he fires into the air which sends the entire lot scrambling. Jacobus Coetzee has a superior feeling about himself. He thinks he is God. He is merciless when he kills the servants who had deserted him and then he destroys the village completely. He discriminates himself from the Hottentots – “The one gulf that divides us from the Hottentots is our Christianity. We are Christians, a folk with a destiny. They become Christians too, but their Christianity is an empty word” (*DL* 57).

It is the fear of the 'Other' that makes Jacobus Coetzee create an identity that is peculiar to the white man. When he has the festering carbuncle, he has to be in the proximity of the Hottentots and this drains him of all feelings of superiority. Nevertheless he returns to Namaqualand to vanquish them all. Through these two novellas Coetzee comes down heavily on the inhuman nature of violence.

Eugene Dawn, the protagonist in the first novella also tries to establish a rapport with the natives. He says, “We could have loved them: our hatred for them grew only out of broken hopes. We... asked only that they acknowledge us” (*DL* 17). However, there is a basic antagonism against the Vietnamese. The very act of writing about the war drives him to a troubled mental state and it begins to affect his relationship with people. He has no concern for his wife or his son and the stabbing of his son is the psychological impact of the pressure of his work. So this process of 'Othering' has a negative impact on the protagonist. As he writes about the ways and means of subduing the 'Other', that is the Vietnamese, the process itself has a debilitating effect on his mind. He loses control over himself and has to be institutionalised. However, he becomes an ideal patient, doing everything the doctors expect him to do.

In the novel *In the Heart of the Country* the protagonist Magda's father's relationship with the servants on the farm is one of superiority. The servants are the 'Other', they are inferior and they work for the master. The father even finds sexual gratification with the servant's wife Klein Anna. However, the protagonist Magda who wants to identify herself with the 'Other' tries to communicate with them. What Coetzee demonstrates is that in a relationship such as this, there cannot be equality. So eventually, the servant assumes the role of master. Hendrik, the servant becomes the master and Magda the white woman becomes the 'Other'. She now lives a subjugated life on her own farm. Hendrik's rape of Magda is an act of self assertion. So if there has to be a master there has to be a slave. The master has to be validated by the slave and vice versa. Magda's way of communication both in the state of mistress and slave is through monologues. Coetzee here states that there can be no dialogue between the master and slave. It is only one of domination. The process of 'Othering' has a very negative impact on Magda. The farm that she owns goes to ruins. She loses track of time. She deteriorates physically and mentally. "I lie here involved in cycles of time, outside the true time of the world."<sup>51</sup> Coetzee envisages how the discourse of 'Othering' has a deteriorating impact on the individual, whether it is the coloniser or the native. The 'Other' cannot exist without having a negative impact. The 'Other' becomes subject to exploitation and oppression.

In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, we have a clear representation of the 'Other'. Although the protagonist of the novel, the Magistrate is sympathetic to the 'Other', he does not do anything to bridge the gap between the 'us' and 'them'. He knows that he is also a part of the imperial project. The natives are suspected of planning a raid and they are called enemies by Colonel Joll and his men. As Colonel Joll and his men believe that the barbarians are definitely planning to attack the Outpost, they exercise their power

before that is done. For expressing his sympathy to the natives, the Magistrate is also treated as the 'Other'. The atrocities committed on the natives are also committed on the Magistrate. The Magistrate, by a single act of compassion for the natives becomes a suspect. The same violence is let loose on him too and the Magistrate is tortured in an inhuman manner. Thus Colonel Joll and his men will not tolerate any objection to their exercise of power, whether it is from the 'Other' or a white. Therefore, when the Magistrate talks in favour of the natives, he is suspected of helping the natives. When they discover the wooden slips with something written, they feel that the natives have been communicating with the Magistrate. When the Magistrate cries out in pain, he is ridiculed by Mandel and his men. In *White Writing*, Coetzee mentions how travel writers have described the language of the Hottentots. He says that they made a noise like turkeys. Coetzee perhaps has this in mind when Mandel's men ridicule the Magistrate when he cries out in pain.

In *Life and Times of Michael K*, the protagonist Michael K is the 'Other'. He has been brought up in an institution where impaired people learn. What is interesting to note is that his 'Otherness' is something that he desires. He wants to be outside the society, away from the people and he wants to be close to nature. Therefore he takes refuge in the farm where he grows vegetables. The Medical Officer tries to treat him as if he is the 'Other'. He refuses to be subjugated. He does not communicate with the Medical Officer. The Medical Officer is not successful in trying to make Michael speak. He is similar to the whites who want to control the natives, but Michael gives no scope for this. The Medical Officer fails to construct K's 'Otherness'. Although he appears to be genuinely concerned about Michael he is similar to the coloniser who tries to subjugate the native.

“Michael K rebels against a society which would like to categorize him precisely, and by escaping from all the prisons in which they try to incarcerate him he asserts his ‘difference’, thus becoming suspect to the police.”<sup>52</sup> Michael only wants to be on his own. Thus Michael escapes being made the ‘Other’ by refusing to adhere to the system of the whites. He opts to be in the margins of the society and live his life on his own terms as he detests the company of people. In Jakkalsdrif when a man comes to enquire after him he says to himself “I needed more warning. I should have been told I was going to be sent back amongst people” (*MK* 74). Thus Coetzee delineates Michael K as a person who abhors human company. He seeks refuge in solitariness, feeling comfortable when he is away from people.

The camps in South Africa are places where the unemployed and vagrants are kept so that they do not pose any danger to civilised society. The civilised society does not want to see the ‘Other’ amidst them. They would rather keep them away. Hence they have these camps. Michael detests the camps and wants to get away from them. He escapes from Jakkalsdrif and goes back to the farm where he starts cultivation again. He works on the land in the night for fear of being discovered. At any cost Michael will not let himself be the ‘Other’. Michael avers “Would it not be better to hide day and night, would it not be better to bury myself in the bowels of the earth than become a creature of theirs?” (*MK* 106) When the soldiers discover Michael, they assume that he is helping the guerillas. Captain Oosthuizen refers to him as Michaels. He changes his name; in other words the ‘Other’ is named according to the wish of the white man. However, in the camp when the Doctor refers to him as Michaels, Michael asserts that his name is not Michaels, but Michael. The Doctor tries to recreate Michael according to his terms but Michael refuses to allow such colonization of his self. In his frustration in not being able to get any details

from Michael about the insurgents they suspected, the Medical Officer opines “He is not of our world. He lives in a world all his own” (MK 142). Here again the Medical Officer tries to project Michael’s ‘Otherness’. In spite of the Medical Officer showing his concern for Michael, he does not co-operate and even refuses to eat. This is an act of assertion by the ‘Other’. The Medical Officer helplessly says “It seemed foolish to argue with someone who looked at you as if from beyond the grave”(MK 148). The Medical officer expresses his helplessness in trying to wield his influence over Michael. He acts like Michael’s saviour. In the letter he writes to Michael he says “I am the only one who can save you. I am the only one who sees you for the original soul you are. I am the only one who cares for you” (MK 151). Here the Medical Officer takes on the role of the coloniser who thinks he is out in the colony to help the uncivilised. The white man always entertains the thought that their presence in the colonies is to save the natives from damnation. The white man defines himself when he tries to define the native.

Michael soon escapes from the camp and the Medical Officer is happy about it. He even wonders whether he too would have liked to join Michael. Michael finally returns to Sea Point dreaming of living the life of a gardener. Thus, what we see in *Life and Times of Michael K* is that, Michael refuses to yield to the position of the ‘Other’. The Medical Officer is not able to show his sympathy and Michael has no need for it. He lives his life on his own terms. Michael K is above suffering. He embraces the stance of passive resistance and does not allow anyone to dominate him. Whenever he sees any sign of domination, he leaves the place. At the farm when the Visagie son tries to boss over him he goes away without a word. Similarly, he leaves the camps when he is made subject to the whites. He does not like camp life or camp food. He does not like the

rigidity and imposition of discipline there. He lives his life without any confrontation and allows none to gain mastery over him.

Susan Van Zanten Gallagher avers “Coetzee’s account of the end of South Africa is more obliquely rendered in *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983), but he also forecasts that change will occur in South Africa only at the point of a gun, as the novel’s epitaph makes clear. (“War is the father of all and king of all”).”<sup>53</sup> However, with the lifting of apartheid and democratic elections, Gallagher contends “Rather than projecting a world to come, they now depict the anticipations and beliefs of a world that has passed.”<sup>54</sup>

In the novel *Foe* which is a reworking of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, unlike Defoe’s Friday, Crusoe’s Friday is made to take the role of the silenced ‘Other’. When Susan Barton is marooned on Crusoe’s island, she thinks she has come to the wrong island, an island of cannibals. This is a typical construct of the ‘Other’ by a white man. She remarks she could have lived happily in the company of these brutes – “But who, accustomed to the fullness of human speech, can be content with caws and chirps...”<sup>55</sup> (*F* 8). Again, it is the white man’s construct that the ‘Other’ has no speech, or if he has it at all, it is uncivilised speech. The white man contends that speech is only their prerogative. They feel that the language that the ‘Other’ spoke is no language at all. It is only sounds, gibberish. However, we note that Friday is not very keen on even communicating either by sign language or words which is impossible for him. Susan tries to find out who has mutilated Friday. She shows him drawings. But there is not even the slightest response from him. This seems to be a sort of defiance from Friday. We do not know what is going on in his mind. His tongue being mutilated he cannot speak. But even his face does not give away anything. She tries to teach him to write English but Friday tries to write in some other language. He draws signs on the slate and then wipes it off before Susan can

make anything of it. There seems to be some resistance on Friday's part to communicate. Labib the critic analyzing *Foe* states, "by refusing to be replaced and to replace himself with language,... Friday overcomes the system."<sup>56</sup>

Coetzee's novel *Age of Iron* reflects the South African society in turmoil. Here there is no question of creating the 'Other'. The 'Other' is already an awakened lot. They retaliate with violence and are out and out against the white regime. Here the 'Other' even enters the space of the whites and has no respect for the whites. They act with a dogged purpose of ousting the whites. They are sure of what they want to achieve and they are determined to oust the whites. This is embodied in the character of Vercueil who, comes to occupy a space in Mrs. Curren's house which until then was not for the 'Other'. Mrs Curren who has kept away from the South African politics is drawn to it and she realises that the white autocratic regime has through segregation and exploitation created the conditions of a violence torn society.

Mrs. Curren in *Age of Iron* is dejected about the happenings around her. Although all the schools in Guguletu, a black township are closed down, the radio, the television and the newspapers do not report anything. "In the world they project all the children of the land are sitting happily at their desks learning..." (AI 39). She is shocked at the way Bheki and his friend treat Vercueil. She tells her maid Florence. "You told me you admire your son's generation because they are afraid of nothing. Be careful: they may start by being careless of their own lives and end by being careless of everyone else's" (AI 48). Here we find that Mrs Curren is concerned about the blacks. But her concern is not appreciated by the blacks.

Florence indicts her. "But who made them so cruel? It is the whites who made them so cruel! Yes!" (AI 49) she says. Coetzee abhors violence in any form. The violence in

South Africa will have an impact on the children. Mrs Curren asks Florence “What love will they be capable of ? Their hearts are turning to stone before our eyes, and what do you say...? Are you going to blame them on the whites and turn your back?” (AI 50) Bheki, Florence’s son does not want to go to school. “What is school for? It is to make us fit into the apartheid system” (AI 67) he says. Bheki voices the view of many of the youth who revolt against the presence of the police in the schools. Mrs Curren feels responsible for the war torn situation, “A crime was committed long ago.....so long ago that I was born into it. It is part of my inheritance. It is part of me, I am part of it” (AI 164). Here again Coetzee stresses on the involvement of the white man in the institution of apartheid. Coetzee time and again raises this idea of the white man’s complicity. In his writings also he refers to the atrocities committed by the white man in the apartheid era.

*Age of Iron* visibly brings out the violence inflicted both by the blacks and whites. The blacks are indignant and the youth hurl themselves against the whites with high ideals of comradeship. Thus in the novels we find Coetzee dealing with oppression, and his characters also use passive resistance to oppression. They resort to silence as a mode of defiance. Michael K also resorts to silence as he does not want to be in a state of subjugation. There is nothing obviously defiant in him. He just does not yield.

In *Disgrace* we see the post apartheid era. This period in the history of South Africa is a tumultuous one with the blacks asserting their rights and resorting to violence. The ‘Other’ retaliate against the whites who have suppressed and oppressed them for long. Lucy, a white woman who wants to keep her farm has to pay a price for the atrocities of the whites. She is gang raped, her house is looted, her dogs shot and her father assaulted. She feels that she is paying a price for the atrocities committed by the whites on the blacks. Here she accepts the ‘Other’ on his terms. Hence there is a reversal of roles in the

post apartheid period. This awareness enables the whites to be conscious of the fact that they are being punished for their wrongs and in a way they accept their lot. Decolonisation is a painful process for the white man. He finds himself in a difficult situation. Lucy's rape is the price she pays for being white. It is an outcome of the crime committed by the whites against the blacks for several decades.

### **3.4 Silence as a Tool Against Violence in the Novels of Coetzee**

In *The Empire Writes Back* Ashcroft et al say "Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetrated and the medium through which conceptions, of 'truth', 'order', and 'reality' become established."<sup>57</sup> What we notice in Coetzee's novels is that the protagonists, that is, the marginalised ones hardly speak. When they speak, it is the same language of the coloniser. Most of the time they are silent or mute. This silence is deliberate and through the silence, the 'Other' shows resistance.

Post-colonial theory was developed because European theory could not "adequately deal with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing."<sup>58</sup> Coetzee has abandoned the linear plot, story line, rounded characters and closed endings which we normally find in English Literature. He uses different genres in his novels and all his novels are open ended subject to various interpretations.

Very often in post colonial texts the natives are made to use pidgin especially in the master-slave context to retain social and economic hierarchies. However, in Coetzee's novels we do not find this. This reveals that Coetzee in his novels engages with the human condition irrespective of class or race. Although he is talking about South Africa, such a situation could occur anywhere in the world.

Silence and passive resistance is seen in the novels of J.M.Coetzee. The idea of passive resistance as a means of opposing evil is well rooted in Indian philosophy. Very often people adopt this to show their opposition to evil. This method was adopted even under the rule of a king. If the people were not happy with the king the entire lot would in a non - violent manner oppose him. Mahatma Gandhi followed passive resistance when he took an active part in public life in Natal. To oppose the atrocities of the whites against the Indians, Gandhi mobilised thousands of Indians to resist the atrocities in a passive and non-violent manner. All the Indians took a solemn oath to practise passive resistance. The politicians of South Africa were uneasy with this stand taken by Gandhi. They condemned it heavily, as they feared that, very soon the natives may use this against them.

In 1906, Mahatma Gandhi led the Indian community in South Africa in acts of passive resistance. On 16<sup>th</sup> August, 1908, thousands of Indians led by Mahatma Gandhi burnt the passes in a huge bonfire. Soon after, Gandhi had a group of his followers cross the border from Natal to Transvaal which resulted in the imprisonment of Gandhi for 6 months.

On reading the novels of J.M.Coetzee, we can observe that, his characters observe the same form of passive resistance. These characters are going through a personal struggle and at the same time, they are part of a greater struggle against an oppressive regime. In the novels, Coetzee displays how the silence of the people which is a form of passive resistance works against the perpetrators of suffering. Most of the time people want to be left alone when they face a situation they cannot fight out. In such situations silence is more powerful than protests. Silence denies the oppressor of a position of superiority. He cannot exercise his power over the marginalised because there is no reaction whatsoever

from the 'Other'. The silence may be a form of defiance also. It becomes a weapon in the hands of the oppressed. Through his marginalised characters, Coetzee gives the readers a new perspective on those who have struggled against colonial rule. When Coetzee was awarded the Nobel Prize, the Swedish Academy observed:

“But passivity is not merely the dark haze that devours personality; it is also the last resort open to human beings as they defy an oppressive order by rendering themselves inaccessible to its intentions. It is in exploring weakness and defeat that Coetzee captures the divine spark in man.”<sup>59</sup> The natives know that they cannot physically take on the coloniser. The only way they can assert themselves is by non cooperation and wilful acts of resistance.

In the novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* which opens with the arrival of Colonel Joll to the Outpost, the two natives who have been taken prisoners are beaten and tortured. The Magistrate does not receive any information about the torture from the guards. The guard denies any knowledge of it. He asks the boy but he refuses to speak and stares over the Magistrates shoulder. Then he addresses the old man who tells him that they are not thieves. They have come to the town for medical help. The boy shows him the sore. Both the old man and the boy do not speak much. Their silence is one of passive understanding of the situation. There is little they can do to overcome the disaster they are subjected to.

Colonel Joll remains silent as the Magistrate speaks. Joll's silence is a conscious one, where he is assessing the Magistrate. Joll also explains to him on how to extract the truth from the 'Other'. The white man is confident that he can make the blacks agree to anything by using violence.

What we observe in this episode is that the boy and the old man look harmless but Colonel Joll acts out of suspicion. His fear, the Empire's fear of the native makes him

take such cruel measures. Coetzee in one of the interviews remarks, "At the heart of the unfreedom of the hereditary masters of South Africa is a failure of love."<sup>60</sup>

The Magistrate recounts that he could have pretended not to have known anything about the torture. He could have remained silent. But he cannot remain so. Therefore he gets embroiled in the whole business. The boy confesses under duress that the barbarians are planning a war on the Empire. The Magistrate knows that he is made to say all this under torture. However, the boy has gone through so much of pain and suffering that he remains passive and silent. The silence here is the silence of surrender, of helplessness and acceptance.

The only doctor available, an old man, is called to attend to the boy. He puts a poultice on the sore and ointment on the hundred little stabs. But he does not ask how the boy sustained the injuries. The doctor is silent because he is afraid to even discuss the atrocities which everybody knows of. The fear of violence makes people remain silent. Silence is the outcome of fear for some and for the protagonists in many of Coetzee's novels it is a deliberate act to defeat the purpose of the whites.

Colonel Joll and his men bring many of the fisher folk as prisoners and they are housed in the barrack rooms. They are "sick, famished, terrified, damaged" (*WB* 26). When the Magistrate sees the barbarian girl begging in the streets he asks one of the soldiers to bring her to his room. When he asks about her whereabouts she chooses to remain silent. He offers to keep her as his help but she goes away. The next day he brings her to his room and makes an attempt to talk to her. "I prowled around her, talking about our vagrancy ordinances, sick at myself..." (*WB* 29).

When asked to show her feet, she slowly unwraps the bandages. He then washes her feet in a basin of water and sleeps off. When questioned about her eyes and her loss of

sight she remains silent. She does not want to talk about what the torturers had done to her. ““What did they do to you?” I murmur. My tongue is slow. I sway on my feet with exhaustion. “Why don’t you want to tell me?” she shakes her head” (*WB* 34). The Magistrate questions her as if he is concerned about her though the real intention is to satisfy his curiosity. The barbarian girl refuses to tell her story. This could be a way of trying to forget all about the torture. It could be an acceptance of her lot, knowing that nothing would come by way of her telling the story. The damage has already been done. This act on her part foregrounds the fact that she resides in a state of indifference. The torture perpetrated by the State and hushed up is found also in the novel *The Master of Petersburg* where the death of Isaev is referred to as a suicide which Nechaev says is not true. The State concocts such statements. Similarly nothing that really happens is reported in the newspapers in *Age of Iron*. The people never get to know the truth of the killings and murder committed by the State.

When the Magistrate tries to get the truth out of the soldiers about the treatment meted out to the girl and her father, they are hesitant to talk. One of them gives a few details but the other dare not speak for fear of incurring the wrath of Col. Joll and his men. When the Magistrate asks the barbarian girl about what she thinks of the men who tortured her, she evades the question saying “I am tired of talking” (*WB* 44). Though the Magistrate sleeps with her, their relationship is not consummated. She gets used to his sleeping away from him in the parlour. The Magistrate says “She adapts without complaint to the new pattern...” (*WB* 60). Hence Coetzee makes it clear that the native also has a will of her own. The black protagonists of Coetzee are not totally helpless. Even in the helpless situation they find themselves in, they assert their will. Their act of resistance is brought about very calmly without being ruffled.

When the Magistrate is imprisoned in his cell, initially, he feels it is not anything much “to move from the solitariness of everyday existence to the solitude of a cell... but now, I begin to comprehend how rudimentary freedom is” (*WB* 93). The Magistrate realises the significance of freedom when he is confined to the cell. For him there is no threat from the barbarians. But, for the Third Bureau they are a threat to the existence of the settlement and hence, are the ‘enemy’. They feel that the barbarians may attack any time. So in self defence, the Empire decides to attack the ‘enemy’. The Magistrate asks Mandel how he feels after each session of torture:

Do you find it easy to take food afterwards? I have imagined that one would want to wash one’s hands.... Otherwise how would it be possible to return to everyday life – to sit down at table, for instance, and break bread with one’s family or one’s comrades? (*WB* 138)

The novel concludes with Colonel Joll and his men retreating and the Magistrate returns to his post. The imagined threat of the barbarians remains unfulfilled. There is no scope for the barbarians to speak at all. They exist as per the construct of the white man. We see them through the eyes of the Magistrate, Colonel Joll and his men. The voices of the barbarians are effaced in the novel and an imperial discourse is constructed. If the Empire is good, then the barbarians are bad. Similarly it was civilization versus savagery, white versus black. The whites are civilised people and as against them, the blacks are an uncivilised lot. If the whites stand for ‘goodness’ the natives are ‘evil’.

The Magistrate, though sympathetic to the barbarians knows his complicity in the gruesome colonial enterprise. “The old Magistrate, defender of the rule of law, enemy in his own way of the State, assaulted and imprisoned, impregably virtuous, is not without his own twinges of doubt” (*WB* 118). Just as the agents of the Empire Colonel Joll and

his men leave their marks, by brutally beating the barbarians, the Magistrate says, "I will not disappear into the earth without leaving my mark on them" (*WB* 123). He wants to help the natives. However, he is not able to do so. On the other hand he is humiliated and subjected to torture for expressing his sympathy for the natives.

*Waiting for the Barbarians* published in 1980 is about the dynamics of torture. This was the time when Steve Biko died in detention under the South African security police and this was fresh in everybody's mind. The atrocities happening in South Africa find an echo in the novel. Coetzee examines the rhetoric of torture which is perpetrated by the cruel system of apartheid.

In the novel *Life and Times of Michael K* the first thing the midwife notices when the protagonist, Michael K is born, is his harelip. Michael grows up as a passive child, isolated, voiceless. "Year after year Michael sat on a blanket watching his mother polish other people's floors, learning to be quiet" (*MK* 3-4). He hardly makes any acquaintance. He could lie down for hours looking at his hands or at the roof. So by nature solitude is Michael's nature.

In *Michael K* Coetzee repeatedly examines the problems of individuals trapped in repressive societies. He deals with the problems encountered by the protagonist Michael K as he persistently struggles to avoid the detention camps of South Africa. K is at his best when he is by himself, cultivating the land.

The doctor who is fascinated by Michael tries to fill out the silences of Michael K. He says of Michael K that he is not "of our world" (*MK* 142) and is not aware of the war. However, he wants K to tell his story. "Why is it just you by yourself? Where is your stake in the future? Do you want the story to end with you? That would make it a sad story, don't you think?" There was a silence so dense that I heard it as a ringing in my

ears. A silence of the kind one experiences in mine-shafts, cellars, bomb shelters, airless places” (MK 140). However, this has no effect on Michael who remains silent. The Medical Officer tells Michael “Give yourself some substance, man, otherwise you are going to slide through life absolutely unnoticed. You want to live, don’t you? Well then, talk, make your voice heard, tell your story!” (MK 140) Even though Michael is asked to speak, he does not do so. He prefers to remain silent. The voice of the ‘Other’ is not heard even when he wants to be heard. In Michael’s case he himself makes a conscious decision not to be heard because he is better off when he is by himself.

K refuses to eat camp food. This refusal is also a form of passive resistance. Michael’s resistance to the wishes of the officer appears to be a physical resistance but not of the mind. The Medical Officer is helpless and he begins to feel that he is wrong when he attempts to monitor Michael’s every movement.

When K finally returns to Sea Point he again becomes the object of charity. “They want me to open my heart and tell them the story of a life lived in cages” (MK 181). But K is aware of his freedom.

“I have escaped the camps; perhaps, if I lie low, I will escape the charity too” (MK 182). Michael K deliberately remains silent in order to resist being dominated. In a way he becomes the oppressor. His silence irks the whites, even the Medical Officer is unnerved by Michael’s quietness.

The relationship between Michael K and the Medical officer is similar to the relationship between the barbarian girl and the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Both seem to be appealing to the other. Although Coetzee portrays Michael as a person who wants freedom, that is freedom to be away from people and from the camps, we are not sure whether Coetzee advocates such a freedom. Man is basically a social being, he is

gregarious, he desires the company of fellow human beings. However, Michael K does not seem to want any company. Nevertheless, he returns to civilization; he comes back to Sea Point where he had lived with his mother earlier. Michael is unable to function in society. He does not have any desire to belong. Coetzee conveys Michael's enjoyment of human companionship most effectively when he describes Michael with the children in the camp. Sleeping outside his hut, he finds the children incorporating his body into their games and takes great pleasure. Michael does not speak or eat anything and he becomes sick. Yet he will not yield.

In the novel *Disgrace*, which is about a professor, David Lurie, Coetzee talks about his fall, his disgrace. David Lurie is 52, has an affair with a student, half his age, who just gives in but refuses to be silent about his overtures. Therefore he faces a trial, refuses to repent and hence is dismissed disgracefully. He goes to live with his daughter, Lucy, who lives on her farm in Eastern Cape. Lucy has a kennel. She also grows and sells flowers at the weekly market. Her neighbour is a black, by name Petrus who belongs to the period of decolonization and nurses a grudge against the whites.

