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 16th 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 interracial 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.”

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.”

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.

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.  

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 timeless that art contributes to its time and times to come. 5

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, 2nd 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.  

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."  

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 18th 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.”

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 foregrounded 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.”

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” of Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe. Head further contends: “Coetzee’s preoccupation... is the problem of the silencing and mutilation of the colonial Other.” 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.”

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 Breytenbach.

*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."

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?" 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.\textsuperscript{15}

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."16

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."17

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."18 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...”

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.”

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.”

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. 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.²³

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.” 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. 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 standpoint 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 remonstration 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


8 David Attwell, J.M. Coetzee South Africa and the Politics of Writing (USA: University of California Press, 1993) 70.


10 Dominic Head, J.M. Coetzee (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 2.

11 Head 112.

12 Head 147.


17 Ibid


20 Attwell 13.

21 Attwell 13.