Lucy's assault and rape by three black men is an indication of the period of decolonization when the blacks started asserting for their rights. They put Lurie in the bathroom, sprinkle alcohol on him and set him ablaze. They shoot all the dogs and ransack the house and leave with David's car. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon says "At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self respect."<sup>61</sup> Lucy is upset but refuses to make a complaint. Her silence is a conscious one. "After the incident Lucy spends hour after hour, lying on her bed, staring

into space or looking at old magazines, of which she seems to have an unlimited store” (*D* 114).

Owing to her silence and her refusal to complain to the police about the rape, David contends “Like a stain the story is spreading across the district. Not her story to spread but theirs: they are its owners. How they put her in her place, how they showed her what a woman was for” (*D* 115). Petrus returns to his farm. He is conveniently absent at the time of the crime and David has his own suspicion about him.

“As yet Petrus has offered no explanation for his absence. Petrus has the right to come and go as he wishes; he has exercised that right; he is entitled to his silence” (*D* 116). Here Petrus’ silence can be interpreted as that of an accomplice’s. Petrus has an eye on Lucy’s farm. Fanon says “For a colonised people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and above all, dignity.”<sup>62</sup>

Lucy’s silence and her desire not to level charges against those blacks who have raped her, upsets Lurie. However, Lucy’s argument is that the rape is, “the price one has to pay for staying on? Perhaps that is how they look at it; perhaps that is how I should look at it too. They see me as owing something. They see themselves as debt collectors, tax collectors. Why should I be allowed to live here without paying? Perhaps that is what they tell themselves” (*D* 158).

When Lucy learns that she is pregnant as a result of the rape, she agrees to become Petrus’ mistress in return for protection. Lucy becomes subordinate to Petrus. There is a reversal of roles. She is silenced or rather she chooses to silence herself.

Lucy reaches a stage where she says “Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept. To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no right, no dignity”(D 205).

The rape, Lucy knows is an expression of male power and here it is not just male power. It is the male power of a certain race subjugated for so long and which is now retaliating. Lucy knows that with the rape, she is a dead person and life can never be the same for her. Yet she refuses to make it public or complain to the police because she feels no one can understand what she has experienced. “Decolonisation never takes place unnoticed, for it influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally.... Decolonisation is the veritable creation of new men. But this creation owes nothing of its legitimacy to any supernatural power; ...”<sup>63</sup>

In *Age of Iron* Mrs. Curren a retired professor of Classics is diagnosed with cancer and lives during the time of the unrest and chaos in South Africa when the natives are in open rebellion against the whites. As a member of the white class she has been out of the chaos in the country. She has no direct confrontation with the blacks. The novel is in the form of a letter she writes to her daughter who has left South Africa as she cannot live amidst the chaos and anarchy in the society.

Mrs. Curren’s disease is symbolic of the cancer that is eating South African society embroiled in a white-black encounter. The white government has intensified its repressive measures against the blacks who are now rebelling against them. Mrs. Curren is drawn into the conflict because her maid’s son Bheki and his friend John are up and arms with the white regime. She sees the two young boys being killed by the whites.

The novel which begins with Mrs. Curren telling her daughter about Vercueil, a vagrant who has taken shelter in her yard, presents the black man entering the space of a

white woman. Vercueil by co-incidence enters her house on the same day the doctor diagnoses her illness as cancer. Therefore, Mrs. Curren considers Vercueil as an angel of death. She describes him thus, "One of the homeless for whom August, month of rains, is the worst month. Asleep in his box, his legs stretched out like a marionette's, his jaw agape. An unsavory smell about him: urine, sweet wine, moldy clothing and something else too. Unclean" (AI 4).

She asks him to clear off and without a word, Vercueil goes away leaving behind the boxes, an empty bottle, and the smell of urine. Mrs. Curren wonders why she writes to her daughter about this man, whom she will never see. Although Vercueil does not talk to her, there is some sort of bonding. When Mrs. Curren has an attack of pain, he helps her into the house. She tells him that she has cancer. He just remains silent and then comments that her house could be turned "into a boarding house" (AI 10).

One day Mrs. Curren and Vercueil go for a ride in the car. When she asks him questions about himself, he is uncomfortable. He does not answer but becomes restless. She asks him to clear the overgrown garden. At five in the evening she pays him and tells him she can't proceed with charity. "'Why?' 'Because you don't deserve it.' And he, smiling, keeping his smile to himself, 'Deserve... Who deserves anything?'" (AI 21) Mrs. Curren is angry and hands her purse over asking him to take what he wants and without any qualms he empties it of thirty rand and some coins. The situation in South Africa has changed. The blacks have started demanding. Things are not as before. When he returns, Mrs. Curren asks him for the money and he returns some notes. She tells him "because the spirit of charity has perished in this country. Because those who accept charity despise it, while those who give, give with a despairing heart. What is the point of charity

when it does not go from heart to heart" (AI 22). When she says this, Vercueil, hardly listens to her.

One day when Mrs. Curren asks him whether he will send some papers to her daughter after her death, he is hesitant but finally agrees to do so. Florence, her maid returns with her son Bheki. She is not happy to see Vercueil. Schools have been closed down. However, nothing is reported in the media.

Of trouble in the schools the radio says nothing, the television says nothing, the newspapers say nothing.... What I know about events in Guguletu depends solely on what Florence tells me and on what I can learn by standing on the balcony and peering northeast: namely, that Guguletu is not burning today, or, if it is burning, is burning with a low flame. (AI 39)

This is how the media is silent. Censorship silences the media, allowing nothing to be reported. This is the time when the State had its iron hold on the media and adopted extreme repressive measures. Bheki and his friend beat up Vercueil while Florence supports them. Mrs. Curren is aghast that Florence encourages such behaviour. Florence blames the whites for their behaviour.

Vercueil, one morning, has a woman with him. When Mrs. Curren asks him who she is, he remains silent. He chooses not to answer. Mrs. Curren is angry when she finds that Bheki and his friend have been sleeping in her car without even asking her. To her question they remain silent. The blacks have started asserting.

Bheki and his friend who are pushed by the police when they are on the bicycle, are badly hurt. However, Florence, Bheki's mother does not want to make a complaint. "There is nothing you can do against the police" (AI 66) she says. The helplessness of the blacks is revealed here. Yet at the cost of their lives the youth are ready to fight. "What is

more important, that apartheid must be destroyed or that I must go to school?" asks Bheki (AI 68)

Whenever Mrs. Curren speaks to Vercueil he does not seem to be interested to listen. When she talks about her daughter, he sighs. He asks her to tell her daughter about her longing to be touched and looked after.

"Tell this to your daughter, said Vercueil quietly. She will come."

"No."

'Tell her right now. Phone her in America. Tell her you need her here.'

"No."

'Then don't tell her afterward, when it is too late. She won't forgive you.' (AI 74)

Although Mrs. Curren visits Bheki's friend in the hospital, he is cold to her. When she touches his hand she "felt him stiffen, felt an angry electric recoil." (AI 79) Mrs. Curren is shaken when she sees the body of Bheki. When she talks to Vercueil about Bheki's death there is absolutely no response from him. He seems to be indifferent and when she talks to him about her plight he hardly listens. He is not interested in listening to her 'confession'. She tells him that she talks to him because she feels he is "an angel come to show me the way"(AI 168).

Towards the end, Mrs. Curren becomes irritable. Vercueil tries to ease the situation. "Don't worry", he says, "it's all going to end. Have patience" (AI 181). Vercueil tells her about how he lost his three fingers. She asks him what he will do when she is gone and he replies he will go on. Mrs. Curren breathes her last in his arms "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" (AI 198).

Thus, Vercueil and Mrs. Curren have a queer relationship. He does not show any concern for her, but helps her whenever she needs him. Most of the time when she speaks, there is no response from him; at times it looks as if he is not bothered about her at all. It is as if, he has taken the space without any qualms, as a matter of right. He does not expect anything from her. But for Mrs. Curren, he is a consolation and therefore, she puts up with him in spite of his dirty unclean ways. The age of iron is the age of transition and there is violence everywhere.

Although, Coetzee's marginalised characters are silent and passive, they are strong individuals. In *Dusklands*, it is Eugene who becomes a victim. He is sent to a mental asylum, as he loses his mental equilibrium, in the process of being associated with what goes on in Vietnam – the atrocities of the Americans on the Vietnamese.

Similarly, Jacobus Coetzee who thinks that he can lord it over the Hottentots realises that they do not care for him. When he addresses the Namaquas “as befitted the opening of negotiations with possibly unfriendly powers...” (*DL* 66) they merely become uninterested and drift “out of [his] firm but friendly line of vision” (*DL* 66). When he thinks that they probably regard him as God, he finds that they ridicule him. Finally, he cuts a sorry figure in their midst when he suffers from the carbuncle.

In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the Magistrate thinks that he is being benevolent to the barbarian girl. Although he keeps her with him, waiting on her, sleeping with her, it is he who becomes obsessed with her. He wonders “What this woman beside me is doing in my life I cannot comprehend” (*WB* 50).

Even the men who are in the camps are capable of inhuman treatment. They are also similar to those who keep watch over them. Coetzee highlights this in the novel when one of the guards is injured and bleeding and none of the inmates help him. It is only Michael

who has sympathy for him. So it does not take much for the oppressed to become the oppressor. Similarly the moment the Medical Officer comes to know of Michael, he feels he is oppressed by his presence. He claims that before the arrival of Michael in the camp he is happy. Michael refuses to talk and the Medical Officer feels as if he is the oppressed. He refuses to eat camp food and the Medical Officer becomes desperate.

It is quite interesting to note that Michael, the 'Other' has left such an impression on the Medical Officer that all his thoughts are about Michael. In his letter addressed to Michael he says, "Did you not notice how, whenever I tried to pin you down, you slipped away?" (MK 166) He has not been able to communicate with Michael and that is a failure for the white man to establish a rapport with the colored or black even if he wishes to. The black man (Michael) does not allow it. Communication between the whites and the blacks is beyond the pale of human discourse.

In *Age of Iron* Mrs. Curren, the protagonist has hitherto kept away from the unrest going on in the society. However, when her maid's son, Bheki and his friend John, are involved in the fight against the white administration, she is drawn into the struggle. When she sees the atrocities of the police against the blacks she speaks up for the black boys, only to be insulted by the policemen. However, since she is white, the blacks have no allegiance to her. She is insulted by them and in such a situation she feels oppressed. Caught in the turmoil of a fight in the black township of Guguletu, Mrs. Curren wants to go away as she is exhausted. Mr. Thabane, the relative of Florence only rebukes her "when you see a crime being committed in front of your eyes, what do you say? Do you say, 'I have seen enough, I didn't come to see sights, I want to go home?'" I shook my head in distress" (AI 98). Mrs. Curren although sympathetic to the blacks finds herself in a trying state. The blacks do not understand her at all. Her condition is oppressive. When

she sees the dead bodies of Bheki and four other youth she feels terrible. It is she who feels oppressed though she was not in anyway involved with their death. However, in the case of Mrs. Curren's relationship with Vercueil who is also the other there seems to be a sort of affinity towards each other. It is Vercueil who is around to help her out in her last days as she suffers from cancer which debilitates her body. The chaos outside, in the society is similar to the chaos in her body as the cancer cells are eating her up. "I give my life to Vercueil to carry over. I trust Vercueil because I do not trust Vercueil. I love him because I do not love him. Because he is the weak reed I lean upon him" (AI 131). Such is her relationship with Vercueil.

Mrs. Curren knows very well that she dislikes Bheki's friend, John. However, she says "I do not want to die in the state I am in, in a state of ugliness. I want to be saved. How shall I be saved? By doing what I do not want to do. That is the first step: that I know. I must love, first of all, the unlovable I must love, for instance, this child... He is here for a reason. He is a part of my salvation. I must love him" (AI 136). So for Mrs Curren even the effort to love the blacks has to be premeditated. She has to love them for her own sake.

Mrs. Curren knows that she has to make a compromise. She is no longer the oppressor who is in a situation that is better off than that of the 'Other'. She is oppressed by the society around her and by her illness. When the police enter her premises and shoot the boy John down, she is helpless. She cannot do anything to protect him. She does not believe that the war that the black youth are fighting will bring in any good. She does not believe in comradeship, as Mr. Thabane, the school teacher calls it. She tells Vercueil "I have been a good person, I freely confess to it. I am a good person still. What times these are when to be a good person is not enough"(AI 165). She knows that she has

to bear the burden of being a white. She is aware that her opinions do not mean anything to the blacks however concerned she is about them.

In the novel *Foe*, which is a parody of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, we have the story of Crusoe and Friday who are cast away on an island. The relationship between Crusoe and Friday is cordial. Crusoe has taught him enough language that is necessary for his use on the island. However, when Susan Barton is marooned on the same island, her attitude to Friday is different. Friday, she realises is mute. She learns that his tongue has been cut. She tries to make him learn to write. When she takes Friday with her to England, he becomes a burden to her. She wants to write her story on the island. But she knows she cannot write the story without the story of Friday and she knows that Friday cannot tell his story. She asks him a series of questions and exclaims "How I wish you could answer!" (F 82) Friday's silence oppresses her which in fact becomes a burden for her. She is relieved of Friday only when she finds a ship that will carry him to his home country. Until then Friday remains a burden to her. She cannot abandon him. Friday however, does not express any of his feelings. He goes with Susan Barton wherever she takes him.

### **3.5 The Sense of Isolation in the Novels of J.M. Coetzee: a Pretext to Tackle Violence**

Michela Canapari -Labib in the preface to his book *Old Myths- Modern Empires Power Language and Identity in J.M.Coetzee's Work* avers:

Although his novels often appear to depict a particular situation or a personal story determined by the cultural, political and social circumstances of South Africa, at the same time, they must be read as powerful and incisive statements about human nature, speaking of more

fundamental psychological realities which cannot be seen solely as the result of South African politics.<sup>64</sup>

Though almost all the novels have been written about South Africa, especially the apartheid and post apartheid era, they have become international literature as they address the human condition. Coetzee's writing is not primarily concerned with the act of decolonization. He is more concerned about what colonization does to the psyche of both coloniser and the colonised, the oppressor and the oppressed. Coetzee writes against apartheid, violence and speaks for the dignity of man. In his post colonial discourse he does not seek to re-instate the 'Other' or the marginalised. Coetzee's 'Other' are evolved persons with infinite patience and endurance. They are passive, silent and isolated and this becomes a weapon in their hands.

Gayatri Spivak who speaks about the silencing of the native, says that the native is silenced by the dominating power. But the natives in Coetzee, we see, have not been silenced; on the other hand they remain silent by choice.

A reading of the novels of Coetzee, the first written in 1974, reveals that the protagonists in the novels are all isolated individuals. He focuses on individuals leading isolated lives. This sense of isolation is out of circumstances, sometimes willed, sometimes by chance.

Eugene Dawn, the protagonist in the novel *Dusklands* collapses into a state of insanity. He is on a mission writing an analysis of the psychological war in Vietnam for the U.S Defense Department. The preparation of the report makes him enter into a state of self-isolation. The work that he is involved in creates a stressful situation. He is unable to be part of the community, he cannot interact with people especially the 'Other'. He

kidnaps his son from his wife and when she tracks him down with police officers, he stabs his son and describes it with the same attitude that governs his narrative.

In the second part of the same novel, the protagonist Jacobus Coetzee is a white man entering the territory of the 'Other'. He is an isolated being. Similar to Fanon's analysis of the white man's mind, Jacobus Coetzee is scared of the natives. He stays away from the natives. He thinks the enemy needs to be defeated so that he in turn is not destroyed. However, he is unable to establish his authority among the Hottentots as he falls sick and needs to be in the village under their care. He feels that his privacy has been intruded upon. Once he recovers, he leaves the village and when he returns to Namaqua Land, all he yearns for is revenge which intensifies as he drifts into the world of his interior. He destroys the village completely.

The novel *In the Heart of the Country* revolves around the protagonist Magda, a spinster who lives a life of isolation. She lives on a secluded farm and the novel is written as a sort of journal with many contradicting details. The stories are inward looking. Her father lives with her. She talks of his new bride. She cannot communicate with her father and stays away from the servants of the house. But she is not happy with this seclusion. She laments this isolated state. She hates her father and even fantasises killing him. In this state of isolation she attempts parricide four times. She imagines that the bride who her father brings home will relegate her to a state of nothing. After the death of her father, in order to overcome her loneliness she offers shelter to the servant Hendrik and his wife Klein Anna. She gives up her position of 'master' which is taken over by Hendrik and Klein Anna. There is a reversal of roles and Hendrik beats her and even rapes her.

For Magda the only form of communication is her monologues. The monologues are fragmented and she herself is not sure of the tale she tells. She feels alienated and

mentally confused. She tries to communicate with Anna, who answers her only in monosyllables. Finally she tries to attain some communication by expressing her sexual desire with Hendrik. She even longs to return to the animal state. She tries to imagine herself as living outside human society. She thinks of herself as “a beetle”, “a black widow spider”. However, she feels the need for community. “It is not speech that makes man, but the speech of others” (*HOC* 125). She tries to communicate with the sky gods and her narrative ends by turning away from the messages of the “sky-gods”. “If the truth be told, I never wanted to fly away with the sky-gods. My hope was always that they would descend and live with me here in paradise, making up with their ambrosial breath for all that I lost when the ghostly brown figures of the last people I knew crept away from me in the night” (*HOC* 138-9).

Magda’s isolation has stunted her. She is devoid of all positive feelings and inhabits a world of fantasy. Aroma Kharshiing writing about *In the Heart of the Country* avers, “Magda, *In the Heart of the Country*, is a displaced subject, for she desperately attempts to seek and construct a life for herself as the only means to resist her fate. She realises that in a colonial condition, all forms of relationship and communication – filial, societal, marital as well as the colonial structures of kinship, lack authenticity and reciprocity.”<sup>65</sup> Hence she finds herself completely alienated from people and her surroundings.

In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, which is a strongly allegorical text we have the protagonist of the novel the Magistrate who is in the Outpost of the ‘Empire’. He leads a very isolated life. He sympathizes with the Native. He tries to communicate with the barbarian girl. He is a man of conscience. He is aware of his complicity in the Empire’s imperialism. He develops an interest in the barbarian girl who has been subject to torture by Colonel Joll and his men. He tries to converse with the girl but there is no

communication at all. Even their relationship is not consummated. He is also isolated by the Empire because he is thought of as a collaborator with the barbarians. However, he is also not accepted by the barbarians. Isolated physically in the Outpost which is away from his people and also demarcated as a territory forbidden to the Natives, he experiences total loneliness when he is imprisoned after he is suspected of liaison with the natives. It is now that he feels the need for companionship.

At the end of the novel we find the Magistrate in a state of despair and hopelessness. The narrator experiences a terrible sense of solitude as he is distanced from his people and is not accepted by the barbarians for whom he had sympathy.

Michael K in *Life and Times of Michael K*, which won Coetzee the Booker, is different. Michael lives in the civil war torn society, but is not touched or affected by it. The society is ridden with widespread lawlessness. The downtrodden and the poor resort to looting and violence whenever they have the opportunity. There is corruption in the society, exploitation of the labour force by those in power, especially the police. Michael makes a desperate effort to get away from the company of human beings. He is a victim of a conflict torn society. Being hare-lipped he is sent to a special school and he lives a secluded life there. K himself says that he lives in silence. He does not remember his father and considers the institution Huis Norenius to be his father. Michael's only allegiance is to his mother. He sets out to take his mother from Cape Town to Prince Albert where she had spent her youth with her family. She dies on the way. He feels suffocated and uneasy when the doctors and nurses try to comfort him. He carries on with her ashes and scatters it in the farm where she had lived. He tries to find solace in living the life of a farmer.

He goes back to the farm and starts cultivation. But when a member of the Visagie family who once owned the farm comes back, he abandons his cultivation. He lives in a cave, feeding on roots and insects, avoiding the company of people. He is picked up as a vagrant and sent to a reinstatement camp. He detests life there as he is in contact with people. He escapes from the camp and gets back to the farm. However, again he is found by the police who take him back to the camp. Here he is repulsed by the interest shown by the medical doctor towards him. He refuses to talk to the doctor. Michael is different from Coetzee's protagonists from other novels.

The protagonists in other novels lament their solitude. But Michael struggles for isolation. He does not want to have anything to do with people. However, despite being alone in the mountains K knows that he cannot escape history entirely. Only silence and absence of society can make Michael happy and give him a feeling of security. However, there is a contradiction in him. When he sees the revolutionaries, he wants to join them in their fun. Magda in the novel *In the Heart of the Country* is uncomfortable in her secluded life unlike Michael K who enjoys living in a state of isolation.

In the novel *Foe*, we have two characters, who have two different attitudes towards solitude. Crusoe who accepts his state of solitariness is happy with himself on the island. He refuses to keep a journal and does not make any effort to save himself. He lives in a hut, wakes up and sleeps following the sunrise and sunset. He makes terraces for those who may come later with seeds. All in all, life for him is calm and serene. Susan Barton on the other hand who is also marooned on the island cannot accept her situation. She regrets the lack of human society. The silence around her oppresses her and she longs to get back to civilization. However, when she does get back to civilization she still feels lonely. She feels alienated from other human beings. Mrs. Curren in *Age of Iron*, is

suffering from cancer and leads a psychologically isolated life. In this novel Coetzee portrays the South Africa of 1986 to 1989, the worst years during the emergency. Mrs. Curren, a professor of Classics and now retired, lives a life of solitude. She does not have many friends. The society she lives in is fighting for power. Mrs Curren isolates herself from the violence and unrest in the society, but soon finds herself in the midst of all this when Bheki, the son of her maid Florence, plunges himself into the resistance movement against the whites. She finds herself helping Bheki, nursing his wound and even offering him and his friend shelter in her house. In the novel, the black voices are loud and vociferous. Bheki and his friend are sure of what they want. Florence supports the children condemning the whites and Mr. Thabane, the school teacher is well aware of comradeship.

Mrs. Curren also experiences loneliness because of her disease which is eating her. The imminent death makes her withdraw into herself. Although she feels alienated, she enters into a strange relationship with Vercueil, a tramp who comes to occupy the space outside her house where her daughter once played. Vercueil becomes a sort of a mentor for Mrs. Curren. She does not send him away. He even lives in her house and towards the end she entrusts a bundle of papers to be delivered to her daughter. Vercueil becomes her angel of death. Living in the midst of the social and political situation in South Africa, she needs love to face her illness in her daughter's absence.

Mrs. Curren's disease is symbolic of the extreme deterioration that had set into South African society, torn apart by civil war, and violence. She is in a state of preparation for her death. In the course of it she learns many things. She is shocked that young boys could defy death in the name of defending their identity. She arrives at a new level of existence, thereby forming a new self. When she visits the township of Guguletu where

her maid Florence lives, she, for the first time has an encounter with violence and death. Awareness comes to her. She learns about the need for equality of all human beings and the need for love to preserve the human race.

In *The Master of Petersburg* the protagonist, who is a fictionalised Dostoevsky comes to mourn the death of his son Isaev. He accepts his guilt of abandoning his son. He tries to find out the real circumstances of the death of his son and tries to establish a relationship with his son which he never had when he was alive. He realises he is tied down with remorse till his death.

The protagonist in *Disgrace* is David Lurie, a professor twice divorced. He is forced to resign as he gets embroiled in an affair with a student half his age, who complains against him of sexual harassment. An enquiry is conducted and he is asked to apologise and show repentance. But he refuses to do so. "That plea should suffice. Repentance is neither here nor there. Repentance belongs to another world, to another discourse" (*D* 58). Therefore, he chooses to resign and leaves his town and home to live with his daughter on the farm. Throughout the novel, David tries to come to terms with the new condition. It is the post apartheid era and there is a reversal in the position of blacks and whites in the society. Although he is in the company of his daughter, he is lonely. He seeks relief helping Bev Shaw in her veterinary clinic where she puts to death old and ailing dogs. Erik Grayson a critic argues, "That Lurie's new vocation deals exclusively in canine and feline euthanasia only emphasises the remarkable process of existential maturation he undergoes in *Disgrace*."<sup>66</sup>

The novel *Slow Man*, examines the idea of solitariness from a philosophical stand point. Paul Rayment, the protagonist is in his sixties. His leg has been amputated as a result of an accident. He refuses to use a prosthesis and chooses to live on his own with

the help of a woman who helps him with the chores, washes and dresses him. He experiences a sense of futility. Coetzee through the character of Paul ruminates about life, man's position and human nature. Paul experiences terrible loneliness. The calamity has "shrunk his world, turned him into prisoner". In his isolation, he says "Live like a hero. That is what the classics teach us. Be the main character. Otherwise what is life for?" (SM 229)

In the novel *Diary of a Bad Year* also, the protagonist, is a single man, a writer in his seventies, who is asked to write about his strong opinions on the happenings in the world. He happens to see a young woman called Anya, in the laundry room of the apartment he is living in. He offers her work as a typist for a handsome sum of money. The real need is not for a typist. He is only carried away by her beauty and youth and wants to have her in his proximity. The thoughts that go on in his mind are those of a man facing old age and of one who does not have any one around him.

The questions that come to the forefront about man's desire for isolation is the desire to understand himself, to find answers to many questions that have long troubled him. Coetzee seems to ask whether man can live in isolation. He wonders whether man can understand himself better in a state of isolation. Coetzee drives home the point that isolation is not something that man can put up with. Nevertheless the protagonists emerge transformed after the isolated state whether it is physical or mental. In the novels that Coetzee wrote after leaving South Africa, he analyses the life of people who lead a life of isolation.

Thus in this chapter the novels of Coetzee have been examined from the standpoint of violence and its impact. The protagonists of Coetzee stand out as exceptional individuals

who mark out their own way of handling violence. They emerge as individuals with a character of their own. Even in their humiliation, they exhibit strength of character.

Thus, we can say that Coetzee is primarily concerned with the violence encountered by his protagonists. He shows us the impact of violence on the psyche of individuals. He explores the nuances of violence and its manifestation. Coetzee's analysis of violence takes on a spiritual level when he makes his characters passive and silent even when confronted with violence. The violence that Coetzee envisages has a debilitating effect on both the coloniser and the colonised. The violence inflicted on the natives is abominable. However, they handle it in a philosophical manner. Coetzee explores the dynamics of violence with regard to the western and non western people. We also see the impact of violence on the whites just as we see it on the blacks. Coetzee has very carefully presented to us the encounter between the whites and the blacks, bringing out the clash between them very effectively. He has very sensitively drawn a picture of South African society under the apartheid regime driving home the point that aggression has its impact on the doer of the action also. Each novel of Coetzee is an entity in itself representing the South African society of the second half of the twentieth century.

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Kailash C Baral, ed., J.M.Coetzee Critical Perspectives (New Delhi: Pencraft International,2008) 11.
- <sup>2</sup> *ibid* 12.
- <sup>3</sup> *ibid* 14.
- <sup>4</sup> Tony Morphet, "Reading Coetzee in South Africa" WLT, 78.1(2003):14-16.
- <sup>5</sup> Dominic Head, J.M.Coetzee (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 3.
- <sup>6</sup> Parag M. Sarma, J.M.Coetzee Critical Perspectives ed. Kailash C. Baral (New Delhi: Pencraft International,2008).
- <sup>7</sup> David Attwell, ed., J.M. Coetzee *Doubling the Point. Essays and Interviews* (USA: Harvard University Press, 1992) 27. Henceforth referenced parenthetically in the text as *DP* with page number.
- <sup>8</sup> J.M.Coetzee, Dusklands (UK: Vintage, 1998) 15-16. Henceforth referenced parenthetically in the text as *DL* with page number.
- <sup>9</sup> Parag M. Sarma, J.M.Coetzee Critical Perspectives ed., Kailash C. Baral (New Delhi:Pencraft International, 2008) 21.
- <sup>10</sup> *ibid* 20.
- <sup>11</sup> David Attwell, J.M.Coetzee South Africa and the Politics of Writing (USA: University of California Press, 1993) 35.
- <sup>12</sup> Wang Jinghui, J.M.Coetzee Critical Perspectives ed., Kailash C. Baral (New Delhi:Pencraft International, 2008) 61.

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<sup>13</sup> J.M.Coetzee, Giving Offence: Essays on Censorship (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996) 10. Henceforth referenced parenthetically in the text as *GO* with page number.

<sup>14</sup> Seth B. Pardick, J.M.Coetzee Critical Perspectives ed., Kailash C. Baral (New Delhi:Pencraft International, 2008) 44.

<sup>15</sup> Michela Canepari – Labib, Old Myths- Modern Empires Power, Language and Identity in J.M.Coetzee’s Work. (Oxford, Peterlang, 2005) 87.

<sup>16</sup> Seth B.Pardick, J.M.Coetzee Critical Perspectives ed., Kailash C. Baral (New Delhi:Pencraft International, 2008) 45.

<sup>17</sup> J.M.Coetzee, Waiting for the Barbarians (London: Vintage, 2000) 5. Henceforth referenced parenthetically in the text as *WB* with page number.

<sup>18</sup> David Attwell, ed., 1992. 363.

<sup>19</sup> Rosemary Jane Jolly, “Territorial Metaphor in Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* Ariel 20.1 (1983): 65-81.

<sup>20</sup> Seth B.Pardick, J.M.Coetzee Critical Perspectives ed., Kailash C. Baral (New Delhi:Pencraft International, 2008) 47.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid* 50.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid* 51.

<sup>23</sup> David Attwell, ed., 1992. 342.

<sup>24</sup> John McLeod, Beginning Post Colonialism (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) 217.

<sup>25</sup> Head, J.M.Coetzee 72.

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<sup>26</sup> J.M.Coetzee, White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa (South Africa: Pentz Publishers, 2007) 51. Henceforth referenced parenthetically in the text as *WW* with page number.

<sup>27</sup> Michela Canepari-Labib 39.

<sup>28</sup> Attwell (1993) 79.

<sup>29</sup> Mike Marais, J.M.Coetzee Critical Perspectives ed., Kailash C Baral (New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2008) 68.

<sup>30</sup> Michela Canepari-Labib 101.

<sup>31</sup> Fanon, preface, 23.

<sup>32</sup> Timothy Francis Strode, The Ethics of Exile: Colonialism in the Fictions of Charles Brockden Brown and J.M.Coetzee (New York Routledge, 2005) 154.

<sup>33</sup> J.M.Coetzee, Age of Iron (New York: Penguin Books, 1994) 50.

Henceforth referenced parenthetically in the text as *AI* with page number.

<sup>34</sup> Mike Marais, J.M.Coetzee Critical Perspectives ed., Kailash C Baral (New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2008) 109.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid* 110.

<sup>36</sup> J.M.Coetzee, Disgrace (Great Britain: Vintage, 2000) 158. Henceforth referenced parenthetically in the text as *D* with page number.

<sup>37</sup> Suresh Raval, J.M.Coetzee Critical Perspectives ed., Kailash C Baral (New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2008) 151.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid* 158.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid* 153.

<sup>40</sup> Michela Canepari – Labib 86.

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<sup>41</sup> Attwell, 1992 97.

<sup>42</sup> J.M. Coetzee, Life and Times of Michael K (London: Vintage, 2004).

Henceforth referenced parenthetically in the text as *MK* with page number.

<sup>43</sup> Michela Canepari – Labib 119.

<sup>44</sup> Head 114.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid* 59.

<sup>46</sup> J.M. Coetzee, The Lives of Animals (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977) 21. Henceforth referred to parenthetically in the text as *LA* with page number.

<sup>47</sup> Maren Meinhardt “Animal Arguments” Rev. of *The Lives of Animals*.

The Times Literary Supplement 5011 (1999): 25.

<sup>48</sup> Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998) 16.

<sup>49</sup> Attwell (1992) 120.

<sup>50</sup> Edward Said, Orientalism (U.K.: Penguin Books, 1995) 5.

<sup>51</sup> J.M. Coetzee, In the Heart of the Country (London: Vintage, 1999) 39.

Henceforth referred to parenthetically in the text as *HOC* with page number.

<sup>52</sup> Michela Canepari Labib 101.

<sup>53</sup> Susan Van Zanten Gallagher, “The Backward Glance : History and the Novel in Post Apartheid Africa” Studies in the Novel 29.3 (1997) : 389.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid* 389.

<sup>55</sup> J.M. Coetzee, Foe (New York: Penguin Books, 1987) 8. Henceforth referred to parenthetically in the text as *F* with page number.

<sup>56</sup> Michela Canepari- Labib 242.

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<sup>57</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, The Empire Writes Back  
Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures ( London : Routledge, 1989) 7.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid* 11.

<sup>59</sup> Svenska Akademien Press Release 2 October 2003. 12 September 2005  
<[http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/2003/press.html](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2003/press.html) >.

<sup>60</sup> David Attwell ed., (1992) 97.

<sup>61</sup> Fanon 74.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid* 34.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid* 28.

<sup>64</sup> Michela Canapari-Labib 17.

<sup>65</sup> Aroma Kharshiing , J.M.Coetzee Critical Perspectives ed., Kailash C Baral  
(New Delhi:Pencraft International, 2008) 29.

<sup>66</sup> Erik Grayson, J.M.Coetzee Critical Perspectives ed., Kailash C Baral  
(New Delhi:Pencraft International, 2008) 168.

## Chapter IV

### Studies in the Self - the Latest Three Novels of Coetzee

*A man, who realizes the potential of his mind by means of introspection and contemplation, he does not lack self-confidence. He has control over his mind and he is able to realize its full potential.*

*Sama Veda*

For more than three decades, Coetzee as a novelist engaged himself with the political and social milieu of South Africa. So his novels were primarily centred round the horrific practice of segregation employed by the whites. As a white novelist with his sympathies for the blacks, Coetzee in his novels was engaged with violence intellectually and emotionally. It was not just apartheid that he focused on, but the human condition in an oppressive state that he was involved with. With the lifting of apartheid, Coetzee was witness to the process of decolonization which was equally violent. Tables were turned and violence was seen everywhere. The blacks wreaked vengeance on the whites and Coetzee presents this scenario in his later novels. Thus we see violence perpetrated both by the whites and later by the blacks in his novels until he left South Africa in 2002.

Technically and thematically these novels written in Australia are significant because they have ceased to engage with the question of apartheid and the problems that came in its wake. The three novels like the novels written in South Africa have protagonists who are isolated characters. However, they are not grappling with conditions that are external to them. In fact, they are not victims of the society they live in. These protagonists are

individuals who are old and who face ontological questions of selfhood and existence. They try to define themselves in their own terms, due to a new condition they find themselves in. They are either crippled or old and suffering from age related diseases and in the latest novel, the protagonist is Coetzee himself who imagines himself to be dead. Coetzee thus seems to have completely taken a break away from the themes of his novels written earlier. Being in his seventies, Coetzee has reached a stage where he interrogates ontological questions like self-hood and also death. This is a period in Coetzee's life when he is living in Australia in a conducive atmosphere which allows him to mull over abstract themes. He found life in Australia very compatible for a philosophical engagement. Hence Coetzee in the first novel deals with a character who faces an unexpected problem.

In his early novels written in South Africa, violence plays a prominent role in the life of the protagonist whose life is centred round it and there is no way they can escape such a situation. But in the novels written in Australia there is no external violence, nevertheless there is turbulence in the mind of the characters. These characters are not opposed by any external agent, the oppression is within them.

The three novels of Coetzee, *Slow Man* (2005), *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007) and the latest *Summertime* (2009), were written after Coetzee left South Africa and settled down in Australia. These novels are undoubtedly significant as they have ceased to engage with the question of apartheid and its tribulations. They deviate from the position hitherto held by Coetzee. The three novels are introspective in nature. Until 2005, Coetzee was preoccupied with the apartheid and post apartheid period in South Africa. These novels centered round the happenings in his country. Coetzee engaged himself with the

dynamics and play of violence in his novels. His major preoccupation was with the impact violence had on the human psyche. In 2002, Coetzee moved to Australia and took up residence in Adelaide. It was here that Coetzee brought in a change in perspective of writing novels. He no longer engaged himself with the apartheid or post apartheid regime. The novels that he wrote at this point in time are very different. In *Slow Man*, Coetzee looking inward, engages himself with what goes on in the mind of an individual who faces unexpected problems. It is at the individual level that Coetzee handles issues in this novel. It deals with the life of a man who in his old age is comfortably settled. He loses his leg in an accident and tries to live his life by himself, shunning the company of both friends and acquaintances. He finds ample time to rediscover himself. A Croatian nurse who attends on him helps him with the household chores. He develops a fascination for her but she does not in any way encourage him. The novel can be examined from the light of Coetzee's exploration of the self. The protagonist poses himself many questions as he goes into the nuances of selfhood. Coetzee also engages himself with authorship. He brings the author and the character together and talks about the relationship between the two. The novel *Slow Man* received mixed responses. Some critics came down heavily on Coetzee and some were full of praise. This was what Ward Just, a critic said "I take this novel to be a scrutiny of disappointment and irresolution, a chicken-and-egg affair that does not yield satisfactory answers. Still...deeply thought, wonderfully written."<sup>1</sup> Another critic Matt Thorne avers, "It is an undeniably peculiar read, but Coetzee has profound things to say about ageing, writing, and accepting one's lot in life. It's probably too strange to win the author another prize, but this seems unlikely to concern him. He has earned the right to poke fun at fiction, and die-hard fans will delight in this"<sup>2</sup>

In another review the writer Cartwright states: "It becomes apparent that this is a novel about identity and indeed the very question of existence..... Coetzee is a unique voice; no novelist explores ideas and the power of literature and the sense of displacement so boldly."<sup>3</sup>

The novel begins with an accident. Paul Rayment the protagonist of the novel, is hit by a speeding car and thrown on to the pavement. A young boy who drives his car rashly crashes on Rayment as he is riding his bicycle. As a result he loses his leg and it is amputated above the knee. He refuses to wear prosthesis or keep a nurse. He refrains from even seeing his friends as he does not want them "to see him in his new, curtailed, humiliating and humiliated state."<sup>4</sup> Here is a man whose physical debility brings about a change in his mental outlook. The severing of his leg is similar to losing his self respect. He muses "A leg gone: what is losing a leg, in the larger perspective? In the larger perspective, losing a leg is no more than a rehearsal for losing everything"(SM 15). Disillusioned by the state he finds himself in, Rayment even wishes for death.

In *Slow Man*, which is a very self-conscious novel, we find a major shift from the focus of the earlier novels. Coetzee ruminates about life, man's position and human nature. Rayment experiences a sense of futility brought about on losing his leg. His movement becomes limited and he cannot live without help. This is a terrible psychological blow for him who although aging was leading an independent life. He cannot easily accept this new condition. He regrets not having children –"A wasted chance. He will leave no trace behind, not even an heir to carry on his name" (SM 19). It is when faced with such a disaster that Rayment ruminates on these things. When the boy Wayne Blithe who had caused the accident visits him, Rayment knows very well

that there is no remorse; he is the type Rayment thinks, who would shout “ ‘Fuck you mate!’ at old geezers as he ripped past them!” (SM 21).

Rayment has to have a nurse to look after his needs, but he does not approve of the nurses who are appointed to look after him. He dislikes their coaxing and cajoling as he wants to be left alone. He is indignant when they treat him condescendingly. In a way he is like Michael K the protagonist of Coetzee’s novel *Life and Times of Michael K* who is not happy when the doctor at the hospital shows an interest in him. Rayment does not want anybody’s sympathy or charity. However, a saving grace for Paul Rayment, is the arrival of Marijana Jokic, a Croatian nurse whom Rayment likes for her matter of fact behavior and because she does not fuss about with him. Slowly he starts loving her and one day he even confesses his love for her which she does not reciprocate. To show his concern for her he offers to pay for her son’s education. This causes a rift in her family and when her husband comes to know of Rayment’s offer he is angry to the extent of beating her. So she decides to stay with her sister-in-law. Rayment continues to be involved with her through her children. He allows her son to stay with him. He also helps her daughter who was in trouble, when she was caught shop-lifting. By doing this he experiences the joy of being a father. Thus, in his state of helplessness Rayment longs for the company of this woman who however, does not encourage him. The solitary life he leads makes him crave for affection from Marijana. He is trying to accept his new position as a dependent and he longs for a physical relationship with Marijana.

Marijana respects his privacy. The third person narrator in the novel avers, “Patiently without baby talk, she helps him with his ablutions. When he tells her he wants to be left alone, she absents herself” (SM 28). He likes the way she puts herself into her work. “A

decent woman, he thinks to himself, decent through and through” (SM 33). On one of his visits to the hospital he sees two women – an old one, stooped with a hawk-like nose and a younger wearing a wide-brimmed hat and a pair of sunglasses to hide the upper half of her face. He remembers their image. The younger woman is the first to provoke his sexual interest since the accident. (SM 36). Meanwhile an old friend of his, Margaret McCord telephones and visits him offering to have sex. But “He does not care to be the object of any woman’s sexual charity, however good natured” (SM 37). and he does not want to expose his mutilated body to even a friend of the old days. Throughout we find that Rayment is self-conscious of his disfigurement. After Margaret’s visit, he daydreams about women and most of the time it is the woman whom he saw, at the hospital, with the dark glasses. Rayment is a man of many regrets, and, not having a son is his greatest regret. He thinks of how if he had a son, he would have come forward to take care of him. “What he wants is a son, a son and heir, a younger, stronger, better version of himself” (SM 45). Thus Rayment in his old age longs for a son who would be his heir. There is a sense of futility when he thinks of this. He knows that with his death he would be forgotten. He would be remembered if he had a son to carry his name. Coetzee through Rayment expresses the basic desire in man to be remembered after his death. He is preoccupied with old age and death in the novels written in Australia which are a complete break away from the earlier novels written in South Africa.

In the previous novels of Coetzee the father figure is always presented as irresponsible and uncaring. The father is not really bothered about the children. In *Dusklands* the protagonist Eugene stabs his son and in *In the Heart of the Country* the relationship between the protagonist Magda and her father is a strained one. Similarly Michael in the

novel *Life and Times of Michael K* does not remember his father at all. But in this novel, there is a major change. Rayment longs to have a son and is even ready to play surrogate father to Marijana's children. This is a major change from the notion held by the protagonist Michael of the Booker prize winning novel *Life and Times of Michael K*. "How fortunate that I have no children, he thought: how fortunate that I have no desire to father.... I would fail in my duties; I would be the worst of fathers"<sup>5</sup>

When confronted with the disaster of living without a leg, Rayment, like everyone else, forgets all the philosophy one normally thinks one should accept. He cannot easily come to terms with his new state. His movements become restricted and he needs the help of a nurse to carry on his daily needs. He has to preserve his dignity and respect and has to cope with nurses who fuss over him like a child. He thinks, "Fate deals you a hand, and you play the hand you are dealt. You do not whine, you do not complain. That, he used to believe, was his philosophy. Why then can he not resist these plunges into darkness?" (*SM* 54) This is what normally people go through, Coetzee seems to argue. When disaster strikes, all philosophy is forgotten. The calamity had "shrunk his world, turned him into a prisoner. But escaping death ought to have shaken him up, opened windows inside him, renewed his sense of the preciousness of life. It has done nothing of the sort" (*SM* 54). The narrator sees the brighter side of life. He feels that Rayment should have been more aware as he had escaped death. But his brush with death does not seem to awaken any deeper thoughts in him. His reaction is similar to that of any ordinary man who faces such a catastrophe. In desperation he wants to be with Marijana who he feels could mother his children. "A woman built for motherhood. Marijana would have helped him out of childlessness. Marijana could mother six, ten, twelve and still

have love left over, mother-love. But too late now: how sad, how sorry!” (SM 34) If that is not possible he would like to play foster-father to her wonderful children. “Nevertheless, he will give anything to be father to these excellent beautiful children and husband to Marijana –co-father if need be, co-husband if need be, platonic if need be, he wants to take care of them, all of them, protect them and save them” (SM 72).

There is a shift in the plot of the novel with the arrival of Elizabeth Costello. Costello is the protagonist of Coetzee’s previous novel and a well known author. A metafictional note enters the novel. She is out to find characters for her novel. Her arrival at Rayment’s house is similar to that of an uninvited guest. He is irritated by her presence. But the plot moves on with her interference. It is she who arranges a meeting with the young woman with glasses whom Rayment had seen at the hospital. She knows about Rayment’s ‘love’ for Marijana. It is as if she is reading Rayment’s diary everyday, but he never writes a diary. Coetzee is talking about what goes on in the mind of the author when he/she starts writing. “You came to me,” she says. “In certain respects I am not in command of what comes to me” (SM 81). The author, Coetzee says does not choose the characters. They just come into the world of the author.

For an author, a character evolves on its own with no effort on the part of the creator. That is what Coetzee wants to present in his novel. “I did not ask for you. I did not ask to spend a perfectly good afternoon in the gloomy flat of yours” (SM 85), says the novelist Elizabeth Costello. Costello interferes with Rayment’s life, even though he does not like it. Coetzee introduces Elizabeth Costello in the novel *Slow Man*, and he asks several fictional questions. She knows about Drago’s (Marijana’s son) college and education. She reminds Rayment that Marijana has a husband and prepares him for a conversation

with her husband. She asks him to forget about Marijana and bring his attention to the crone and the lady with the glasses. He could not possibly have a relationship with a person like Marijana who was a complete woman. Costello feels he could have a meaningful relationship with the blind woman, who like him, was incapacitated. She gives him all information about the woman and arranges a meeting. She has a peek into his mind and knows everything about him. Talking about writing a novel in an interview with David Attwell, Coetzee said "The experience of writing a novel is lengthy. The novel becomes less a thing than a place where one goes every day for several hours a day for years on end. What happens in that place has less and less discernible relation to the daily life one lives or the lives people are living around one. Other forces, other dynamics, take over."<sup>6</sup> So for Coetzee the process of writing does not correspond with the day to day happenings. The world of the writer is very different from his real world since he creates a world of his own in his writings.

The meeting of Rayment with the woman in glasses is significant. She comes to him and he is with his eyes sealed with dough (as arranged by Costello). He has sex with her but later on, he wonders whether the woman was just another call girl and not the same woman he had seen in the hospital. He is irritated with Costello "Drop me, I beseech you let me get on with my life. Write about this blind Marianna of yours instead. She has more potential than I will ever have"(SM 117). Rayment is angry that Costello "is hunting around for characters to put in a book she is planning"(SM 261). Elizabeth's arrival is like the arrival of the author in the novel. At times she claims she is the inventor of Rayment. She seems to make him do what she wants. But he is unwilling. Here it is an account of a character struggling with an author instead of the other way round. Once

when Rayment tries to get rid of Costello saying that he had guests, she tells him that she is like the old man round the shoulders of Sinbad which Rayment refuses to accept. "No, you are not, Mrs Costello. I am not under your control, not in any sense of the word, and I am going to prove it"(SM 129). Here Coetzee avers that the writer holds the character in his grip and while trying to write about the character he/she faces resistance. The character does not yield easily. Coetzee thus engages himself with the dynamics of writing. He gives an account as to how the author goes about the task of writing and how the characters decide the progress of the plot.

As soon as he manages to send Costello away, Drago, Marijana's son comes to stay with him. He tells him about the fight at home, of his father beating his mother and her walking out. Next day he comes back with Costello and she says that they had bumped into each other in Victoria Square. Costello then tells Rayment that he should soon settle on a course of action vis-à-vis Marijana or the lady with the glasses or Mrs McCord and as soon as he settles on a course of action, both of them could part. "What that course of action should consist in I cannot advise, that must come from you. If I know what came next, there would be no need for me to be here"(SM 36). Thus Coetzee says that the plot of the novel is not necessarily in the hands of the writer. In other words Coetzee implies here that the plot of the novel depends on the way the character takes it. The character decides the progression of the plot and not the author. Costello intrudes into the life of the character Rayment. She is there in Rayment's house observing him and deciding the course of his life. She tells Rayment that it is in his strength to bring the story to a closure and she will not interfere with that.

Coetzee narrates how the events in a novel take place. The characters themselves decide the course of action, not the author. The author wants things to happen and only then can the story progress. Elizabeth Costello articulates, “And I am unhappy because nothing is happening. Four people in four corners, like tramps in Beckett, and myself in the middle, wasting time, being wasted by time” (*SM* 141). Unless the characters act there can be no development of the plot because action is central to the development of the plot.

He writes a letter to Marijana’s husband but does not post it. He tells Costello “Surely you don’t scribble down the first thing that comes into your head and mail it off to your publisher. Surely you wait for second thoughts.... Isn’t the whole of writing a matter of second thoughts- second thoughts and third thoughts and further thoughts?”(*SM* 228) Here Coetzee is in fact talking about the whole process of writing. Writing according to him involves a lot of writing, rethinking and rewriting. It is a laborious process. The finished product is an outcome of days of laborious work. The relationship between the author and the character is one of tension as we see it dramatized between Costello and Rayment. Both are at the mercy of each other. Costello keeps insisting that he had come to her as a man with one leg and with his liking for Marijana Jokic. She keeps telling him that she did not know anything about his life prior to that and she does not intend to know anything about what may happen to him in the future. Rayment wonders why Costello cannot make characters of her own. Costello has appeared earlier in Coetzee’s novel *The Lives of Animals* and *Elizabeth Costello* as a novelist who speaks on animal rights and justifies the right for all living beings to live without being attacked or killed.

Coetzee comments on the question of 'care' and 'love' through Costello. She tells Rayment "Care is not love. Care is a service that any nurse worth her salt can provide, as long as we do not ask her for more"(SM 154). When Drago stays with Rayment he takes away some of his collection of photographs. Rayment had some good photographs of Fauchery, a famous photographer. He finds that Drago has tampered with them. He puts the faces of his family using the computer. Rayment is indignant and enquires about the fate of the original Fauchery. Soon he dislikes the noisy atmosphere in the house created by Drago and his friends. In his talk with Costello, Rayment tells her about his past and she says, "Your past life was virgin territory"(SM 195). As an author she says she does not know everything about his life. She does not know the whole story from the start.

Rayment refuses to talk about his wife. "My wife would not thank me for offering her up as a minor character in one of your literary efforts" (SM 200), he says. Rayment also airs his views about art. Coetzee expresses his views on life and living, in the novel-"Live like a hero. That is what the classics teach us. Be a main character. Otherwise what is life for?"(SM 229) Elizabeth Costello invites him to live with her in Carlton and says she would take care of him and they could live together as companions. But he says "Why me? Why do you stay with me?"(SM 233) It is interesting to note that at the time of writing the novel Coetzee had shifted to Australia and was staying with his companion Dorothy Driver. Costello contends "For me alone Rayment was born and I for him. His is the power of leading, mine of following; his of acting, mine of writing"(SM 233). So she treats Rayment as a character in her novel, whose way of life she will put in writing.

One day Costello takes Rayment to Marijana's house. He tells her about the missing photographs and she becomes defensive. To his surprise, he finds that they have fixed his

bike. It was redone as a recumbent bicycle. Rayment says that he could go fast like a Rocket Man and Ljuba, Marijana's daughter says "You aren't Rocket Man, you're Slow Man!"(SM 258) Costello and Rayment discuss their visit as they drive back and Costello says he would have lost Drago, if he had shown his fury. He refuses to call her into his apartment and bids her goodbye.

The ending of the novel suggests that the lives of fictional characters are also not susceptible to manipulation by the author. In the novel Coetzee comments on Elizabeth Costello who is a writer involved in the process of writing and Paul Rayment who tries to find a meaning in life after the tragedy he has gone through.

*Slow Man* closes with Rayment's grave refusal to change course. Coetzee makes it clear that while he can talk about South Africa, he can never go back to South Africa. *Slow Man* explores the dynamics wherein Coetzee makes the protagonist look within and explore the various aspects of his persona. The novel has been tackled from a very different angle compared to other novels of Coetzee. We see the workings of the mind of the protagonist when he faces adversity. Coetzee also shares his views on writing through this novel.

*Diary of a Bad Year* published in 2007 has a unique form and structure. It is three tiered, with three narratives on a page. Those on the top called Strong Opinions are the writer's opinions on varied topics ranging from politics to humanities, science and other mundane matters. The narrative in the middle consists of Senor C's musings. He is a seventy two year old bachelor who develops a fascination for a young woman who lives in the same block as he does. He employs her as his typist by offering a huge amount as wages. This man has much in common with the real J.M.Coetzee. His initials are J C and

he is a white writer from South Africa who has settled down in Adelaide. He also mentions having published a book named *Dusklands* which we also know is the real Coetzee's first novel. However, unlike Coetzee he is childless. He suffers from incipient Parkinson's and thinks constantly of death and his failing physical health. The third narrative is a monologue by Anya the woman, who Senor C employs to type the manuscript.

In this novel, there is a mixture of facts, opinions and fiction. These make light reading. 'Strong Opinions' are on a variety of subjects. Coetzee and six other eminent writers have been asked to put down their views on contemporary issues by a German publisher. We find Coetzee very outspoken about his opinions. Some of his remarks are scathing. He writes about music, about the university, Tony Blair, Terrorists, Al Qaida and so on.

J.M.Coetzee is highly critical on certain issues. He expresses his opinions strongly in the first part of the page. He says in 'On the Origins of the State' that the concept of the State gives the State immense powers. Once we are in the State it is impossible to come out of it or take away the authority of the State. He says that "those who are "under" the state who "belong to" the state, will find it very hard indeed to change its form; they-we-are certainly powerless to abolish it."<sup>7</sup> The citizen becomes helpless in relation with the State and is powerless against the State. The citizen irrespective of his likes or dislikes has to yield to the power of the State and also its prerogative to use force whenever it wants. The State thus becomes unquestionable. If anyone chose to remain outside the law of the State he becomes an outlaw. The State while protecting the law abiding citizen also protects the law breaker, because it sees to it that the punishment awarded is

commensurate with the crime committed. This is a telling remark by Coetzee because it draws our attention to the legal process.

Coetzee says that ever since we are born, we are born subject, because we exist only if the State issues us a birth certificate or else the citizen has no identity. He is highly critical of birth certificates and death certificates. “Whether the citizen lives or dies is not a concern of the State. What matters to the state and its records is whether the citizen is alive or dead” (*DBY* 5). To issue a death certificate, the State may poke and prod a dead body as it did of the Tsunami victims, says Coetzee. In ‘On Anarchism’ Coetzee refers to the term ‘the bastards’ as used in Australia (Coetzee has been living in Australia since 2002). He says that for the convict it means the men who flog him. “Now, “the bastards” he says are the politicians, the men and women who run the state” (*DBY* 11). The State wins the servitude of the people. They automatically surrender their liberty with or without knowing it. He is also sceptical about democracy. There is a tacit understanding says Coetzee, that the politicians or the so called people who rule us want half of what we have and what we earn. Coetzee does not hesitate to air his views freely.

In his work ‘On Democracy’, Coetzee talks about how in the past the first born of the king would succeed him. But there was no guarantee that he would be a successful king. “As during the time of kings it would have been naïve to think that the king’s firstborn son would be the fittest to rule, so in our time it is naïve to think that the democratically elected ruler will be the fittest”( *DBY* 14). People are more concerned that the absence of the king should not result in civil war. Coetzee says that in democracies we choose our rulers by counting ballots. He is of the opinion that it is similar to tossing a coin and deciding who wins. “but who would dare to claim that the world would be in a worse

state than it is if rulers had from the beginning of time, been chosen by the method of the coin" (*DBY* 14). Coetzee's statements are indicative of his bold outlook.

Coetzee's views are very frank and outspoken. He is highly critical of institutions that do not have any sort of commitment to the cause of the well being of man. He feels that even in a democracy we do not get the right people to rule us. Democracy does not provide for politics outside the system. Hence, Coetzee says, democracy is also totalitarian. This is very true because once the rulers are elected, we have to endure them for the whole term and wait for the outcome of the next election. Discussing Machiavelli he says "Machiavelli says that if as a ruler you accept that every action must pass moral scrutiny, you will without fail be defeated by an opponent who submits to no such moral test. To hold on to power, you have not only to master the crafts of deception and treachery, but to be prepared to use them where necessary" (*DBY* 17). This is a very succinct observation on the part of Coetzee. Power corrupts everyone and those who wish to be in power are people who deceive and are treacherous.

This observation of Coetzee is very apt and shows that people in power are not really good at heart. They resort to all sorts of deception to hold on to power. This becomes acceptable even though people are not happy about it as it becomes inevitable for them. Prior to Machiavelli, moral law was supreme. But Machiavelli believed in breaking the moral law and since then there has been no looking back. He even feels that infringing moral law can be justified. Coetzee thus discusses how individuals can even alter the existing state of affairs by their own arguments, force and power. They are even able to justify their stance.

If we look at the world around us, this is exactly what we see. However there are exceptions also and they are so few that Coetzee ignores even mentioning it. On the whole what Coetzee seems to say is that the State should be in the hands of men of integrity and this is hard to find in modern days. Even democracy is not one of the best forms of government because it also has loopholes. He talks about how Australia being a democracy, is also a land where politics gets 'short shrift.' People are cynical about politics and have contempt for the politicians. But a change can be brought if necessary only within the existing system which acts as an impediment.

'On Terrorism' is a scathing attack on terrorism by Coetzee. In the past also there were terrorist activities. But the U S is hysterical about the terror attacks that happened in their country. Coetzee says "the new foe is irrational ... The old Soviet foes might have been cunning and even devilish, but they were not irrational... They played the game of nuclear diplomacy ... the game would be played by the same rule on both sides"(DBY 19). The Islamic terrorists do not care about survival, individual or national. They only want to wage a war against "God's enemies". (DBY 20). Since the terrorists do not represent any particular State says Coetzee, it is difficult to wage a "war on terror". Thus we note that Coetzee is concerned about the violence perpetrated by the terrorists in the name of God.

Coetzee says that the State enters into contracts with other States though not bothered about how it has come into existence. However, they are unconcerned about the means. Coetzee is highly critical of the suicide bombers. He avers that, they are hardened people who have no anxiety about their lives. They live with a strong feeling that, in dying for the cause of their religion they would be amply rewarded in heaven. Coetzee is fearless

when he makes these remarks. He does not fear any retaliation from the target of his criticism.

Talking about war in the past and wars waged in the present, Coetzee says that those soldiers who embark on suicide missions are not eulogised as heroes. "In today's wars there is no acceptance, even in principle, that the enemy can have heroes"(DBY 29). In the modern world there are no secrets because information is accessible to everybody. Even telephonic and electronic communications can be followed up. However, Coetzee argues that in poetry we can still have secrets. The poet can hide meanings in the lines. The line may mean something other than what it actually seems to be saying. Coetzee is thus evaluating the strength of literature even in days of modern communication. Poetry still has retained its quality to be interpreted.

He says that although people were cynical in 1990s when he wrote about censorship saying that "the new electronic media will make the surveillance and control of communication impossible to carry out" (DBY 22) in the modern age "nothing worth knowing cannot be uncovered in a matter of seconds, and without much effort; private life is, to all intents and purposes, a thing of the past" (DBY 22). Coetzee's observations are very pertinent. Any sort of information can easily be got, as the means of communication is highly sophisticated and accessible to all without any secrecy. The internet accounts can be hacked, telephones including the mobile can be easily tapped. Privacy in the modern world is a thing of the past.

Talking about Al Qaida, Coetzee says that the U.S is paranoid about these terrorists "the U.S 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 are terror attacks by autonomous groups of Muslim radicals”(DBY 31). If they are really so powerful they could have vanquished the whole world. But what Coetzee does not mention is that they have caused enough havoc all over the world. The terrorists are still active around the world and it is the young blood that is being trained in the name of religion. So we cannot disregard Coetzee’s thoughts about the terrorists. They are, indeed, a threat all over the world.

In his work ‘On Universities’ Coetzee makes a pertinent observation about the universities. In the 1980’s and 1990’s with limited funding, universities have turned themselves into “business enterprises, in which professors who had previously carried on their enquiries in sovereign freedom were transformed into harried employees required to fulfill quotas under the scrutiny of professional managers” (DBY 35). According to Coetzee, if at all true scholarship should continue, the scholars should have freedom to carry on with their enquiry. Otherwise the conditions of the universities will not be feasible. At present universities are places where a lot of power mongering goes on. They are money making centres and cease to be advanced centres of learning.

Coetzee is highly critical of the U S policy. “The worst of their deeds we will never know: that we must be prepared to accept. To know the worst we will have to extrapolate and use the imagination” (DBY 42). He feels that the U S is unscrupulous in its dealings with others and there is a streak of wickedness in them. Though the U S is highly advanced we know that their practices are questionable. They involve themselves with other countries only if it helps them enormously and interfere in the affairs of every country provided they benefit out of it. The Americans do not believe in war heroes. About the Japanese kamikaze pilots, the West feels that they are not authentic heroes as

they are suicide missions who treat life as cheap. Similarly, the Americans thought that the Vietnamese soldiers who faced frontal attacks are also not heroes. It is only a fatalistic belief. So Coetzee says that suicide bombers are no longer considered heroic in the modern world.

Airing his views about 'National Shame' Coetzee says that the U S justified the torture of the terrorists. Americans will distort their history because they will not record the bad things they have done. This is a pertinent observation of Coetzee because it puts before us the question as to how reliable the history of any country is. If history does not take recourse to truth and easily distorts things, then history cannot be accepted as truth. This observation is significant because we find that people with vested interests write and rewrite history to suit their needs. Coetzee in his non fictional writings does mention that history is a construct.

Coetzee discusses varied topics in *Diary of a Bad Year*. He talks about a mundane concept like 'curse' highlighting that there is a belief that a curse comes true eventually. The curse is also powerful. This idea is not surprising for an Indian because we have innumerable instances of how curses have come into effect, in our myths, legends and history. Talking about the slaughter of animals, Coetzee mentions the atrocities committed on animals and the lack of concern for them. The "cattle have their hind tendons slashed in order to make controlling them easier..." (DBY 65). Coetzee says about compassionate killing "The notion of compassionate killing is riddled with absurdities" (DBY 65). His views on animal rights are discussed in detail in his fictional work *The Lives of Animals*. The protagonist Elizabeth Costello who is invited to give

lectures at Appleton University airs her views on the killing of animals. It has to be noted that Coetzee himself is a vegetarian.

His views on competition are very pertinent. He wonders why in Australia when things are going smooth, the government passes new laws to make it easier for employers to fire employees, to work harder and for longer hours. The reason given he says is “We will all have to work harder to stay ahead, or indeed even to keep pace” (*DBY* 78). They believe that the Chinese work hard and unless Australians also work harder “they will fall behind and become losers in the great global race” (*DBY* 78). This however is a very relevant observation because everywhere people are in a rat race. Coetzee means to say that life can be lived in a more congenial way and this stress and rat race is unnecessary. Coetzee is appreciative of Australia when he mentions that “Australian society may never –thank God! become quite as selfish and cruel as American society, but it does seem to be sleep walking in that direction” (*DBY* 122). His choice to live in Australia was mainly because he liked the people and also the land. However, he is not happy about the way Australia treats its refugees. He comments, “Plenty of Third World societies treat lepers with equal heartlessness” he says (*DBY* 111).

Coetzee analyses how apartheid came into being in South Africa in ‘On Raiding’. He talks about how the blacks used to raid the whites in the white areas and walk away with whatever they could grab. There were two broad choices. “One was reactive: to define raiding as a crime and to employ a police force to respond to raids by tracking down and punishing the raiders. The other was proactive: to set up boundaries between black and white areas and police these boundaries, defining each unauthorized intrusion by a black into a white area as an offence in itself...the machinery created to police those

boundaries turned into the expensive tentacular bureaucracy of the apartheid state” (DBY 106). Here, Coetzee does not actually talk about why the blacks conducted the raids. This question is left unanswered. Were they the first to initiate action or did the whites provoke them?

Talking about paedophilia, Coetzee says that with the intervention of the feminists, sex on children was punished. He is of the opinion that in both the print as well as the film media there should be a ban on child pornography.

Coetzee is nostalgic about music of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. “But certainly we can say that the quality of yearning, of erotic idealism, so common in earlier Romantic music has vanished probably for good, as have heroic struggle and the striving toward transcendence” (DBY 135).

He talks about after life. He says “But if ‘I’ will in the next life have a kind of existence that ‘I’ as I am now, am incapable of understanding, then Christian churches should rid themselves of the doctrine of the heavenly reward, the promise that good behaviour in the present life will be rewarded with heavenly bliss in the next: whoever I am now I will not be then”(DBY 153).

That Coetzee is a very sensitive person is evident in ‘My Father’. He has his father’s belongings with him. “Who will save them once I am gone? What will become of them? The thought wrings my heart” (DBY 166). He cares for relationships and has this receptive streak about him. However, when we read his fictionalized memoir *Boyhood* we find that he does not show much liking for his father. So we know that, though that was how he felt for his father as a child, he has changed his attitude as an adult. He responds in a manner befitting a son.

Talking about mother tongue, Coetzee says “English does not feel to me like a resting place, a home. It just happens to be a language over whose resource I have achieved some mastery” (*DBY* 197). But we know that is not just some mastery. Coetzee has a very good understanding of English and can deftly handle the language. He goes on to say that among many middle class Indians, there are those for whom English is of similar importance. It is significant that Coetzee is aware of this.

He is highly appreciative of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. “By their example one becomes a better artist; and by better I do not mean more skilful but ethically better. They annihilate one’s impurer pretensions: they clear one’s eyesight; they fortify one’s arm” (*DBY* 227).

Coetzee opines that “...the voice of the narrator has to begin with no authority at all. Authority must be earned;...” (*DBY* 149). and we see that in all the novels of Coetzee the narrator does ‘earn’ authority by keeping the reader of his novels bound to the novel. This is something that not every author is able to achieve.

Coetzee in ‘Strong Opinions’ deals mainly with contemporary issues though philosophical issues are also dealt with. In ‘A Dream’ he talks about death. “All love is moderate in the end. No one will come with one... The afterworld is a sad and subdued place” (*DBY* 159). Hence we see Coetzee ruminating about life and death also. Coetzee says that he believed:

As a young man that only from a self, disengaged from the mass and critical of the mass could true art emerge... But what sort of art that has been, in the end? Art that is not great souled, as the Russians would say, that lacks generosity, fails to celebrate life, lacks love. (*DBY* 170)

Coetzee takes art very seriously. It is not just a vocation for him; it is a commitment to life. Here Coetzee makes a very critical assessment of himself and his work. He feels he had been too reserved a person, quiet and solitary and one observes a trace of regret about this realization.

The writing 'On the body' is a humorous and thoughtful one. He says that we refer to the different parts of our body. Each part has a relation to the whole body. Certain parts of our body regenerate. However, there are certain parts that do not regenerate. When we lose a tooth, even though it does not regenerate we are not upset as much as we would, if something happens to our lips. It is fascinating to note how Coetzee airs his opinions on even simple topics. Whatever he does, he does with conviction.

There are also his thoughts on topics like avian influenza and on counting. He discusses the different ways in which children are taught to count. These writings appear trivial but they are out of the ordinary also.

Coetzee also responds to the surroundings. He talks of the birds and what they would be thinking of him in 'On the Birds of the Air' and there is a moral lesson in 'On Children' "What I forget about children is the unending racket they make. Baldly put, they shout ...One of the first things we should learn along the road toward being civilized: not to shout" (*DBY* 213). Such observations of Coetzee are so down to earth and make one ponder over it. About political life in Australia, Coetzee says that the government should have least interference in the lives of the citizens.

The second section in the novel is the monologue of Senor C. He lives in an apartment and one day comes across a young woman in the laundry room who he finds startling. He tries to make conversation with her. However, Anya, the young lady is not

very interested in responding to him. "As I watched her, an ache, a metaphysical ache, crept over me that I did nothing to stem" (*DBY* 7). Coetzee analyses the mind of an old man who knows he is growing old and his passions are running low. It is interesting to see how Coetzee reveals the thoughts going on in the mind of an old man. When Senor C meets her a second time, in the park, they get to talking. He tells her that he needs a secretary who can type a manuscript for him. She suggests contacting a bureau, but he tells her that he needed some one who "should also have a feel, an intuitive feel, for what I am trying to do" (*DBY* 18). He asks her whether she could do the job and offers a handsome payment. Senor C says "and I mentioned a rate per hour which, even if she had once been the tsarina of hospitality must have given her pause to reflect" (*DBY* 18). On her enquiry, he tells her about what he is writing and she agrees to help him with the typing.

We see the subtle humour of Coetzee when he talks about Anya as his typist. "There are times when I stare in dismay at the text she turns in. According to Daniel Defoe, I read, the true-born Englishman hates. "papers and papery" Brezhnev's generals sit "somewhere in the urinals"" (*DBY* 25).

Once Anya feels insulted in the course of a conversation and she sends a note saying that she would not type for him anymore. Senor C is upset and sends a note back "I cannot imagine handing over the manuscript to someone else. It would be like taking a child away from its normal mother and putting it in a stranger's case. I urge you, please reconsider" (*DBY* 121). After some days Anya does come back.

One day Anya invites Senor C home but Alan insults him. Anya comes to apologise on his behalf. She tells him "Alan and I are going to take a break from each other... A

trial separation” (*DBY* 171). She decides to spend some time with her mother. Senor C promises to keep a copy of the book for her although it would be published in German.

Coetzee analyses the mind of young Anya in relationship with old Senor C. Anya talks to herself:

Let’s look nice for Senor C, I used to say to myself when I was getting ready to pay you a visit in the mornings – for Senor C who must get lonely sitting by himself all day with no one to talk to but the dictaphone and sometimes the birds. Let’s look nice for him so he can stock upon memories and have something to dream about when he goes to bed tonight. (*DBY* 209)

Coetzee in fact has a tongue in cheek manner of laughing at old men who fantasise about young girls. Finally Coetzee has Anya passing comments about Senor C’s writings too.

The third part of the Page is Anya’s monologue. Anya talks about Senor C. She is not really interested in what Senor C writes. “All he writes about is politics-he, El Senor.... It’s a big, disappointment. It makes me yawn” (*DBY* 26). She wants him to write “about the world around you. Write about the birds” (*DBY* 35). Perhaps Coetzee has in mind people who expect something more mundane in his writings.

Anya knows that she turns Senor C on and is quite happy about it. Her lover Alan is jealous about Senor C. He wants Anya to find out about his finances. When Anya asks Senor C why he did not write a novel instead of the Strong Opinions he says “A Novel? No. I don’t have the endurance any more. To write a novel you have to be like Atlas, holding up a whole world on your shoulders and supporting it there for months and years

while its affairs work themselves out”(DBY 54). Perhaps this is why *Diary of a Bad Year* is not written as a regular novel by Coetzee.

Alan is always waiting for a chance to pick on Senor C. He feels he is using Anya, fantasizing over her and even thinks he can sue him, if he uses her in his book. We also have Anya commenting about his strong opinions “you are wasting your pity on the fundamentalists, Mister C. They despise your pity... They have made up their minds ... They don’t mind dying if it helps to bring the day of reckoning nearer” (DBY 75). Both Anya and Alan talk a lot about Senor C and his opinions and even wonder why they should do so. Alan wants to install software in Senor C’s computer whereby he is able to read all his operations. He plans to cheat him of his money.

Thus in both *Slow Man* and *Diary of a Bad Year*, the protagonists are old men who are trying to come to terms with old age and its accompanying loneliness and feeling of loss. Both the protagonists try to lead independent lives. In *Slow Man*, the protagonist Paul Rayment who has lost his leg due to an accident refuses to use prosthesis and lives by himself. He hires a Croatian nurse whom he falls in love with. But she, who has a husband and children does not reciprocate his love. And when Rayment offers to finance his son’s studies, her husband is not happy about it and quarrels with her. In *Diary of a Bad Year* also, the protagonist Senor C has a crush for his neighbour Anya who lives in the same building and hires her as his typist as he is suffering from Parkinson’s disease. Anya lives with a man called Alan and he becomes jealous and suspicious of Senor C. He insults him at his house where Senor C calls them both for a dinner. He gets drunk and abuses Senor C; consequently Anya decides to stay away from Alan and goes to her mother’s place.

Thus, in both the novels Coetzee makes a study of old age accompanied by physical disability-an amputated leg in the case of Paul Rayment and Parkinson's in the case of Senor C. Both protagonists are trying to grapple with and come to terms with their physical and mental state. Both try to establish some relationship with a woman when they realize that their sexual powers are failing them.

*Summertime* published in August 2009 is about the protagonist who is Coetzee himself. He imagines he is dead and Mr Vincent a biographer interviews his relatives, friends and lovers wherein we get to know Coetzee from the view points of these people. This is a very unique approach in novel writing. The book though short listed for the Booker Prize 2009 did not win it. *Summertime* is the last of his trilogy of "fictionalised memoir." The other two being *Boyhood* and *Youth*. *Boyhood* is about his childhood and school days and *Youth* is about his days as a young man working in England and his affairs with many women that he feels was unsatisfactory.

In *Summertime*, subtitled 'Scenes from Provincial Life', we have a self-portrait of Coetzee. Though there are similarities between Coetzee and J C, the protagonist he cannot completely be equated with Coetzee. J.M.Coetzee sees himself through five people- a lover, a relative, a dancer, a friend and a colleague. These people are interviewed by Mr. Vincent who is writing a biography of Coetzee who, he has never met and the interviews are conducted after Coetzee's 'death'. The period that is talked about is between 1972 and 1977. He has some notebooks of Coetzee at his disposal. So J. M. Coetzee writes this book imagining himself to be dead. He does not give us a flattering picture of himself in the book. "The work evades, eludes, gets away from the facts and

finds its own form. The version we see is not the finished biography, but it is the finished novel. It is not life, but art.”<sup>8</sup>

Throughout the interviews with the women, Coetzee is presented as an insignificant and dull person. The novel poses a number of ethical questions on the feasibility of questioning the life of a writer. It seems to say that the writer should be examined only through his writings and not his life. The novel poses very stern questions whether it is proper to be more interested in his personal life rather than his life as a writer. We see Coetzee from the view points of five people who are known to him. The description of himself is far from satisfactory. Coetzee is a stern critic of himself and the novel which is in the line of a biography resorts to self-analysis.

The last part focuses on his ailing father. It is in the description of his father that he opens up. Coetzee presents the father-son relationship in the novel and also his association with his Afrikaner family with many interesting anecdotes. However, he does not hesitate to state his shortcomings when discussing his family and also himself.

The book is more complex than the other two, *Boyhood* and *Youth* his fictionalised memoirs, as far as the relationship between fact and fiction is concerned. The historical J.M.Coetzee is married with two children, but the fictional Coetzee is unmarried and not made for conjugal life. The historical mother died in 1985 but in the novel she dies way back as 1972. The historical Coetzee is not dead contrary to the novel which pictures him as dead.

Coetzee makes us see him from different perspectives. In a way he tries to tease the readers who try to arrive at some information or the other about people through

biographies even when they are fictional. The dynamics at work here is interesting and the perspective about his dead self from the view-point of five others is fascinating.

*Summertime* begins with a journal entry in 1972. It is about a shooting wherein it is not clear whether it is the blacks or whites who are killed. The government is evasive about its comments. "The killings are probably an internal ANC matter."<sup>9</sup> Coetzee's father does not like to read these reports and goes straight to the sports page. The government, his father thinks is:

...at this very moment sitting and calculating how long they can keep the show running (the mines, the factories) before they will need to pack their bags, shred any incriminating documents, and fly off to Zurich or Monaco or San Diego, where under the cover of holding companies with names like Algo Trading or Handfast Securities they years ago bought themselves villas and apartments as insurance against the day of reckoning. (*ST* 5-6).

Coetzee meets a classmate Davis Truscott who did not do well in school but is now a prosperous marketing man. John Coetzee comments:

What does that suggest about the workings of the world? What it seems most obviously to suggest is that the path that leads through Latin and algebra is not the path to material success. But it may suggest much more: that understanding things is a waste of time; that if you want to succeed in the world ... you should not try to understand things but just add up the numbers or press the buttons or do whatever else it is that the marketers are so richly rewarded for doing. (*ST* 14-15)

We should note here Coetzee's subtle sense of humour and this observation is nevertheless, very true. The real good performers in school are not necessarily the successful ones. It is the mediocre ones or the dropouts who really succeed in life, at least materially!

The first person Mr. Vincent, the biographer of the fictionally dead writer John Coetzee, interviews is his one-time-lover Julia. When she is asked about Coetzee and his father, she says, "They were both loners. Socially inept. Repressed, in the wider sense of the word" (ST 20). When we read the journal entries, at the end of the entries there are some comments in italics. The reader is likely to wonder what they are and J.M.Coetzee the writer very cleverly makes Julia ask the interviewer about it and he replies "Coetzee wrote them himself. They are memos to himself written in 1999 or 2000, when he was thinking of adapting those particular entries for a book" (ST 20). This again is a very novel technique of getting the queries that may arise in the reader, cleared within the novel.

When questioned how she met Coetzee she says it was in a supermarket she used to frequent when she was bored. There were not many men then and this man (Coetzee) "was scrawny, he had a beard, he wore horn-rimmed glasses and sandals. He looked out of place, like a bird, one of those flightless birds; or like an abstracted scientist who had wandered by mistake out of his laboratory. There was an air of seediness about him too, an air of failure" (ST 21). She says of him, "he had no sexual presence whatsoever. It was as though he had been sprayed from head to toe with a neutralizing spray, a neutering spray" (ST 24). This is a humorous self criticism by the writer J.M.Coetzee. In the novel *Youth* also Coetzee presents himself as a person not very successful with women.

One day Julia notices that her husband has been cheating on her and he even admits to it. Subsequent to that she had called Coetzee home for a meal. She expresses her surprise with Mr. Vincent when he tells her he had never met Coetzee. But he had decided to meet her because Coetzee had told several people of the great impact she had made on his life. Julia is happy to hear this. She says at first that she does not want to talk to Vincent as she thinks he is some academic newshound. Mr Vincent asks her whether she does not have a high opinion of academic researchers. J.M.Coetzee himself does not have much of an opinion about academic researchers, so he hardly gives interviews. She is however, unhappy that Coetzee never writes about her in his books. “Which to me means I never quite flowered within him, never quite came to life” (ST 36).

She has an affair with him which is more out of spite. She wanted to get even with her husband who was cheating on her. She describes her first time together with him as “Interesting, an interesting experience, but not earth-shaking. But then, I never expected it to be earth- shaking, not with him” (ST 38). This is an extension of what Coetzee thought of himself in the memoir *Youth* when it came to his relationship with women.

Julia is trying to have an affair with Coetzee. She says, “my husband’s infidelities had provoked me to such an extent that to punish him and salvage my own *amour propre* I had gone out, and had a brief infidelity of my own”(ST 43). Mr. Vincent was keen to know about John Coetzee, but in the process of talking about him, he has to listen to her story. So here Coetzee is commenting on how fiction gets written. It cannot exist in isolation, it has to exist in connection with something else. She continues to say, “the story you wanted to hear and the story you are getting, will be nothing more than a matter of perspective” (ST 44). This is a comment on how books get written.

In the course of the interview, where Vincent is keen to know about Coetzee, Julia digresses about her father. Coetzee is here pointing out, how in a novel the novelist digresses on things that do not belong to the plot. When Julia's husband goes away to Hong Kong, she spends the nights with Coetzee, but is not happy with the sexual relationship. "I never had the feeling that he was with me, me in all my reality... In his lovemaking I now think there was an autistic quality" (ST 52).

One day Coetzee the protagonist gives her his novel *Dusklands*. This, we know is also the novel written by J.M.Coetzee. He says he has made up things about his father in the Preface and about Jacobus Coetzee, the ancestor, he says there was really one like that. So here we have the real Coetzee saying things about his novel that it is both fiction and fact. The difference between Coetzee and J.M.Coetzee is brought out here. He also knows of the anomalies- this supposed to be real eighteenth century ancestor quotes Nietzsche. Coetzee is actually playing with fiction and showing us what it is capable of. After *Dusklands*, Julia asks Coetzee what his next project is. He tells her "There is always something or the other I am working on. If I yielded to the seduction of not working, what would I do with myself?... I would have to shoot myself" (ST 60). We know from various sources that Coetzee spends at least an hour everyday writing seven days a week. Writing is something that is second nature to him.

We know that in real life since 1974, J.M.Coetzee has been coming out with one new novel every 3 to 4 years. Coetzee tells Julia that he hopes to survive through the books he has written. "I mean surviving beyond one's physical demise" (ST 61). Julia's husband comes to know of the relationship and questions her. She walks out on him and goes and stays in a hotel. The first day she is happy, the second day she feels lonely, she calls John

and tells him about what has happened. He arrives at the hotel and he spends the night with her and they make love.

The next day Julia calls Mark. But he is furious. Finally, John takes her to his house. She says of him "John was a friend to me during a rough patch in my life, he was a crutch I sometimes leant on, but he was never going to be my lover, not in the real sense of the word" (ST 81). She says "But the fact is, John wasn't made for love, wasn't constructed that way- wasn't constructed to fit into or be fitted into" (ST 81). Julia says about Coetzee, "He makes a living writing reports, expert reports, on intimate human experience. Because that is what novels are about- isn't it? – intimate experience" (ST 82).

We know J.M.Coetzee in his novels examines man in relation to his life. All his protagonists are people who experience life intimately. About his love life Julia says that Coetzee "mistook his mistress for a violin... who was so dumb, so cut off from reality that he could not distinguish between playing on a woman and loving a woman" (ST 83). We know that J.M.Coetzee divorced his wife and he had mentioned in one of the interviews with David Attwell that "Spare prose and a spare thrifty world: it's an unattractive part of my makeup that has exasperated people who have had to share their lives with me."<sup>10</sup> Coetzee is well aware of his nature and acknowledges it. He is always referred to as being a recluse. So Mr. Vincent in his interview with Julia gives us a picture of Coetzee as a lover. He is not passionate; he is rather dull and unexcitable.

The second interview Mr. Vincent conducts is with Coetzee's cousin Mrs. Jonker. He rewrites the story she tells him which makes her rather upset. She asks him whether she really told him that and argues, "When I spoke to you, I was under the impression you

were simply going to transcribe our interview and leave it at that. I had no idea you were going to rewrite it completely" (*ST* 91). Here, J.M.Coetzee is indeed having a dig at interviewers who distort and change whatever is actually said. It is a well known fact that Coetzee never encouraged interviewers.

Margot likes her cousin John. She says that he has forgotten his Afrikaans. When the family questions him about his not eating meat, he is rather embarrassed. Margot holds his hand and reassures him saying everyone has his own preferences. In the night after supper, both John and Margot go for a walk and he thanks her for saving him. He confides in Margot that the Karoo makes him sorrowful. "This place wrenches my heart," he says. "It wrenched my heart when I was a child, and I have never been right since" (*ST* 97). Margot is sensitive about John and understands him, whereas his other cousin says, "He is stuck up. He thinks too much of himself. He can't bear to lower himself to talk to ordinary people. When he isn't messing around with his car he is sitting in a corner with a book" (*ST* 99).

Here we get perspectives of Coetzee from his cousins Margot and Carol. Margot understands him whereas Carol does not. Margot says to Carol, "And he is shy, not stuck up. That's why he keeps to himself. Give him a chance, he's an interesting person" (*ST* 100). Carol tells Margot that he is flirting with her and she is flirting back.

Margot tells Mr. Vincent that he could not write all that she told him about her sister Carol. She tells him, "Yes, but you can't write down every word I say and broadcast it to the world. I never agreed to that" (*ST* 100). J.M.Coetzee is hinting at how interviewers make use of even a tiny slip. They would use anything one says to suit their purpose. J.M.Coetzee means to say that one has to be very guarded with interviewers. Even though

Margot does not want him to write what she has told him about his sister, he only offers to cut it out or tone it down. We get to know quite a bit about Margot's sister Carol from what Margot tells Vincent. We get a picture of Coetzee from her viewpoint also. "About love Carol could teach her cousin a thing or two, she is sure – at least about love in its advanced version" (ST 101).

Coetzee invites Margot for a ride in the farm in his Datsun. Margot is apprehensive whether the car would breakdown but he says he has repaired it. Then they get to talking about Koup. Margot asks whether the word is English and he says it is Khoi, in which it means dry place and it is a noun. Margot wonders where he has learnt all that. He tells her "from the grammar books put together by missionaries in the old days"(ST 103).

When Margot asks him with whom he can speak to in the Hottentot language he says "The dead. You can speak with the dead. Who otherwise...who otherwise are cast out into everlasting silence"(ST 104). When they drive and stop at a café, small black children follow them. One of them also takes the sugar cube from the plate and Margot realizes "how far the old barriers between white and coloured have come down" (ST 105). This was the time when the power of the whites was slowly waning, the blacks were retaliating and trying to take control.

Margot recalls her grandfather who she remembers to be a 'go-getter'. He had worked hard and from humble beginnings he had bought a farm and had become a sheep-farmer.

Coetzee tells her that he wishes to buy a house and some land in Merweville, a small village. He would stay in Cape Town and visit his father regularly. He says that he wants to buy a house here as it was the Karoo. We know from Coetzee's biography and also

from his fictionalized memoir *Boyhood* that he liked the Karoo especially the open landscape.

Margot knows that the society is changing and one could no longer be easy going as the Coetzees are. Margot feels:

In the attitude of Coloured people in general toward whites there is a new and unsettling hardness. The younger ones regard one with a cold eye, refuse to call one Baas or Miesies... The police are finding it harder and harder to come up with information they can trust. (ST 117).

The society is slowly trying to free itself from the whites. They do not want to be subservient to the whites anymore and this is the change that has set in slowly.

As Mr. Vincent narrates what Margot is to have told him, he says that she does not think much about God. "She may not be as good at jokes as the rest of the family, but she does find God a bit of a trial, a bit of a bore" (ST 119). When Margot hears this she tells Vincent "Now I must protest. You are really going too far. I said nothing remotely like that. You are putting words of your own in my mouth" (ST 119) and Vincent agrees to fix it and tone it down. J.M.Coetzee is actually making his comment about how story writers distort facts and write whatever they want. The words and ideas are interpreted to suit them.

John and Margot return home and when the family enquires of their whereabouts, Margot just goes indoors without speaking. Coetzee leaves with Michiel to get the Datsun back. Margot asks Coetzee's father whether they are planning to buy a house in Merweville and whether he would be staying there. Carol immediately says that it was John's plan to abandon his father. He never liked him although he now lived with him.

As he does not earn his livelihood, he lives on what his father earns. She says Coetzee left South Africa to escape the army and he left America because he broke the law and now he cannot find any job because “he is too stuck up” (*ST* 99).

We know that the real J.M.Coetzee did leave South Africa and returned from America because he participated in the anti-Vietnam War demonstrations and was denied citizenship. So here, we know that, J.M.Coetzee is using fact and fiction. We cannot clearly demarcate the difference between the two, unless we have read about him or his fictionalised memoirs. J.M.Coetzee is deliberately using this technique to show us that the dividing line between fact and fiction is very thin, one may overlap the other.

Margot however, always defends John, “He wants a place in the Karoo where he can come when it suits him, where he can sit with his chin on his hands and contemplate the sunset and write poems” (*ST* 128).

Margot wonders as to why John is not married. “But what woman with any sense would want to devote herself to the hapless John?” (*ST* 130). We have now Margot discussing how John’s parents felt when he went away from South Africa. His father kept telling people that John was independent and his mother said that he was working as a scientist in England. His family, “the Coetzees took it to mean he had disowned his country, his family, his very parents” (*ST* 131). When Margot asks John whether he is happy to be back in South Africa he remarks that he never fits in the country and he has no future in it.

Coetzee’s biography reveals that he was forced to return to South Africa because he was denied citizenship in America. He had said in one of his interviews that his two children were born in America and he wanted to continue living there. When Margot tells

him he should not think of putting his father alone in Merweville, he says, "Fathers and sons were never meant to share a house. ... but I am a difficult person to live with. My difficulty consists in not wanting to live with other people" (ST 133). Coetzee has many a time talked about himself in this way.

His colleagues also had talked of how reticent he used to be. One of them had even remarked that in a span of ten years he had seen him smile only once. He tells Margot that he wants to "be able to be alone when I choose" (ST 133). Coetzee by nature is an introvert. In *Boyhood* we know that as a child he was different and in *Youth* also he was not a typical grown up man. He is never a success with any woman. Margot calls him, "An alleenloper, as some male animals are: a loner" (ST 133).

Margot thinks of the happy days of her childhood spent with John and writes a letter to him telling him that he should marry. She receives a matter-of- fact letter from him "and thank you for the good if impracticable advice re marriage" (ST 139).

It is ironical to read a passage where his cousin Margot asks Coetzee to write a best-seller and make lots of money. John replies he does not know how to write a best seller and he wasn't destined to "the fate of being a rich and successful writer"(ST 149). This seems to be Coetzee's way of underplaying his success as an internationally renowned writer.

The interview ends with Margot telling Vincent about her mother who has been hospitalized with a cardiac problem. Margot asks Mr. Vincent why he is writing so much about her, her husband, her sister and her husband when he is actually writing a book on John. J.M.Coetzee is perhaps making a reference to the long digressions we often find in

novels. In most of the novels writers digress from the main theme and offer a panorama of life as it is.

The next person Mr. Vincent interviews is a Brazilian dancer, Adriana. She has come to South Africa with her husband from Angola. There has been trouble in Angola and so they have left the place. In Cape Town her husband finds a job as a security guard. One day he is attacked and hurt with an axe and eventually he dies.

Adriana meets Coetzee who is giving lessons in English to her daughter. One day she invites Coetzee to her flat to tea. She is curious to know who this teacher is who taught English and writes poems as her daughter says. She is not impressed with him; rather she is put off by him. Adriana tells Coetzee that she feels that he is a 'celibataire' "I mean not just unmarried but also not suited to marriage, like a man who has spent his life in priesthood and lost his manhood and become incompetent with women" (*ST* 160). She tries to tell Coetzee that he ought not to be teaching English as he was not an Englishman. "I want her to learn to speak English properly, and with a proper English accent" (*ST* 161).

Coetzee then speaks about the role of a teacher and what a teacher ought to do and what a student receives from the teacher:

Before true learning can occur, I believe, there must be in the student's heart a certain yearning for the truth, a certain fire.... For his part, the teacher recognizes and encourages the fire in the student, and responds to it by burning with an intenser light. Thus together the two of them rise to a higher realm. So to speak" (*ST* 163).

Such should be the relationship between a student and a teacher which is one of give and take. In fact, the teacher should always inspire the student.

Adriana is not happy about what he says. When her daughters leave the room she tells Coetzee “I am paying for her to learn English and get a good certificate. I am not paying for you to play with her feelings” (*ST* 164). Adriana also writes a letter to Coetzee that she meant what she said and repeated that he should not play with her daughter’s feelings- “expose your feelings, expose them outside the classroom” (*ST* 164). She asks her daughter to give the letter to her teacher and to her surprise she gets a note from Coetzee inviting the family for a picnic with him and his father. The girls very much want to go although she tries to dissuade them though she finally agrees to go. The picnic is a fiasco as it rains. Coetzee invites them home to tea but Adriana turns down the invitation saying that Maria Regina has her homework to do.

Adriana then tells Coetzee that he should not be favouring one student because she is pretty by giving special favours like inviting them for a picnic. However, after a few days she receives a letter from him telling her that he would never betray the trust she has put in him as far as her daughter is concerned, but he would like to meet her. Mr Vincent asks Adriana what she did and she replies, “What did I do? I did nothing and hoped he would leave me alone” (*ST* 170). Mr. Vincent asks her whether she has that letter of Coetzee and Adriana gets annoyed and tells him:

...you tell me you are writing a biography of a man who happened many years ago to be my daughter’s English teacher, and now suddenly you feel you are permitted to interrogate me about my ‘relations’? What kind of

biography are you writing? Is it like Hollywood gossip, like secrets of the rich and famous? (ST 170)

She tells him that Coetzee is soft. To this Vincent asks whether she is suggesting that he is homosexual. This is one way J.M.Coetzee perhaps says, how the typical interviewer tries to get stuff from people who they interview. They ask leading questions and see what they can get. But Adriana says she does not mean he is a homosexual, he is “Solitary. Not made for conjugal life. Not made for the company of women” (ST 171).

She tells him that he wrote several letters to her some of which she did not even read and says that if you have fallen in love with someone:

...you do not sit down and type her one long letter after another, pages and pages, each one ending ‘Yours sincerely.’ No, you write a proper love-letter, and have it delivered with a bouquet of red roses. But then I thought, perhaps this is how these Dutch Protestants behave when they fall in love: prudently, long-windedly without fire, without grace. And no doubt that is how his lovemaking would be too, if he ever got a chance.  
(ST 172)

Mr. Vincent asks her whether he can put her photograph and that of her children in the book. She refuses.

No. If you want pictures of the girls you must ask them. As for me, no. I have decided no. It will be taken the wrong way. People will assume I was one of the women in his life, and it was never so” And when Vincent tells Adriana “He was in love with you” she says “... it was not me, it was

some fantasy that he dreamed up in his own brain and gave my name to.

(*ST* 174).

Mr. Vincent asks Adriana whether she remembers more of what Coetzee says in his letters. She tells him that he often speaks of Schubert, the musician. "He said that listening to Schubert had taught him one of the great secrets of love: how we can sublime love as chemists in the old days sublimed base substances" (*ST* 175). She tells Vincent that if Coetzee had offered his friendship that would have been fine. "I was not interested in love; I was still close to my husband, still grieving for him" (*ST* 176). However Adriana says that she would have welcomed his friendship as she has a lot of paper work to do. "Mr. Coetzee could have offered to be my facilitator. A facilitator for me and a protector for my girls" (*ST* 178).

Adriana speaks to Vincent about her husband's death and feels very depressed. When she starts holding dance classes she finds Coetzee enrolled as a student. She is annoyed with him. "I did not greet him. I wanted him to see at once that he was not welcome" (*ST* 182). She recounts to Vincent how one day she had told Coetzee that she detested him. His presence she says is bad for her and her students. But he could not believe why she detested him. "he just stared back at me in bewilderment, as if he could not believe his ears-that the woman to whom he was offering himself could refuse him" (*ST* 184). There is no reaction from Mr. Vincent and Adriana tells him that perhaps he is disappointed with the story. He would have wanted to hear about the romance between her and Coetzee. "Well, I am not giving you romance, I am giving you the truth. Maybe too much truth. Maybe so much truth, that there will be no place for it in your book" (*ST* 185).

J.M.Coetzee is perhaps referring to the fact that a fiction writer cannot put too much truth in his novel which makes an art form lose its attraction. A writer creates from his experiences and observations.

Finally, she goes to her daughter's school and tells the Principal that she wants to remove her daughter from Coetzee's classes. Her daughter is furious with her and accuses her of being jealous. But soon Coetzee stops coming for the dance classes and she finds another teacher for her daughter.

Adriana then puts forth a question to Mr. Vincent about what he feels about Coetzee. Mr. Vincent tells her that "Coetzee was lonely, unnaturally lonely. Perhaps that explains certain – what shall I say? –certain extravagances of behaviour" (*ST* 196). Adriana replies "Maybe in his books, if you read them, you can see the flame. But for me, in the times I was with him I never felt any fire. On the contrary, he seemed to me - tepid" (*ST* 196).

The next interview is with a man called Martin who is Coetzee's colleague. Both of them, he says feel that, "their presence in South Africa was legal but illegitimate" (*ST* 209). Martin left South Africa in 1970 and Coetzee left South Africa for good to Australia in 2002. "We thought of ourselves as sojourners, temporary residents, and to that extent without a home, without a homeland" (*ST* 210). He also points out that both of them "were reluctant to invest too deeply in the country, since sooner or later our ties to it would have to be cut, our investment in it annulled" (*ST* 211). When questioned whether Coetzee is a good teacher Martin replies, "All I can suggest is that a strain of secretiveness that seemed to be engrained in him, part of his character, extended to his teaching too" (*ST* 212).

Mr. Vincent then asks him whether he has any 'special friendship' with his students. Martin asks him whether he is suggesting something for which Mr. Vincent remarks, "The theme of the older man and the younger woman keeps coming back in his fiction," and Martin replies, "It would be very, very naïve to conclude that because the theme was present in his writing it had to be present in his life" (ST 215). Here, J.M. Coetzee expostulates that a work of art need not correspond with the writer's life and in a way discourages people to read his works that way. We face the question as to whether this novel *Summertime* could be treated as an account of his real life or just another fictional work. Perhaps the dividing line between truth and fiction is very thin. Though there are many instances from his real life in this novel there are also many differences. So the novel combines fact and fiction.

Martin asks Mr. Vincent how he chooses the people he interviews and he says it is from the hints provided by Coetzee himself in his notes. Martin opines that then he will be writing a biography which is leaning more to "the personal and intimate at the expense of the man's actual achievements as a writer" (ST 218). He then interviews another colleague of Coetzee's M'me Denoel. Both she and Coetzee have together offered a course in African Literature. When asked why he is depending on interviews more than his notes and diary entries Vincent says, "I have been through the letters and diaries. What Coetzee writes there cannot be trusted, not as a factual record ... because he was a fictioneer ... As documents they are valuable, of course; but if you want the truth you have to go behind the fictions they elaborate and hear from people who knew him directly, in the flesh" (ST 225). Here again, Coetzee seems to say that autobiographies and journal entries need not necessarily stick to the truth. They can be fictitious also.

M'me Denoel says that "Coetzee was out and out apolitical. In fact, he looked down on politics nor did he like political writers, writers who espoused a political programme" (ST 228). She tells him that once a French journalist wanted to interview Coetzee and she is able to convince him to give the interview. But the interviewer wants to know more about Breytenbach from Coetzee than about Coetzee himself.

Coetzee feels insulted when the interviewer refers to Afrikaans as a dialect. He does not get angry but he just becomes silent and refuses to speak, much to the confusion of the interviewer. M'me Denoel says "I found John clever, I found him knowledgeable. I admired him in many ways. As a writer ... he had a certain style, and style is the beginning of distinction" (ST 242). About his writings, she says, "Too cool, too neat, I would say. Too easy. Too lacking in passion. That's all" (ST 242). This is perhaps J.M.Coetzee's comment about his writings. Whether he really believes so or he is only voicing what others may have been saying of him, we really do not know. This may be one way of making the reader understand his works.

In the notes Coetzee describes himself "In laughing he comes bottom of the class. Gloomy fellow: that must be how the world sees him, when it sees him at all. A gloomy fellow; a wet blanket; a stick in the mud" (ST 248). In the last chapter we have in the fragmented notes, the father-son relationship, John's education and so on.

Although *Summertime* was short-listed for the Booker and J.M.Coetzee was a strong contender for the prize, success did not come his way. This novel appears to be even more mature than the other two novels *Life and Times of Michael K* and *Disgrace* which won him the Booker twice. This novel adopts a unique way of narration. Coetzee

imagines himself to be dead and he has a biographer writing about him and the picture he gives about himself is quite critical.

Thus the three novels written after Coetzee left South Africa, are all about the self. Coetzee does not make any reference to South Africa where he had spent a number of years and where almost all the previous novels were written. Coetzee is more into introspection and talks about himself. He is also philosophical. The three novels deviate from the themes of the novels written in South Africa. As a writer ages and reaches a state of maturity in his works, we find that he goes into analysing ontological issues that beset him. This is what Coetzee also does in the last three novels. These novels are set in Australia but he is not concerned with the Australian milieu. Perhaps he would have written the same novels had he been in South Africa. But in Australia he faces no distraction from the society he lives in. In South Africa the post apartheid era would have impinged upon his thought process. In Australia he lives in an environment which is free from any turbulence.

The novel *Slow Man* examines the mind of a man whose mobility is impaired as a result of an accident. He is also losing his sexual powers and this leads to turmoil within him. He tries to reaffirm this power through his relationship with a woman with whom he has sex and also by being benevolent to Marijaana the help who does the household chores and looks after him.

The novel *Diary of a Bad Year* is again about an old man who shows his interest in a young lady. Coetzee analyses the mind of the old man Senor C and the confusions and apprehensions he has. It is thus an almost tongue in cheek account of Senor C that Coetzee presents. The humour is subtle.

The latest novel *Summertime* presents before us Coetzee as a dead man and as seen through the lens of five of his acquaintances. This is a unique novel because Coetzee writes about himself as a dead man. The accounts given by these five people more or less are accounts which Coetzee feels about himself. It is almost a self criticism.

Thus the theme of violence and passive resistance that permeated the early novels is replaced by introspection in these novels. These three novels present the dilemma and confusions faced by an individual and present Coetzee's views about life and people. Coetzee examines questions of selfhood and the desire of man to be loed, cherished and remembered.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Ward Just, Complete review Slow Man, by J.M.Coetzee. New York Times Book Review 12 January 2006 <<http://www.complete-review.com/reviews/coetzeej/slowman.htm>>.

<sup>2</sup> Matt Thorne, Complete review Slow Man, by J.M.Coetzee. The Telegraph 11 September 2005. 12 January 2006 <<http://www.complete-review.com/reviews/coetzeej/slowman.htm> >.

<sup>3</sup> Justin Cartwright, Complete review Slow Man, by J.M.Coetzee. Independent on Sunday 28 August 2005. 10 October 2006 < <http://www.complete-review.com/reviews/coetzeej/slowman.htm> >.

<sup>4</sup> J.M.Coetzee, Slow Man (London:Vintage, 2006) 14. Henceforth referred to parenthetically in the text as *SM* with page number.

<sup>5</sup> J.M.Coetzee, Life and Times of Michael K (London:Vintage, 2004) 104.

<sup>6</sup> David Attwell ed., J.M.Coetzee Doubling the Point Essays and Interviews (USA: Harvard University Press, 1992) 206.

<sup>7</sup> J.M.Coetzee, Diary of a Bad Year (London:Harvill Secker,2007) 3. Henceforth referred to parenthetically in the text as *DBY* with page number.

<sup>8</sup> John Self's Shelves Asylum. J.M.Coetzee: Summertime 31 August 2009. 25 September 2009 < <http://www.theasylum.wordpress.com/2009/08/31/j-m-coetzee-summertime/> >.

<sup>9</sup> J.M.Coetzee, Summertime (London:Harvill Secker,2009)3.

<sup>10</sup> David Attwell ed.,(1992) 20.

## Chapter V

### The Narrative Techniques in the Novels of Coetzee

*And by the way, everything in life is writable about if you have the outgoing guts to do it, and the imagination to improvise. The worst enemy to creativity is self-doubt.*

*Sylvia Plath*

A writer stands apart on the basis of the tools he employs to express his concerns. The effectiveness of a writer is dependent on the narrative techniques that he employs in his works. The novel as a literary form lends itself to many techniques. We have a variety of novels like historical novels, psychological novels, realistic novels, allegorical novels, parodies and so on. As a writer uses these forms he can resort to various techniques to express himself. The success of a writer depends to a large extent on the manner in which he presents the development of the plot. The scholarly stance of a writer becomes evident in the manner in which he handles the narrative. The narrative can have many layers of meaning and it is carefully woven into the fabric of narration by using various techniques like authorial intrusion, dialogue, alienation, deconstruction and so on.

Coetzee positions himself as a writer who engages with a colonial and post colonial discourse. He deconstructs the binary of the centre and the margin. Coetzee's works also tend towards the post modern. However, it is a futile exercise to try to label Coetzee as he does not just fit into one slot as such. Coetzee's intellectual and artistic leanings are informed by various influences like the milieu, scholarship, his rootedness in linguistics and stylistics. Coetzee subverts the dominant discourse of the centre and the margin. His

novels are metafictional and self-reflexive. They refer to historical moments but he deliberately fictionalizes them. The protagonists in some of the novels are physically deformed or mentally traumatized. In spite of these limitations, they face oppression and solve the confusions around them with equanimity. They appear to be repressed but they stand up for freedom. The dream sequence which serves as motif in one of his novels, projects Coetzee's optimism. Coetzee employs intertextuality when he writes his novels. Hence, we have him writing a parody of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and also about the story of Dostoevsky in the novel *The Master of Petersburg*. His language is appropriated from the diction of police reports in some of the novels where he deals with the whites who try to subdue the blacks. They are similar to the reports that are published in newspapers about prisoners who died in detention. The English used by Coetzee's black characters is the same as that used by the whites. Unlike other writers who inevitably made the black characters use a baser variety of English, Coetzee's natives do not do so. He does not attempt to reconstruct history through language.

It was Teresa Dovey's study of Coetzee's novels in her book *Novels of J.M. Coetzee: Lacanian Allegories* that drew a lot of attention to the narrative techniques of Coetzee. Coetzee, Dovey pointed out used parody, allegory and deconstructive techniques in his novels. Attwell, a critic of the works of Coetzee says in his book *South Africa and the Politics of Writing*, "Dovey was able to make the startling but justifiable claim that the novels possessed a preemptive theoretical sophistication that disarmed the critics in advance."<sup>1</sup>

Coetzee's narrative techniques are highly influenced by writers like Beckett, Kafka and Nabokov. A study of the non-fictional works of Coetzee gives certain insights into his fiction. His interviews with David Attwell and the essays edited and published in

*Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*, give us an insight into the scholarly mind of the writer. Dominic Head avers, "The Coetzee style is in effect, a carefully worked out compromise between political obligation or duty, on the one hand, and intellectual integrity, on the other."<sup>2</sup> Coetzee's novels deal with history as discourse. Although he does not attempt to recreate or rebuild history in his novels, his discourse is rooted in historical time. Coetzee himself says that history is not a reality and that history is a kind of discourse. Though Coetzee admits to being influenced by Beckett, Kafka and Nabakov in several interviews, he has evolved a narrative, distinct and particular to him alone. Of course, narrative technique is one of the arresting features of an author. Coetzee uses a variety of techniques in his novels. What is very conspicuous is the space, time and location in his novels. All his novels except for the last three which he wrote after leaving South Africa, are centred more or less explicitly in South Africa, although Coetzee does not overtly state them. His style is sparse, to the point, without elaborate descriptions or authorial intrusions. If it is not the first person narrative that he is using, it is the third person narrative, and the story is told from the point of view of several characters in the narrative. Coetzee is sincerely engaged with the social and political goings-on in South Africa.

In the South African milieu, as in other African societies, art is an integral part of society. Hence, South African writers used this creative form of expression to expound their social responsibility. Writers from South Africa like Athol Fugard, Breyten Breytenback, Nadine Gordiner were socially committed writers who used their fiction to address the socio-political concerns and their resistance to apartheid. Their works addressed the social and political concerns as they believed that writers had a social responsibility. Coetzee who did not use his fiction overtly for this was termed evasive.

However, we should note that Coetzee used his fiction in a very creative manner by employing various narrative techniques to voice his concern for the socio-political reality in South Africa. Most of the writers in South Africa presented a realistic picture of what was happening in South Africa.

The techniques Coetzee uses are scholarly and imaginative. Hence his texts go beyond just being records of the socio-political reality of South Africa. He transforms reality into a work of art and hence his difference as a writer of fiction.

Coetzee is a foil to Lewis Nkosi's statement that all African literature is journalistic. Coetzee uses his protagonists as representative of a genre that opposes the ruling class or the settler. But the opposition exemplified by his characters is different from that of the normal ones. These characters are evolved human beings, who have chalked out a path for themselves. They resist the atrocities and high handedness of the white man in a passive manner. Non violence seems to be the order of the day for them, except perhaps in the novel *Age of Iron* which is primarily about the revolutionary zeal of the youth and the Black Consciousness movement in South Africa. But here also the protagonist Elizabeth Curren finds herself at a loss when faced with the violence around her. She cannot live in the midst of violence and the atrocities in the society around her which kills her spirit, just as the cancer within her body slowly eats her tissues leading to her death. Death comes to her in the refuge of a black man who is always by her side when she needs help.

The novel is epistolary in nature. It is a long letter written to her daughter who has fled to America unable to stand the violence around her. The mother is engaged in a virtual dialogue with an absent child, the daughter who is far away in America. Mrs. Curren is central to the novel *Age of Iron*. The mother tries to restore the lost bond with

her daughter as she writes to her. She starts communicating to her daughter on the day she is diagnosed with cancer which is in an advanced stage. She misses her all the more because of her illness. However, she does not ask her to come back. It is only at the end of the novel that Mrs Curren expresses her longing and her resentment towards her daughter for having abandoned her. The cancer that she is suffering from is symbolic and metaphoric of the times she is living in. The novel moves towards a state of self - discovery. Mrs Curren understands why her maid's son who represents the youth of South Africa rashly faces death.

In his novels Coetzee uses dialogue, narration of an action and also interior monologues whereby we get to know the action of the story and also the development of the characters in the novels. The first novel *Dusklands* explores the beginning of the Afrikaner society along with the 'Vietnamese project' which is based on the American involvement in the Vietnamese conflict. It is a metarepresentational work. The Africa that the protagonist Jacobus Coetzee explores is not actually there. It is what he invents. It is a verbal construct. The journey that he undertakes is allegorical. The story of Jacobus clearly allegorises the entire colonial project. He goes on a journey of discovery and instead of discovering something, he subsumes what is already there. Africa and its indigenous population is constructed as Europe's 'Other'. Hence Europe can imagine and represent itself. The African inferiority and the European superiority is reinforced. The coloniser's contact with the native is conditioned by the colonial discourse. The title *Dusklands* evokes the metaphor of European imperialism. The 'dusk' in question is that of the long 'day' of empire. The 'lands' are Europe's colonies and all places that exist in this symbolic time frame.

The narrative of Jacobus Coetzee comprises three accounts of the same journey. The first is in the form of a journal. The second is in the third person narrative and the third is a translation. The second novel *In the Heart of the Country* is a search for personal identity. The publication of Coetzee's second novel in 1976 confirmed Coetzee as an impressive writer. He developed the theme of violence and alienation which was at the root of western white colonialism. The novel is a first person account of a lonely white spinster, Magda and her solitude. The novel has many allegorical features. After being raped by her servant, Magda lives alone on the farm and invents her metaphysical sky gods with whom she tries to communicate. There is a sense of timelessness in the novel. The novel has been greatly influenced by Beckett's style and substance. It is in the form of a series of fragmented narratives that reflect the fragmented state of mind of the protagonist, Magda. It is written as a kind of journal or first person monologue. Magda is the symbolic daughter of colonialism. The stories she tells are self introspective. The events in the novel are numbered and sometimes subsequent accounts discredit the previous accounts.

*Waiting for the barbarians* which catapulted Coetzee to international fame is an allegorical text. Coetzee examines the imperial theme through the Magistrate who is sympathetic to the natives. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Coetzee critiques the Empire and its activities through the Magistrate who being a servant of the Empire, nevertheless indicts it and is sympathetic to the blacks and the natives. In the delineation of the character of the Magistrate, Coetzee places before us an individual who responds sensitively to suffering and who also becomes a victim of such pain because of this quality in him. For the white man there is no space for sensitivity towards the blacks. If he is so, then he also needs to suffer like the black man. Hence the Magistrate is

humiliated by Captain Joll and his men who represent the Empire for apparently showing his sympathy for the native. Space and time in the novel are indeterminate.

The 'Empire' is an emblem of imperialism. Coetzee universalises the dilemma at the heart of imperial conquest generally. This is an important technique as the reader will not try to find parallels in the novel. This is a unique technique of keeping the reader's attention active on the text of the novel rather than treating it as a record of what is happening in South Africa.

In all his novels Coetzee presents to the reader his engagement with apartheid through the consciousness of his protagonists. The protest against apartheid is presented through characters and very often through the life and activity of one man or woman. These characters are ordinary beings, but extra ordinary in the manner in which they handle suffering and pain. They are not great leaders who strive to transform society. They live in their own small space and time but they emerge larger than life. They are people who act with a purpose who make no compromises on their principles. The Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, although a white man, stands by his principles. He finds that the white man is unnecessarily making intrusions into the black man or the Native's space. He cannot understand why Captain Joll has to encroach upon the black man's freedom. He speaks up for the black man but he pays a heavy price for this act of his. Captain Joll and his men lay their hands on him too. "At a basic level, the Magistrate's story suggests an allegory of the situation of the contemporary South African liberal, facing the fact of complicity in apartheid."<sup>3</sup>

*Life and Times of Michael K* is very much about the South African situation though Coetzee does not state it anywhere in the novel. This is a deliberate technique used by Coetzee. He wants to convey the message that such a condition can exist anywhere in the

world. It is more a human condition than a condition specific to a place or a country. Michael K. is also a protagonist who is an ordinary individual, a gardener in the Municipality, who has his own concept of freedom and lives by his principles.

Coetzee struggles to find a meaningful relationship between his fictional world and his real world. If he depicted the real world as it is, in his novels then he would be no different from the writers who came before him or even his contemporaries. The novelists in South Africa engaged themselves with what was happening in South Africa. They responded to the historical present. The novels of Nadine Gordimer contained realistic representation of the harsh realities of the apartheid era. A few writers including Coetzee, questioned the narrative form. What sets him apart as a writer is his fictional engagement with the real world.

We have to consider the question as to whether Coetzee's characters are mimetic representations. His characters are not types, but are apparently based on real men and women. They all have their individuality. The writer filters the characters' thoughts with some commentary. Coetzee uses the protagonist to unravel the plot, which moves on as they go through various experiences. In the encounter of Jacobus Coetzee with the Namaquas, although he makes an attempt at self-assertion, he is not able to accomplish it as he fails miserably when the Natives belittle him.

In the novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* Coetzee goes to the symbolic to represent the reality. The outpost in the novel is the outpost of the British Empire. Although it is just referred to as the outpost, it is very clear that, Coetzee symbolically represents the outpost as a subsidiary of the British Empire. Captain Joll is symbolic of the evil that is eating into the Empire and his deeds will spell his doom and that of the Empire.

Coetzee does not confine himself to historical details in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. History is used as a minor prop for his discursive debate. In *Michael K* history is just there. The society is in a crisis. The scenario in the novels is the civil war in South Africa which has resulted in unrest and chaos. But the manner in which Coetzee handles this is by placing before us the 'life' and 'times' of Michael K. The novel is centred round Michael K. He is a tramp like character who leads a vagrant's existence. He is Coetzee's literary creation. Coetzee does not make any overt reference to or comment about the civil war which is in the background.

Coetzee is interested more in the impact of the civil war on his protagonist. The novel is the story of Michael K who lives in the backdrop of the civil war. Michael, tries to find a meaning in life by evading people, escaping from people, society and thus the backdrop could have been anything and it need not necessarily have been the civil war. But what gives the novel the authenticity of narration is the truth to the existing state. But that is not Coetzee's major engagement. As in the other novels Coetzee is more concerned about the protagonist who becomes a 'victim' of the existing state of affairs, who has to grapple with his problems, his confusions and his existentialist dilemma in an equally troubling environment.

The novel is preoccupied with social relations. There are a series of episodes where Michael K comes into contact with a character who tries to assert himself by trying to negate him. Coetzee fantasises an escape from history from the painful dilemmas he experiences as a writer in South Africa. K does not bother about the war in Cape Town. There are important autobiographical echoes in Michael K. 'K' is a disguised name for Coetzee. The medical officer refers to K as the obscurest of the obscure. He is referred

to as “a little old man”<sup>4</sup> “a pebble” (MK 135) “an insect” (MK 135) “an ant” (MK 83) “a termite” (MK 66) “a little speck” (MK 97) “a mouse” (MK 136) “a snail” (MK 112).

Attwell says that *Michael K* is:

a novel about a subject who, miraculously, lives through the trauma of South Africa in a state of civil war without being touched by it; we might also appreciate the contextual sensitivities of *Foe*, a novel that, while apparently rich in post modern play, is also a skeptical, indeed scrupulous, interrogation of the authority of white South African authorship.<sup>5</sup>

In *Life and Times of Michael K*, the civil war is being fought trying to make people believe the words of Major Noel, commander of the Kenilworth Rehabilitation Camp. “We are fighting this War”, Noel says, “so that minorities will have a say in their destinies” (MK 215). What Noel is talking about finds parallels in the reality in South Africa. It coincides with the political period. The period about which Coetzee has written in the novel historically tallies with the period when P.W. Botha took the leadership to give adequate representation to the minorities in South Africa which included the whites, the coloureds and the Indians. The black majority was excluded from the system for it was believed that their interests were taken care of sufficiently by the creation of Bantustans. The novel, remarks Attwell, “exploits the unreality of the state’s efforts at constitutional reform; ....”<sup>6</sup> The South Africa that Coetzee presents in ‘*Michael K*’ is one of utter lawlessness, curfew, riots, looting by the poor and corruption on the part of the rich. “In socio-political terms, it is a finely drawn and sophisticated picture ... the point of this kind of fiction is rather to analyse the hidden propensities of the *present* from the perspective of an imagined future.”<sup>7</sup> Coetzee minimises the importance of the civil war and keeps it in the background of the novel. The war is not described at all. The political

concerns are totally absent. What we see is the common, everyday problems of the protagonist. This is a conscious technique employed by Coetzee. Coetzee focuses on confrontations which are concerned with individuals and not with war. He presents the greed and cruelty of man rather than what happens during the war at large. Although Coetzee does not give much importance to the war, he deals with a variety of other conflicts. The relationship between Michael and the Medical Officer is similar to the relationship between the Magistrate and the barbarian girl. The novel stands for the quest for freedom. Michael is looking for freedom. He wants to be away from people and from society. Finally he finds it. "At the end of the novel Michael has some tentative understanding of himself, his life, and his achievement, and consequently it is tempting to see the novel as having the narrative progression of a quest, in particular a quest for freedom."<sup>8</sup>

Coetzee places before us the story of Michael K in the novel. He does not wish to draw any moral or highlight the chaos which is rampant in the society at that time. Coetzee portrays in the character of Michael K, a native with a strong will, who does not intend to surrender to the highhandedness of the whites. Throughout the novel we see that Michael K offers resistance and this is done very passively. Ultimately he emerges victorious.

We need to examine where Coetzee locates himself vis a vis South Africa. Is he standing outside the South African society and making an appraisal or coming to judgments or is he within the society, being part of it, giving a frank expression of what it stands for, its institutions, power relations, human interactions, state vis a vis people, whites vis a vis blacks or blacks vis a vis blacks? We find that Coetzee is more concerned about putting before the reader the happenings in South Africa which is under the

apartheid regime. He is neither judgemental nor does he offer any solutions to the existing situation, although he is a witness to the social and political events.

Another technique Coetzee uses in his novels is the way in which he presents his characters who are inevitably isolated individuals. In the first novel, it is Jacobus Coetzee and Eugene Dawn who are the lonely people. Eugene Dawn becomes obsessed after he is asked to prepare the report for the Defence Department on the Vietnam war. In the motel room he attacks his son with a knife. He is sent to a mental hospital where he is an exemplary patient. Jacobus Coetzee is also an isolated character and because of his seclusion, he resorts to violence and revenge. The protagonist Magda, in the novel *In the Heart of the Country* is lonely. Her psychological loneliness is stronger than her physical separation.

In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the outpost is a remote area. Throughout the novel, the Magistrate feels cut-off both from his people and from the 'barbarians' although he does not want it to be so. However, the protagonist of *Life and Times of Michael K* is different. He seeks isolation; he wants to be away from human society. However after his mother's death he leads a life all by himself in the lap of nature, cultivating a small patch of land. He is happy being by himself and unhappy when he is sent to a rehabilitation camp. In *Foe* there seems to be a stylistic departure. There is a socio-political subtext below the narrative surface. In the novel *Foe*, Crusoe, the prototype of Defoe's Crusoe is happy, whereas Defoe's character is not. Similarly Friday, the Negro is also happy to be in isolation. In *Age of Iron*, Mrs Curren, the protagonist experiences loneliness at a psychological level. Her daughter is away in America. However, later she gets involved in the turmoil the country is facing. The woman enters into a strange relationship with Vercueil who is obviously a native.

In *The Master of Petersburg*, the fictionalised Dostoevsky also faces isolation because he has been alienated from his son. In the novel *Disgrace* also, we have Lucy who lives in a remote farm and David Lurie, her father who is forced to go into seclusion for having sexually harassed a student. Thus we find a similar pattern in the novels of Coetzee.

Coetzee uses repetition as a narrative technique in his novels. In *Dusklands*, we have The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee in three different versions. The three subtexts narrate different versions of the same subject. This sort of structure allows Coetzee to question the veracity of the three accounts implying that any history is a construct.

Coetzee problematises the native, and provides a space to the native. It is similar to how modern theoretical discussions problematise the space of the native in the form of a symptom of the white man. We wonder whether Coetzee's native gives the white man an existence because of him or the white man is a creation of himself. We find in Coetzee's novels that the native is not the rebellious, angry type. He is mature but passive as though he has understood the meaning of life and given up the battle. It is the white man in Coetzee's novels who is perturbed, disturbed, angry and at conflict with himself. This is a change from the customary image of the white man projected in other novels about natives. The white man is unsure of himself and uneasy in the power equation between himself and the Natives.

Coetzee identifies the native as a victim of circumstances, who nevertheless, is not after all, a victim in the real sense, as he does not leave the white man comfortable. However, Coetzee does not give the native a voice in the narrative. Silence is the native's share. Through this passivity he is able to defeat the white man's wish to subjugate him. Although the victory may not be quantifiable, it is only felt as we see the white man

stripped of his mask- his façade of being the superior. Coetzee's natives are not Spivak's subalterns who cannot speak. They are natives who choose not to speak. By their silence they register their protest. This pattern can be seen in many of the novels of Coetzee. Most of his protagonists are able to express themselves through their silence.

In studies conducted by feminists about women in the Third World countries it was found that women had common concerns about family, dignity and social interactions. However, they were thwarted in their actions by the lack of freedom available to them. In Coetzee, the women characters do not seem to lack freedom. They are victims of social and political hegemony. Coetzee's women characters are not commodified. They are individuals in their own right who have a space of their own. They are however in conflict with themselves. Magda is constantly battling with herself for her position in her father's house. She is wrought by jealousy and when her father comes home with his bride, she is overwhelmed with thoughts that threaten her position in her father's house with the arrival of her father's new bride. Again, it is the power relations within a hierarchical order that Coetzee addresses. Here, it has nothing to do with the master-slave or 'us' and 'they' power equation. Magda is battling it out all alone and she solves the conflict all by herself. She enters into a communiqué with the sky gods who alone, she believes understands her. In order to atone for her father's treatment of Anna Kleine, she invites Hendrik, the farm hand and his wife Anna to live in the house instead of the quarters. But, ironically she is raped by Hendrik. However, she does not repent having called them in. She feels that Hendrik has taken his revenge on her for what her father has done to his wife.

We find a similar attitude expressed by Lucy (the white woman) in the novel *Disgrace* which is clearly about decolonization and its aftermath. She too feels that the

three blacks who has raped her and assaulted her father, are only settling scores with the white man for his atrocities. So Coetzee does not stereotype his characters in the narrative. They act, whether white or black, according to certain principles they believe in. In *Disgrace* we see the whole process of decolonization. The narrative techniques Coetzee employs are the thoughts presented to the reader by the protagonist, David Lurie. The plot moves on with the thought process of Lurie presented to us. The phenomenon of decolonization is presented in the violent episode where Lurie is assaulted and Lucy raped by three blacks. Lurie admits to having committed a transgression. His expulsion from the University is a disgrace for him. He goes to his daughter's farm and it is here where his personal transformation begins.

The girl whom the Magistrate takes with him to live with him in the novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* also has a mind of her own. She registers her protest, though with her passivity. She does not speak, she is silent. She also does not yield herself to the Magistrate; or rather he cannot penetrate her. She seems to be inscrutable. It is only when they leave the frontier and enter the native territory that their relationship is consummated. So is Michael K. in *Life and Times of Michael K.* Coetzee through the narrative of Michael K. establishes the need for freedom and studies the struggle of a man who all alone fights the system out, the system which wants to include him, yet he wants to stay out of it and he proves that it is possible, although with some hardships. The system gets frustrated trying to 'reform' Michael K. but not vice versa. In this novel Coetzee examines "the historical and discursive conditions under which white South African authorship must operate – a typically cautious gesture of qualification on Coetzee's part."<sup>9</sup>

The novel *Foe* uses altogether a different narrative structure found in Coetzee's oeuvre. Coetzee uses the narrative to intellectually engage with the writing process and the relationship of the author with what he writes. Hence, we have Susan Barton who is the narrator in the novel telling us the story of her shipwreck and her past, along with the story of Cruso and his slave Friday, drawn as a parody of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. In the process, she is seeking out an author who would write her story. She meets (De)Foe who agrees to write her story and Cruso's story. But she knows that their story cannot be written excluding the story of Friday, the black man. Coetzee hints that no story of South Africa is complete without the story of the Native. Although the Native does not speak for himself, he needs to be spoken to, and spoken about. Otherwise there is no story of South Africa.

The novel *Foe* is divided into four sections. In the first part we have Susan Barton narrating her story, her memoir, in the second we have a series of letters that she writes to Foe. Here, Coetzee uses the epistolary form. Then we have an account of Susan's relationship with Foe and finally we have an unnamed narrator speaking. It is in the first person present tense narrative form. This anonymous speaker could possibly be the author, Coetzee himself. This speaker revisits history with the freedom of an author. The novel ends with the narrator interrogating the mouth of Friday trying to listen to what words will emerge from his hitherto silent orifice. In the novel, Coetzee pays more attention to the act of story telling and as Ina Grabe says, "the novel clearly participates in postmodernism's favouring of the signifier over the signified."<sup>10</sup> Friday cannot speak as his tongue is mutilated. Therefore, the world of Friday (the world of the Native) is inaccessible to the white man (Cruso here). Coetzee is indirectly suggesting that the anti-native attitude of the white results in the native remaining inaccessible to the white. The

white starts to feel confident of himself, thinking that he can civilise the natives, but his efforts are thwarted as the native will not open up. Hence they resort to violence and this becomes an anti-humanist stand on the part of the white man. Friday cannot speak. Neither can his story be effaced. Susan Barton realises that she cannot exclude the story of Friday in her narrative. On her return to England with Crusoe and Friday, Crusoe dies on the way. This is symbolic because Crusoe never wanted his story or (his)tory to be remembered. He is comfortable on the island and he is not keen on leaving it. But he has to, on Susan's insistence, and his death is only symbolic of his reluctance to be a part of the civilised world. Susan is now left with Friday and she walks the streets of London with Friday, although she would have loved to be away from him. She cannot abandon him. Friday becomes a burden to her until she finds a vessel to ship him to his native land. "Crusoe, rejecting post-colonial dispossession had died and was buried at sea, at the bottom of which, we can assume, he still lies, his discourse forgotten."<sup>11</sup>

Although Friday is mute because he has no tongue, he is never colonised mentally. Coetzee shows that although Susan and Foe have their own project, Friday has yet not involved himself in it, but Coetzee hints at a collaborative project that will ultimately lead to the truth. Barton knows that only if she brings out or unravels the story of Friday's life her narrative will be complete. Chris Bongie in the essay "Lost in the Maze of Doubting": J.M.Coetzee's *Foe* and the politics of (un)likeness" argues: "The problem of (un)likeness is foregrounded throughout the novel, beginning with its very first paragraphs, which put into play an emphatic series of similes pointing in two very different directions: towards the diversity of the material ("like a flower of the sea, like an anemone, like a jellyfish of the kind you see in the waters of Brazil") and, on the other hand, the totality of the abstract ("like all the saved"). Language occupies the

intermediate space between these two extremes, a space of (un)likeness that marks the absence of the very things it evokes.”<sup>12</sup>

Susan Barton on the insistence of Foe tries to teach Friday how to write. She draws a picture of a house and writes h-o-u-s beneath it. She avoids ‘e’ the last letter. Then she also teaches him to write the words – ‘ship’, ‘Africa’ and ‘mother’. When she asks Friday to write on his own starting with ‘ship’, Friday writes h-s-h-s-h-s on and on. Friday, Coetzee seems to say, is rewriting what the coloniser has taught him in his own terms. It may be a gesture where he decolonises what has been done by the coloniser. Barton is unhappy about this reversal but Foe accepts it.

The sense of guilt for having abandoned his son is a recurrent motif in *The Master of Petersburg*. The novel is set in Russia in late 1869. The father mourns the death of his son Pavel, who dies under mysterious circumstances in Petersburg where he is a student. He realises after the death of his son that he has failed to understand his son. The novel is a journey of self- discovery. He re-appropriates his role as a parent symbolically.

In *Elizabeth Costello* and *The Lives of Animals* Coetzee uses the narrative to address certain issues which are of prime importance to him. Through the character Elizabeth Costello, Coetzee talks about animal rights. They are in the form of lectures that she gives at a University in the U.S. where her son works. Coetzee airs his strong views against meat eating through the character of Costello. Through Costello, Coetzee expresses his views on the treatment of animals by human beings, violence and evil in literature. Costello seems to be a spokesperson to discuss views that the author holds. Coetzee is perhaps exploring the uses fiction can be put to and the effectiveness of such a method instead of a straight forward lecture or argument.

In the novel the dividing line between fact and fiction is blurred. The title of the novel *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons* is in itself ambiguous. Six of the lessons, Realism, The Novel in Africa, The Lives of Animals: The Philosophers and Animals, The Lives of Animals: The Poets and the Animals, The Humanities in Africa and The Problem of Evil are in fact lectures delivered by Coetzee to various audiences. *Elizabeth Costello* in its form is a fictional narrative.

Throughout his writing career, Coetzee distances himself from his writings. The author stays away, never wanting to be there. It is through the first person narrative that is, the protagonist speaking or otherwise through the third person narrative, that the plot unravels.

When we analyse the narrative of Jacobus Coetzee, we see motifs and mythical images. Jacobus Coetzee is presented as a traveller who goes into the interior land of the Namaquas, the natives. *Dusklands* is a profound meta representational work. It foregrounds the strategies used by Europeans to project the 'Other'. Jacobus rides like a God through a world only partly named. He tries to project a similarity between colonisation and divine creation. Coetzee is also aware of historical time and he juxtaposes it with the time of narration. The motifs he uses are symbols of consciously constituted ideas. The characters in the narrative are not merely types. They are individuals in their own right, whether they are whites or blacks. The characters are built from the different facets of the authors' psyche and his world of experience.

Attwell says "J.M. Coetzee's use of sources would seem to be directly related to his critical intentions with respect to white nationalism, which found the confrontational version useful to its purposes."<sup>13</sup> Jacobus Coetzee also uses the first person narrative at the beginning of Part 2 in the novel. Attwell further avers: "J.M. Coetzee therefore omits

cordial exchanges from the record and adds desertion. The immediate purpose would seem to engineer a certain consistency: .... The deeper and more salient purpose, however, is that these alterations radically turn the narrative into a game of power.”<sup>14</sup> Jacobus Coetzee comes back to Namaqualand to conduct a raid on his servants who has deserted him to reassert his authority.

*Boyhood, Youth* and *Summertime* are often referred to as fictionalised memoirs of Coetzee. *Boyhood* is a memoir written using the third person narrative in the present tense. The narrator is outside the narrative and hence we get to know the life of the young boy from his point of view. We see the working of the mind of young Coetzee. We see him forming his judgements, coming to conclusions by his conditioning, “Women don’t ride bicycles: what if his father is right? If his mother can find no one willing to teach her, if no other housewife in Reunion Park has a bicycle, then perhaps women, are indeed not supposed to ride bicycles.”<sup>15</sup>

The young boy is very reticent. He wants to lead a life of secrecy. He loves his mother, yet does not want her to know all about his life. He is very secretive with his mother. “He shares nothing with his mother” (*BH* 5). He wants her love, yet does not want to admit it. He admires her courage. He likes his mother’s refined ways and is critical of his father’s uncouth mannerisms. *Boyhood* is autobiographical, as it tells the story of Coetzee’s childhood. However, it is not confessional. Coetzee believes that all writing in a larger sense is autobiographical. Coetzee’s use of the third person narrative brings in a distinction between autobiography and biography.

Autobiography is what is written from one’s memory. In *Boyhood* it is Coetzee’s memory but it is told from the third person narrative standpoint. He provides shape to memory by reflecting on the events and his reaction to these events of his life.

Both *Boyhood* and *Youth* follow the real life of Coetzee- his childhood and his life as a youth in England, his career as a computer programmer. The style of these novels, using present tense third person narrative with no retrospective self-analysis makes it different from the typical autobiography. It is more a work of fiction. This style that Coetzee employs, enables him to distance the protagonist of the novel and the writer. Tim McIntyre contends:

The use of present tense foregrounds the textual production of these works in the present by the Coetzee of today, while the third person emphasises the distance between the author and his remembered self. The result is a hybrid protagonist: a past self, both alien and vividly present within the present one, a memory that is fallible, distorted, recalled and recreated from the present state.<sup>16</sup>

Thus Coetzee uses the present tense and third person narrative to talk about the happenings in the society and to distance himself from the events. Both *Boyhood* and *Youth* recount events in retrospection but not as much as is done in autobiographies.

*Boyhood* is the story of a boy growing up in apartheid South Africa, well aware of his complicity in the multiethnic world of South Africa. Coetzee's attitude towards his father as a growing boy, is that of a jealous child who does not want his mother to share her love with the father. So he secretly nurses vengeance against his father. Though he does not want to appear dependent on his mother, he wants her with him always. He wants her to be at home, waiting for him when he returns from school. At the same time he does not open up with his mother. The young boy detests love: "When men and women kiss in films, and the violin plays low and lush in the background, he squirms in his seat. He

vows he will never be like that: soft, soppy” (BH 121). The boy does not want constant attention from her:

He yearns to be rid of her watchful attention. There may come a time when to achieve this he will have to assert himself, refuse her so brutally that with a shock she will have to step back and release him. Yet he has only to think of that moment, imagine her surprised look, feel her hurt, and he is overtaken with a rush of guilt. (BH 122)

Such are his mixed feelings about love. He loves his mother, yet does not want to share his secrets with her. There is a reluctance to accept parental control. In *Boyhood* Coetzee presents how children in school negotiate with the teachers. The teachers use the cane very frequently. Each teacher has a distinct cane and each cane has its own character. They are weapons of harassment. Miss Oosthuizen, the class teacher of Class III is cruel with the cane. She hates a boy Rob Hart, by name, the oldest in the class. She wreaks vengeance on him by flogging him. But Rob Hart never cries. After the flogging session, it is Miss Oosthuizen who “heaves at the breasts, and seems on the brink of tears-of tears and other outpourings also....” (BH 6).

The novel is an intimate record of how a young boy’s mind works. We see the childhood of the young Coetzee as narrated by him. However, it is the third person narrative that Coetzee uses. The use of the third person narrative is deliberate because it gives him the freedom to discuss his life candidly, as if he is talking about someone else. It allows him to distance himself from the course of events in his life so that he is able to talk about it very freely. Coetzee feels that he is different from the other boys. This is made obvious throughout the novel. His family speaks English at home, though they are

not English. He has not been beaten by his teachers, he never would want that to happen too. His feet blister when he has to walk bare-foot. All along he feels lonely.

Coetzee is critical of himself when he makes an assessment of himself, "At home he is an irascible despot, at school a lamb, meek and mild, who sits in the second row from the back...By living this double life he has created for himself a burden of imposture" (*BH* 13).

As he recalls his acquaintance with his classmates, Coetzee comes upon certain revelations. It is like an interior monologue. When he is found by one of his classmates, lying on his back under a chair, he is asked what he is doing and he replies that he was thinking. "Soon everyone in his class knew about it: the new boy was odd, he wasn't normal. From that mistake, he learned to be more prudent. Part of being prudent is always to tell less rather than more" (*BH* 29). The young boy Coetzee is very attached to his mother. "He is too close to his mother, his mother is too close to him" (*BH* 37).

Even as a boy, Coetzee is intrigued by the fact that the black boy is kept away from the society. He feels "this boy, who is a living reproof to him, is nevertheless subjected to him in ways that embarrass him so much that he squirms and wriggles his shoulders and does not want to look at him any longer, despite his beauty" (*BH* 61). He is happy when his mother refers to the old native as 'wise'. It is a great relief for him to hear that. The young Coetzee feels sad when he sees the coloured boys. "He thinks of Afrikaners as people in a rage all the time because their hearts are hurt. He thinks of the English as people who have fallen into a rage because they live behind walls and guard their hearts well" (*BH* 73).

Coetzee traces how the young boy in him grows up. He no longer enjoys riding the cycle. He is conscious of his mother's love for him. We see the young Coetzee observing

people and events around him and making shrewd judgements. The young Coetzee is a mature child, self-conscious like Coetzee who remains so as a grown up.

The novel *Youth*, again a fictionalised memoir, uses the third person narrative in the present tense. The novel is more of an introspection into his character. Coetzee examines the workings of his mind, what he thinks of himself and his relationship with people. He is again very critical and scathing in his remarks about himself.

Coetzee makes a reference to the police shoot out on Africans who protest against the Pass Laws. Then he recalls how it is unsafe to go out into the streets. He remembers how, when he is taking a class, a senior lecturer strides in and announces that there is a “workers march taking place along De Waal Drive. For reasons of safety, I am asked to announce that no one is being allowed to leave the campus, until further notice...”<sup>17</sup>

When unrest begins to escalate, Coetzee decides to leave the country. He wants to go to a city where he can work and also pursue the arts. He chooses London. He finds a job as a programmer. He gets involved with women, but his affairs are never successful.

However he is not happy with his work at IBM. “The building, a featureless block of concrete and glass, seems to give off gas, odourless, colourless, that finds its way into his blood and numbs him, turning him into a zombie”(Y 47).

He regularly visits the library and starts reading Ford Madox Ford as he has registered for his post-graduation in English literature at the University of Cape Town in absentia. He also reads magazines on poems “where he pores over them, trying to work out who is writing what, where he would fit in if he too were to try to publish” (Y 58).

Talking about the writing of poetry, he recalls Eliot’s words which he had copied into his diary- “Poetry is not an expression of personality but an escape from personality”(Y 61). About prose, Coetzee opines, “Prose, unfortunately, does not demand emotion: there

is that to be said for it. Prose is like a flat, tranquil sheet of water on which one can tuck about at one's leisure, making patterns on the surface" (Y 61).

The narrative unfolds the development of Coetzee as a writer. He, at first, attempts writing poetry. But later gives up. Then he makes an attempt to write prose in the manner of Henry James. "He sets himself exercises in the style of James. But the Jamesian manner proves less easy to master than he had thought" (Y 64).

In the narrative, Coetzee explores his character. A neighbour, an Indian invites him over for food and he wants to reciprocate, but he does not. He muses:

There must be some gesture to make, some simple act of reciprocation, but he cannot find it, or else will not, and it is fast becoming too late anyway. What is wrong with him? Why does he make the most ordinary things so hard for himself? If the answer is that it is his nature, what is the good of having a nature like that? Why not change his nature? (Y 95)

It is strange that the young Coetzee has left South Africa to escape the chaos there. It is even stranger that he wants to cut all bonds with the past. He is also not happy with his doting mother who keeps writing letters to him week after week. "How can he make her accept that the process of turning himself onto a different person that began when he was fifteen will be carried through remorselessly until all memory of the family and the country he left behind is extinguished?" (Y 98).

Coetzee is unhappy being at IBM and resigns. His superior is annoyed and when he asks for the reason, he replies:

"I was hoping for friendships." he says when asked by his superior

"And what, may that be?"

"I was hoping for friendships."

“You find the atmosphere unfriendly?”

“No, not unfriendly, not at all. People have been very kind. But being friendly is not the same thing as friendship.” (Y 107)

Coetzee eventually meets an Indian, Ganapathy by name, whom he befriends. Ganapathy is not happy with England and tells Coetzee that he should go to America. However, Coetzee does not think it is a wise decision. The novel ends with Coetzee ruminating about how he is not able to write and compares it with his inability to fall in love. “He is well aware that his failure as a writer and his failure as a lover are so closely parallel that they might as well be the same thing” (Y 166).

*Summertime*, the third fictionalized memoir of J.M. Coetzee subtitled ‘Scenes from Provincial Life’, begins with notebook entries of Coetzee of the years 1972, 1973 and 1975. The biographer who sets out to write on Coetzee, interviews a woman called Julia, who according to him influenced Coetzee. Julia ends up talking more about herself than about Coetzee. J. M. Coetzee as a writer, is making a point here by showing how biographers gather information and how details are modified. The narrative ultimately is in the hands of the writer. Julia avers:

You commit a grave error if you think to yourself that the difference between the two stories, the story you wanted to hear and the story you are getting, will be nothing more than a matter of perspective – that while from my point of view the story of John may have been just one episode among many in the long narrative of my marriage, nevertheless, by dint of a quick flip, a quick manipulation of perspective followed by some clever editing, you can transform it into a story about John and one of the women who passed through his life.<sup>18</sup>

As in *Youth*, Coetzee is very critical of his love relationships. He feels that he is not a success with women. In the numerous affairs he mentions in *Youth* he projects himself as an ineffectual lover. So too, Julia says about her sexual encounters with him, "In his love making I now think there was an autistic quality. I offer this not as criticism but as a diagnosis, if it interests you" (ST 52).

Julia discusses how Coetzee has gifted her, his first novel *Dusklands*. Talking to her about books, Coetzee says that if books one writes are read after one's death too, "It affords me some consolation to cling to that prospect" (ST 62).

Julia concludes the interview by making a categorical statement of Coetzee. When her husband rages with her when he discovers that she is having an affair, she stomps out of the house and moves to a hotel. Coetzee takes her home and she has a fulfilling night with him. She thinks:

John saw or guessed what was going on in me and for once opened his heart, the heart he normally kept wrapped in armour. With open hearts, his and mine, we came together. For him it could and should have marked a sea-change; ...It could have marked the beginning of a new life for two of us together." (ST 84 )

Thus through the character of Julia speaking to his biographer, Coetzee himself gives us a critical assessment of himself as a lover through Julia's conversation. This is a novel way of using narrative to make a character study. J.M.Coetzee means to say that conversation or interview can be a narrative technique to build up a character. Here the novelist can stand outside and at the same time, it could be like a first hand version of the character's study, because it is an assessment by a person who knows the character Coetzee.

The second person whom the biographer interviews is Coetzee's cousin Margot who has a soft corner for Coetzee. The biographer tells her that he has made their conversation into a sort of narration and reads it out to Margot. It is interesting to note the technique Coetzee uses here. As the biographer reads out the narrative, Margot suggests a few changes in the words and sentences used. When he says "In private moments, the survivors have intimations of their own end, and shudder" (*ST* 88). Margot objects to it and he says he would replace that with "Among the survivors, the joking has grown more subdued..." (*ST* 88). As the biographer narrates, Margot clarifies certain of her doubts. This is interesting as it shows how something gets written. Coetzee is hinting at the process of writing.

None of his relatives appreciate him because they feel that he had left South Africa to escape conscription. They think that subsequently he had ended up as a criminal in America and returned to South Africa in disgrace. Margot is the only one who understands Coetzee. However, she finds it strange that he has not found a girl. But she knows he cannot get along with anyone. He lives with his father and is not happy about it. So he wants to buy a house in Merweville and put his father there. He would visit him every week. "My father and I can't live together indefinitely, Margie. It makes us too miserable, both of us. It's unnatural. Fathers and sons were never meant to share a house" (*ST* 133). When Margot tells him that his father does not look as if he is a difficult person to live with, he says "Perhaps; but I am a difficult person to live with. My difficulty consists in not wanting to live with other people" (*ST* 133).

This section of the novel is mostly in the form of Margot's interior monologue interspersed here and there with dialogues with Coetzee, her cousin. J.M.Coetzee again stresses upon the fact that he is incapable of love. Margot and her husband have a very

fulfilling love relationship “whereas her cousin... She cannot imagine her cousin giving wholeheartedly to anyone. Always a quantum held back, held in reserve” (*ST* 134).

It is ironical that when Margot visits Coetzee in Cape Town when her mother is hospitalized and they get to talk, Margot asks him why he cannot have a better house “But why not buy a better house here in the Cape? Write a book. Write a bestseller. Make lots of money”(*ST* 149). Coetzee says:

“I would not know how to write a bestseller. I don’t know enough about people and their fantasy lives. Anyway, I wasn’t destined for that fate.”

“What fate?”

“The fate of being a rich and successful writer.” (*ST* 149)

Coetzee says this of himself in 2009, when he had already won 2 Bookers and the Nobel! Coetzee is playfully making an understatement here.

The third interview is with a Brazilian ballet dancer, whose daughter is Coetzee’s student for extra English classes at school. She is angry that her daughter is enamoured of her teacher, Coetzee. She writes a letter to him asking him not to play with the feelings of her daughter. In reply she receives a letter by post, in which Coetzee invites her to lunch. She says of Coetzee “No, not sexless. Solitary. Not made for conjugal life. Not made for the company of women” (*ST* 171).

During the course of the interviews the biographer gets to know more about the life story of the women he interviews than about Coetzee, on whom he wishes to write a biography. Perhaps J.M.Coetzee the writer is trying to tell us that this is how it is when one sets out to write a biography.

Senhora Nascimento is very critical of Coetzee. She feels he is after her daughter. Later he makes his advances to her, writing love letters which are so dry. She does not reply. She sums him up to the biographer:

He was not a man of substance. Maybe he could write well, maybe had a certain talent for words, I don't know, I never read his books... I know he won a big reputation later; but was he really a great writer? Because to my mind, a talent for words is not enough if you want to be a great writer. You have also to be a great man. And he was not a great man. He was a little man, an unimportant little man. (ST 195)

The interview concludes with the biographer referring to Coetzee's novel *Foe*, in which he says, Coetzee writes about a woman. "In the final version she is an English woman, but in the first draft he made her a Brasileira" (ST 200). Nascimento asks him to send her a copy of *Foe* "I am interested to see what this man of wood made of me" (ST 210). Coetzee perhaps, indirectly wants to suggest that his characters are based on real people.

The next interview is with Martin whom Coetzee has referred to as a friend. Hence Vincent, the biographer decides to interview him. Both Coetzee and Martin feel that they did not belong to South Africa and feel that their presence there, is illegal. They talk about themselves, "We had a certain style of mind in common, a style that I attribute to our origins, colonial and South African. Hence the commonality of our outlook" (ST 211).

When asked about Coetzee's role as a teacher, Martin says "All I can suggest is that a strain of secretiveness that seemed to be engrained in him, part of his character, extended to his teaching too" (ST 212). "A perfectly adequate academic but not a

notable teacher” he says. “Approved in principle of letting oneself go, though I don’t think he ever let himself go- would probably not have known how to” (ST 213). Thus, through Martin, J.M.Coetzee lets us know something about himself as an academician.

When the biographer questions Martin whether Coetzee has any special friendships among his students, Martin replies in the negative and then adds: “It would be very, very naïve to conclude that because the theme was present in his writing it had to be present in his life” (ST 215). In other words, J.M.Coetzee advocates that the reader should not try to find parallels in a writer’s work and his life.

In the interview with Sophie Denoel, the biographer Vincent asks her about Coetzee’s life, whether she knows any story about him. She asks him as to why he depends on interviews when he can fall back on the letters, Diary and notebooks that Coetzee maintained. He answers, “What Coetzee writes there cannot be trusted, not as a factual record- not because he was a liar, but because he was a fictioneer” (ST 227). Sophie talking about Coetzee comments, “He was not a militant. His politics were too idealistic, too Utopian for that. In fact he was not political at all. He looked down on politics. He didn’t like political writers, writers who espoused a political programme” (ST 228).

Coetzee recalls his father’s surgery in the hospital. He goes to see him. However, he is not able to reach out to him. He tells him that it is a routine operation. “He could stretch out and take his father’s hand and hold it, to comfort him, to convey to him that he is not alone, that he is loved, and cherished. But he does no such thing” (ST 262).

*Summertime* ends with Coetzee’s father’s return to his house and Coetzee knows that he will have to nurse him or abandon him. There is no other way. Thus the novel uses a unique technique where a biographer imagines the author to be dead and interviews a number of persons known to the author. Perhaps no author has hitherto used such a

technique. In the novel we find the biographer meeting Coetzee's ex-girlfriends and acquaintances who talk about their association with him. In the course of the conversation they enlighten him about various aspects of his life. It is interesting to note that Coetzee is very unsparingly critical about himself.

Thus Coetzee succeeds as a well known writer of the twentieth and twenty-first century by using innovative methods in handling the novel as a form. Each novel is different as far as the mode he employs and every time he comes out with a unique manner of writing. All the narrative ploys employed by Coetzee in his novels place him as a novelist who is a class apart. Coetzee by his conscious writing, sparse prose, crisp language, authorial engagement and employment of post-colonial and post-modern techniques has been hailed as one of the important novelists of the twentieth century. Coetzee's texts make a subtle exposition of his ideological moorings.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> David Attwell, South Africa and the Politics of Writing (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 2.

<sup>2</sup> Dominic Head, J.M.Coetzee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 70.

<sup>3</sup> Head 75.

<sup>4</sup> J.M.Coetzee, Life and Times of Michael K (London: Vintage, 2004) 129. Henceforth referenced parenthetically in the text as *MK* with page number.

<sup>5</sup> Attwell (1993) 89.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid* 91.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid* 91.

<sup>8</sup> Glennis Stephenson, "Escaping the camps: The Idea of Freedom in J.M.Coetzee's Life and Times of Michael K." Commonwealth Novel in English 4.1 Spring 1991.

<sup>9</sup> Attwell (1993) 103.

<sup>10</sup> Ina Grabe, "Post modern Narrative Strategies in Foe". Journal of Literary Studies 5.2 (June 1989): 145-182.

<sup>11</sup> Sheila Roberts, "Post Colonialism, or the House of Friday" – J.M.Coetzee's Foe. World Literature in English 31.1 1991 89.

<sup>12</sup> Chris Bongie, "Lost in the Maze of Doubting": J.M.Coetzee's Foe and the Politics of (Un)Likeness". Modern Fiction Studies 39.2 Summer 1993. 269.

<sup>13</sup> Attwell (1993) 45.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid* 46.

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<sup>15</sup> J.M.Coetzee, Boyhood (London:Vintage,1998)3. Henceforth referenced parenthetically in the text as *BH* with page number.

<sup>16</sup> Tim McIntyre “Autobiography and Confession in Boyhood, Youth and Disgrace”, J.M.Coetzee Critical Perspectives ed., Kailash C Baral (New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2008)173.

<sup>17</sup> J.M.Coetzee, Youth (London: Vintage, 2003) 37.

<sup>18</sup> J.M.Coetzee, Summer time (London: Harvill Secker, 2009) 44.

## Chapter VI

### Conclusion

*I know somewhat too much; and from this knowledge, once one has been infected, there seems to be no recovering.*

*J. M. Coetzee, Waiting for the Barbarians*

South African literature until the arrival of Coetzee on the literary scene was mainly concerned with the political and social happenings in South Africa. These issues preoccupied the South African writers, whites and blacks alike. Their engagement with these issues was more in journalistic lines. Most of them presented the happenings in the society in their writings and the literary mode employed was by and large realistic. The writers took to writing with the firm conviction that literature ought to present the reality. The writers gave a true account of the political scenario and the impact of these political issues on social life. There was chaos and violence in the society because of the gruesome institution of apartheid. The treatment meted out to the blacks by the whites was inhuman and caused suffering and pain which was unheard of. The writers engaged themselves with the plight of the blacks and exposed the highhanded behaviour of the whites who acted in a ruthless manner. This created conflict between the writers and the white establishment. As a result many of the writers were imprisoned, exiled and their works banned from time to time. The government came down heavily on these writers who questioned their ideology. They refused to tolerate the writers who criticized the monstrous acts of the whites.

It is in such an environment that Coetzee came up with his first novel in 1974 which was also a critique of apartheid. Although it raised a stir in the literary circle, it failed to get the attention of the government as he was mainly concerned with the

question of apartheid intellectually. Unlike his contemporaries, Coetzee's engagement with apartheid was fictional and therefore in his novels he did not outrightly condemn the ruthless regime of apartheid.

The study of the works of Coetzee reveals that they are trend-setters in the history of novel writing of the twentieth century. Coetzee emerges as a humanist to the core, sensitively responding to the suffering of the blacks who are subject to merciless treatment in the apartheid regime in South Africa. But even when he deals with the humanitarian element he does not succumb to sentimentality. His characters are well thought of and crafted. They are docile, silent, almost always loners and their actions speak for themselves. Coetzee's characters Eugene Dawn, the barbarian girl, Michael K, Friday, Mrs. Curren etc. are all individuals who shun society and the company of people. They suffer by themselves accepting their role of being part of the mighty whole. Spending their life without coming in the way of the society or anyone for that matter they also wish not to be disturbed as they try to grapple with their problems in their own small way. These protagonists of Coetzee epitomise the notion of acceptance and surrender. There is in them an acceptance of their fatality without the feeling of remorse. None of them expects any sympathy or pity. They also do not wallow in self pity. They emerge as evolved beings in the course of living through the vicissitudes of life. Coetzee deliberately delineates his characters as independent beings who are able to fight institutions and men in power, being bound by their own conviction and undeterred by the pressure inflicted on them. Through his characters, Coetzee also drives home the point that silence and docility can be effective tools of protest when put to use consciously. His protagonists exemplify this tenet. Michael K refuses to be subjugated by the Medical Officer. The camps are anathema to him and he keeps escaping the camps because he will not tolerate any form of regimentation.

Coetzee's protagonists are emphatic affirmations of individual will and they refuse to fit into any form of stereotyping. In all the novels the marginalized characters are depicted as lonely, physically challenged or introverts. There is Eugene Dawn, who is mentally disturbed because of the effect of working on the details of the Vietnam War, the Magistrate, who in spite of being a white man is marginalised and made to suffer the same plight as that of a black man because he chooses to speak for the native.

Michael K is with a physical defect – he is hare-lipped and this sets him as different. He is brought up in a separate school and his mother is ever conscious of his physical defect. Michael K is also an introvert who hardly speaks but has a mind of his own. He is able to withstand the pressure from those who want him to conform to their dictates and nothing can change his stand. All the attempts of the Medical Officer to make him speak are futile. Coetzee throws light on the sense of failure faced by the Medical Officer. Not being able to bring round a marginalized character, the Medical Officer faces defeat. This is highlighted so as to bring the character of Michael K. into prominence. Coetzee puts forth the view that strength of will is enough to defeat any high handedness or ideology. It is here that we are reminded of Gandhi's Satyagraha and Ahimsa. Coetzee's protagonists are like Satyagrahis who do not swerve from the chosen path and exhibit a kind of stoicism which helps them to keep to their conviction and determinate stand. In a way, Coetzee eulogises his protagonists who are ordinary people with strong convictions. He successfully champions the cause of blacks through his protagonists who are strong individuals although they keep to themselves.

Coetzee's novels have made a distinct mark in the history of novel writing in the twentieth century. David Attwell, a noted critic and authority on J.M. Coetzee avers,

“Indeed, Coetzee brings to his work, a unique combination of intellectual power, stylistic poise, historical vision and ethical penetration.”<sup>1</sup> Coetzee had studied Beckett and was a great admirer of Kafka and Tolstoy. Coetzee was also a critic, translator, linguist and stylistician. But it is in his novels that his accomplishments as a literary person become evident. Coetzee’s fiction addresses the concerns of the times, the political issues and is reflexive in nature and stance. Coetzee posits certain ontological questions in his novels. The coloniser- colonised divide is the underlying thread although he does not restrict himself only to that. In his novels there is a simmering hostility which can set off at the slightest trigger among the natives. The outward calm of the characters is a conscious one. However, deep within there is a turmoil which nevertheless has been subdued. We see that in almost all the novels Coetzee deals with the impact of aggression on the human psyche. Coetzee interrogates the agenda of imperialist ideology in South Africa. He examines how racial hatred could lead to destructiveness both at the level of the masses and the individual. He addresses the difficulty and distress faced by individuals in repressive societies.

Coetzee’s novels deal with the imperial experience in the apartheid regime. The natives in Coetzee are those who have had traumatic experiences, submitting themselves to European superiority imposed upon them under the banner of apartheid. The whites had no concern for their social and economic well being. The natives lost their independence to live life on their own terms. The apartheid laws subjugated the blacks with absolute authority. They had no say in their own country. In his novels we have seen that Coetzee addresses these issues from the point of view of a humanist.

The Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* remains indifferent to the injustices and violence perpetrated by Colonel Joll on the natives. Coetzee’s innate sense of justice and his sensitive response to injustice in apartheid South Africa has resulted in

novels that strike a chord in the hearts of the readers. In almost all the novels written with apartheid as the backdrop, Coetzee champions the cause of the blacks.

Coetzee was concerned about the human condition and apartheid South Africa provided him ample scope to explore this space by writing about protagonists who were unknowingly caught in the struggles of life. He is therefore, able to explore the self in his novels. Coetzee's characters do not simply accept the imperial ideology; they find their own means of engaging themselves with the situation they find themselves in. The world of the native is impinged by the white man. However, the native is not completely at the mercy of the empire. The native creates a world of his own. Coetzee illustrates the manner in which the native finds solutions to ontological questions in his novels. The natives resist the white man and thereby imperialism. Although Coetzee does not overtly refer to historical happenings, the experiences that he deals with in his novels have historical identity. Power being everywhere, Coetzee instead of dealing with it *per se*, engages with it from the standpoint of the self. Coetzee shows how the natives groomed themselves to confront the whites who had dispossessed them of their land. They also became militant as we see in the novel *Age of Iron*. Coetzee presents the change in the relationship between the blacks and whites. The period of decolonization is a time of utter chaos and violence. The blacks are out to reclaim their land. The characters in the novels work towards a change which is epistemological. This change comes from within and is less influenced by extraneous circumstances.

Coetzee believed that literature should not be overtly political which tends towards propaganda. Hence, although his novels are an attack or critique of apartheid and its consequences, he uses the political and social context in a way that his novels do not remain as propaganda. He fuses form and content in such a way that the socio-

political scenario emerges as an excellent work of fiction. “Sincerity (comprising truth-to-experience, honesty towards the self, and the capacity for human empathy and compassion) is a quality which resides within the language of literature,”<sup>2</sup> opines Peter Barry in his book *Beginning Theory*. Coetzee’s novels adhere to this norm in that he sticks to the truth and empathises with his characters whose lives he presents before us from the viewpoint of a humanist. Coetzee is concerned with the impact of the black- white encounter. Nevertheless, he addresses these issues in his novels in a detached manner.

Each of Coetzee’s novels is different from the other in execution. The theme of the early novels is about the plight of the natives in South Africa. Coetzee’s engagement as seen is not just with the colonised. He is sensitive to the plight of individuals as a whole. The focus thus has been on the trauma faced by individuals especially in an oppressive regime. Coetzee also engages with the question of authorship and textuality by addressing the aggressiveness of colonialism. Coetzee’s novels become self-conscious and lead to an exploration of the self. The novels are positioned historically though not overtly.

Coetzee’s novels discussed in the earlier chapters reveal a pattern wherein the novelist views South Africa under the apartheid regime. The first novel comprises of two novellas. The first novella engages with the Vietnamese war, while the second is about the war led by the white man against the natives in the eighteenth century. When Coetzee published *Dusklands*, the war in Vietnam was coming to an end. At the same time in South Africa there was an increase in state violence and censorship. Coetzee projects the thirst for violence inherent in the white man in his novel. The presentation of violence is explicit in the novel. The coloniser is an agent capable of violence which is acute. The violence also affects him just as it destroys the colonised

or the native. Jacobus Coetzee soon exemplifies these qualities in himself. The violence exhibited by Jacobus brings out the sadistic streak in him showing the innate tendency in the white man towards brutality. As he resorts to violence, Jacobus is aware of its impact on himself. His jaw becomes tense as he performs the act of cruelty. Eugene Dawn also exhibits violence when he stabs his son. These acts of violence are a result of the self trying to revalidate its position. However, the novel *In the Heart of the Country* shows a change in Coetzee's treatment of the colonial theme. It deals with the problems faced by the protagonist Magda when she tries to sympathise with the blacks. Magda carves her own destiny and contends that she will live in silence. She treats the farm help Hendrik and his wife Klein Anna on equal terms but realizes that the system will not allow it. A slave cannot remain a mere slave when given equality; he assumes the role of master and hence, her subsequent rape by Hendrik. She becomes the victimized. Throughout the novel Magda expresses her desire to commune with people. However, she is unsuccessful. The novel ends with Magda trying to commune with the skygods as she fails to establish human communication. If *In the Heart of the Country* is an exploration of the self, *Waiting for the Barbarians* is more an exploration of what violence does to people. However, the ending is suggestive of hope. Coetzee deliberately chooses to make the locale non-specific. Although the Magistrate, the protagonist sympathises with the barbarian girl, she identifies him with Colonel Joll, her torturer. The difference is only one of degree. The Magistrate also suffers in the hands of Joll. He is confined to the barracks, humiliated and tortured. The novel makes a very sensitive study of the imperialistic stance of the Empire and the impact of imperialism on those who perpetrate it and those who are subject to it. Coetzee handles violence from the point of view of a sensitive writer. The violence he exemplifies brings out the worst in man and Colonel

Joll and his men are testimony to this reality. The native is not the barbarian as otherwise portrayed by the white man. The coloniser is the barbarian and these qualities lie latent in him. The ending of the novel where we see children making a snowman is an indication of better times to come. In the picture of the children playing with the snowman Coetzee surmises that the future may not be bleak after all.

When Coetzee wrote *Life and Times of Michael K.* there was a violent release of forces in the society that was leading to a gory state then. The society was facing a crisis and in the novel Coetzee shows how the state failed to address the crisis. Michael the protagonist is one with immense power who is able to stand up to the whites by a mere show of indifference. This novel also ends on an optimistic note. Michael goes away from the camp to lead a life on his own terms. He carries with him seeds he will sow and cultivate. This indicates his return to nature. Even in the midst of war and chaos, Michael stands for regeneration of the human society. He emerges victorious over the system that tries to pin him down. He lives through the civil war without being touched by it and he does it in a very subtle and quiet manner.

Unlike the earlier novels, *Foe* is a parody of the canonical novel *Robinson Crusoe*. In this novel the 'Other' is Friday. He is a mute character, unlike Defoe's Friday who learns the language of his master Crusoe. Susan, the protagonist of the novel tries to make Friday speak. But Friday's tongue has been mutilated. Susan trying to make Friday speak is similar to the Medical Officer trying to make Michael speak. Friday's silence is similar to the silence of Michael K. whereby he asserts his identity. The novel ends on an optimistic note too. The novel provides the 'Other' with a possibility of resistance.

Although the novels written before *Age of Iron* deal with the colonial condition, they paid less attention to the violence which was manifesting in the South African

society. The novel which is about Mrs. Curren who participates in the violence that the society faces, is an account of her experience leading to self knowledge. Diagnosed with cancer, she prepares herself for her death. Along this journey from life to death, Mrs. Curren goes on to a level of existence, where she acquires a new self through a learning process. She develops a new perspective towards understanding the blacks and comes to the conclusion that, love must necessarily be there in human society if it is to avoid being annihilated. It is when she learns that she is going to die that Mrs Curren sees the surrounding reality. The violence around makes her sympathetic to the blacks and she reaches out to them. The novel *The Master of Petersburg* is not explicitly concerned with the South African situation. The protagonist, the fictionalized Dostoevsky admits to abandoning his dead son and as retribution, tries to establish communion with his dead son. He declares that as a writer he is unable to transform his experiences into words. Towards the end of the novel, Dostoevsky realizes that only if he surrenders completely will he be able to write. Thus both *Foe* and *The Master of Petersburg* are novels where Coetzee engages himself with the question of authorship.

In the two early autobiographical novels *Boyhood* and *Youth*, Coetzee again deals with the question of identity. In *Boyhood*, Coetzee deals with themes of marginalization and alienation that he faces as a boy living in a land that he does not belong to. The boy Coetzee comes to the conclusion that in spite of having an English education and speaking English at home, he can never totally identify with the English. Therefore, he decides to leave South Africa and goes to London in order to meet his destiny. However, he soon realizes that even the mother country has its limitations. *Youth* again is about the travails of a young man in a foreign country. In both these novels Coetzee's real life experience is turned into fiction.

In his novels, Coetzee eschews realism. The novel *The Lives of Animals* is actually similar to the Tanner lectures given every year at Princeton University. However, the manner in which Coetzee deals with the issue of animal rights is different from the Tanner lectures which are usually philosophical. The lectures in *The Lives of Animals* are fictional in form. The protagonist, Elizabeth Costello presents her views on animal rights and the killing of animals by human beings. Her views resonate Coetzee's views too. However, Coetzee does not give answers or comments nor does he offer any solution.

The last three novels – *Slow man*, *Diary of a Bad Year* and *Summertime* are a complete break from the earlier novels, the setting being different. Coetzee himself has moved to Australia and he engages with questions of the self and death examining the notion of self from different perspectives. The first of these three, reveals Coetzee's exploration of the self in isolation, the second, Coetzee's appraisal of the self in relation to others and the third, a novel way of exploring the self as if he were dead.

A study of the early novels like *Dusklands*, *In the Heart of the Country*, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Age of Iron* reveals that Coetzee is preoccupied with violence and its repercussions on those who suffer and those who inflict it. The study reveals that both the perpetrator and the perpetrated are influenced considerably by violence which emanated from the centre and was targeted on the margin. This violence later boomeranged from the margin to the centre. The very act of segregation by the whites led to violent psychological reaction, building up violence among the blacks.

The novels are a fine study of how the protagonists react to violence. The black protagonists who do not retaliate accept suffering and pain. They remain passive and silent. This passivity defeats the whites. Although the whites try to colonise the minds

of the blacks, they fail to do so. They are helpless and frustrated when they find that the blacks do not react. However, in some of the novels, the blacks react violently against the atrocities of the whites. For example, in *Age of Iron*, the black youth are defiant and rebel against the whites and their high handedness. However, they tragically meet their end.

Although Coetzee does not overtly mention the place and time of the action in his novels, it is very clear that he is writing about the apartheid regime. Through his novels, Coetzee condemns the inhuman practice of apartheid. The solution that he offers is the practice of peace and harmony. The protagonists have an understanding of life which is the result of their experience. They surmount their difficulties by accepting whatever comes to them. As we have seen, some remain passive, some resist passively and some accept their lot while some become defiant.

This study which revolved round the rhetoric of coloniser / colonised has dealt with the impact of such a relationship on the human psyche. It has also dealt with torture and power in the novels. An examination of the novels has revealed that the relationship between the two is a problematic one. The coloniser wants to assert his authority against the blacks to show his superiority making the colonised feel that they are inferior. There is a systematic ploy to create the 'Other'. However, in the novels the blacks do not fall prey to the designs of the whites. The blacks are men of integrity and do not easily succumb to the pressure on them. They create a space for themselves and do not let the whites enter this space. For example, in the novel *Life and Times of Michael K.*, the protagonist Michael K. does not allow the whites to make him the 'Other.' He does not allow the whites to dominate him. He escapes the camps and leads a life of his own, on his terms.

Similarly the barbarian girl in *Waiting for the Barbarians* does not react even

when she is subject to torture. She accepts her situation with resignation. Thus, Coetzee is concerned with the unrest and chaos in South Africa and through the individuals caught in such situations, he wishes to highlight that violence can be subdued with passive resistance.

Coetzee seems to offer a solution to the violence perpetrated by the whites. He advocates peaceful means like non co-operation and passive resistance. Silence also becomes an effective tool. By a show of silence, Coetzee illustrates through his novels that silence defeats the perpetrator of violence and the one who makes an attempt to dominate the 'Other.' By the practice of silence, the blacks do not allow the white man to colonise them. The white man finds that he is helpless trying to dominate the whites.

The study has revealed that although the Empire is the centre and the colonised the margin, resistance from the margin in a non-violent manner can defeat the power of the centre. This is illustrated in the novels like *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Life and Times of Michael K*.

Coetzee by a study of the coloniser/ colonised dialectic has thrown light on human nature. The coloniser is delineated as aggressive, ruthless and greedy with a will to subjugate the blacks for his own needs. The sympathetic whites like the Magistrate and Mrs.Curren by the very fact that they are white, become part of the crime against the blacks. The colonised is shown as compassionate and poised, accepting his lot without being aggressive. Coetzee's protagonists are men of integrity though ordinary people. Coetzee's treatment of violence and the protagonists' reaction to it is similar to Gandhian philosophy of non-violence. Except in *Age of Iron*, in all the other novels, the blacks are passive and do not react against violence. Through his novels Coetzee illustrates that violence need not be handled with violence. Non-violent

means can also be an effective weapon against violence. *Dusklands*, *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Life and Times of Michael K.* convincingly exemplify the fact that the blacks are able to bring victory to their side by being indifferent to violence. Coetzee's protagonists are stoic and do not succumb to violence as they remain undeterred. This kind of silent defiance from the blacks defeats the coloniser.

The manner in which Coetzee has handled violence in his novels shows that he advocates non-violent reaction. This was also the method followed by Gandhi in South Africa. The study concludes that Coetzee perhaps has been influenced by Gandhi and his belief in non-violence. Almost all the protagonists who are subject to violence react in a non-violent manner. Some passively resist violence and some are totally indifferent to it. Silence is also employed as a tool to counter violence. The barbarian girl in the novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* chooses to remain silent when the Magistrate starts probing her. Michael K. in the novel *Life and Times of Michael K.* remains silent when the Medical officer tries to make him talk. By being silent he refuses to let the white man dominate him. This is the mode of defiance followed by the 'Other'. However, Michael does not show any defiance. He just does not cooperate, thereby refusing to be the 'Other.'

In the course of addressing the dialectics of the coloniser and the colonised, Coetzee makes an exposition of human nature. We arrive at the conclusion that when human beings are exposed to unpleasant situations, their innate nature surfaces. The white man in the course of exhibiting his power becomes the personification of evil itself. In *Dusklands*, the protagonist is under great pressure when he writes about the Vietnamese War, that he loses his equanimity and becomes insane. In *Waiting for the Barbarians* the torture of the natives by Colonel Joll and his men brings out the worst in them. Although the Magistrate shows his concern for the barbarian girl, it is mainly

because he feels guilty about the torture inflicted by the representatives of the Empire of which he is also a representative. He feels that he is similar to her torturers because he is keen on knowing about how she has the marks of torture on her. The novel brings out the fact that in everyone there is a latent capacity for evil. The Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the doctor in *Life and Times of Michael K.* and Susan Barton in *Foe* keep the concept of binary opposites as they see a difference between themselves and the 'Other.' The black protagonist becomes an object of sympathy. However, Michael K in *Life and Times of Michael K.* is able to see that behind the doctor's facade there lies a coloniser who sees him as the 'Other.' The doctor, however, is very different from the coloniser Jacobus in *Dusklands*. He is not cruel like Jacobus.

The study reveals that Coetzee spares none in depicting their attitude towards the blacks. He feels that even the whites, who are sympathetic and do not do anything about the violence around them, are part of the atrocities committed on the blacks. Coetzee deals with the issue of power at various levels. He addresses the South African reality, a country torn by civil war and violence. Mrs. Curren in *Age of Iron* admits to her complicity in the crime against the blacks although she has never directly participated in the oppression against the blacks. She understands that it is the whites who resorted to discrimination and exploitation which led to the civil war.

Similarly in *Disgrace* also Coetzee focuses on the connivance of the whites in continuing the abominable system of segregation and exploitation. Lucy feels that her suffering is the price she has to pay in order to atone for the wrongs of the whites.

The torture that Coetzee reveals in his novels is abominable and corresponds very much with what is happening in South Africa. In *Waiting for the Barbarians* the scenes of torture are similar to the accounts of torture conducted by the apartheid

regime. Just as many detainees in prison die under mysterious circumstances, in *Waiting for the Barbarians* there are deaths in detention on account of the inhuman torture inflicted on them. The old man is beaten to death. No record of such happenings is kept. Joll forces his first prisoner to confess by inflicting violence on him. Such instances are common wherever torture is practised.

The study shows that the characters in Coetzee though marginalized, are beings with a temperament of their own. They are mature and cannot be manipulated. The black characters are very much aware of their situation, but they do not compromise on their integrity. The white characters who sympathise with the blacks cannot do much and acknowledge their complicity. The protagonists of the novels are isolated characters and they live their life on their own terms. There is no communication between them and the others in the novel and they do not make any effort to communicate. All the novels of Coetzee centre around isolated individuals who do not want any communication.

The protagonists, especially the whites have a desire in them to be recognized by the natives. Hence Eugene and Jacobus in *Dusklands* long to be recognised by the natives, although they do not have any amiable relationship with them.

The doctor in *Life and Times of Michael K.* and Susan Barton in *Foe* perceive the two black characters, Michael K. and Friday as the 'Other' and hope to be recognised by these blacks. Susan fails to make Friday speak and the doctor cannot get the story out of Michael. These characters try to recreate the native but the natives do not yield. Thus Coetzee presents the white man who also longs for recognition. The violence that he perpetrates or the sympathy that he shows is a tool to validate his existence vis-a-vis the 'Other.' He tries to define himself by relating himself to the blacks.

Although Coetzee's novels written in South Africa were reflections of the political

and social milieu, Coetzee's novels were never banned and he did not come under any surveillance by the white authorities. This was not so with his contemporaries. Many of them were exiled or their works were banned. Thus Coetzee was able to react in a very intellectual manner to the reality around him. His writings never provoked the authorities or the government. One reason being that, Coetzee refused to be in the lime-light. He never gave interviews and was not an activist in any sense although, his sympathies were always with the blacks.

For Coetzee, who believed that writers always had the last word, writing was a serious experience. He has indeed made history by writing about the inhuman practice of apartheid. A reading of his novels elucidates what Coetzee mentions in his book *Giving Offence: Essays on Censorship*:

As an episode in historical time, apartheid was causally overdetermined. It did indeed flower out of self-interest and greed, but also out of desire and the denial of desire. In its greed, it demanded black bodies in all their physicality in order to burn up their energy as labour. In its anxiety about black bodies, it also made laws to banish them from sight. Apartheid did not understand itself and could not afford to understand itself. Its essence from the beginning was confusion, a confusion it displaced wildly all around itself.<sup>3</sup>

Thus Coetzee engages himself with the impact of apartheid and post apartheid in his novels. Although many writers dealt with the same issue, the study reveals that Coetzee is different from his contemporaries because he was not just concerned with the political and social impact of this evil institution. In fact, Coetzee used it as a backdrop to address a more pertinent issue, the relationship between individuals in an

oppressive regime and the manner in which isolated individuals resolved their dilemma. Although Coetzee had first hand experience of the political and social happenings in South Africa, his novels are not journalistic or propagandist in nature. His works are highly literary and intellectually engaging as he makes his black protagonists reach a high state of realisation and they deal with their dilemmas in an evolved manner.

This study observes that Coetzee has adopted nonviolence and passive resistance as tools for his protagonists to overcome the aggression meted out to them by their oppressors. Given the presence of Gandhi in South Africa and the manner in which he got the Indians who were treated as inferior citizens by the whites, to oppose the whites by using the weapons of non co-operation, non violence and passive resistance, it is very likely that Coetzee would have read about Gandhi's activities in South Africa. He apparently is influenced by Gandhian thoughts, although he does not mention it anywhere, even in his interviews or otherwise.

Coetzee's characters emerge as those who are influenced by Gandhian values of non-violence, non co-operation and passive resistance. The protagonist of his seminal work *The Life and Times of Michael K.* would definitely pass for one who stands for Gandhian values. Michael K. is non-violent, non-cooperative and also uses passive resistance as a weapon to confront the oppressor.

Coetzee presents his protagonists and their struggle to find an identity in the face of aggressive behavior in apartheid South Africa. Their struggle is that of all like-minded people of South Africa who opposed the apartheid regime. Coetzee gives a spiritualistic edge to the manner in which his protagonists confront the unfeeling and aggressive coloniser. They grow in stature philosophically and spiritually.

Thus, a study of Coetzee's novels reveals that though Coetzee does not implicitly

refer to South Africa as such, he uses the political and social condition in South Africa to explore the impact of violence on the human psyche. It is done so because, for Coetzee, it is not the land or the race that is important, it is the human condition that he is concerned about. It is only that in the happenings in South Africa and the apartheid regime he finds a source to study the human mind. The coloniser-colonised dialectic enables Coetzee to examine the manner in which those who have the power and those who do not, react in the face of violence. He records how these entities grapple with issues of the conflicting mind.

Coetzee's presence in South Africa gave him a first hand knowledge of what was happening in his country in the apartheid regime. Witnessing the atrocities and being sympathetic to the case of the blacks in spite of being white, Coetzee was able to fictionalise the imperialistic encounter and write from the stand point of a humanist interested in the welfare of fellow human beings. He shows how the downtrodden, the so called weak in the society rise to the occasion and go about with life without making compromises. Hence the whites are shown as foils to the blacks in terms of strength of character. The life of the blacks is precarious but they are spiritually strong nevertheless. Coetzee writes like a detached observer and does not offer judgments or solutions. The novels are all open-ended and are subject to many interpretations and readings.

Coetzee's novels are powerful statements on the inhuman institution of apartheid. However, they are also sensitive studies on the human psyche. Coetzee's novels make subtle forays into the impact of aggression on the human mind. In his novels he advocates a passive nonviolent approach to violence. Based on the study of Coetzee's works it is surmised that his protagonists are evolved human beings, in spite of the fact that they often come from the lower strata of society. Though some of them are

deformed physically, they are capable of immense profundity. It has to be noted that Coetzee has definitely been influenced by Indian spiritual thought especially the Gandhian principles of Satyagraha (Truth) and Ahimsa (Non-violence). This is evident in the passive resistance of his native protagonists, against violence meted out to them by the whites. Thus it can be argued that Coetzee's position as a twentieth century fiction writer is confirmed by the way he handles fiction in a very engaging manner to respond to the immediate issues of his time.

J.M. Coetzee established himself as a fine writer who responded to the gruesome times in his country and came up with novels which reverberated with intensity of feeling. Coetzee inspires his readers to know what it is that cannot hurt others. In his novels he repeatedly makes the point that we commit evil because we are capable of it and we cause suffering to others. He also elucidates that the evil inflicted by others can be withstood by the essential qualities of non-violence and passive resistance. The impact of Coetzee's works can be summed up in David Attwell's words, "In hindsight one can see that Coetzee's struggle has always been to find appropriate points of entry into the narrative of colonisation for the specific interventions of which a self-consciously fictional discourse is capable."<sup>4</sup> Coetzee indeed remains a highly acclaimed author today. As David Attwell reiterates "Coetzee in fact represents no one but himself – after all, he is distinguished not only by a Cape-specific background but also by a degree of intellectualism unmatched by any other South African writer"<sup>5</sup>

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> David Attwell, ed., Doubling the Point Essays and Interviews (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992) 1.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Barry, Beginning Theory. (Manchester : Manchester University Press, 2002) 19.

<sup>3</sup> J M Coetzee, Giving Offence: Essays on Censorship (Chicago, the University of Chicago Press, 1996) 164.

<sup>4</sup> David Attwell, J.M.Coetzee South Africa and the Politics of Writing (USA: University of California Press, 1993) 14.

<sup>5</sup> David Attwell, J.M.Coetzee South Africa and the Politics of Writing (USA: University of California Press, 1993) 26.

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