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.”

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”
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."\(^3\)

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."\(^4\) Here is a man whose physical debility brings bout 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”

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
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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." 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.”7 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 19th 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 he 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..."
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*, subitled ‘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.Coeztee 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.⁸

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." 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 Algro 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.”10 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.Coezze is indeed having a dig at
interviewers who distort and change whatever is actually said. It is a well known fact that
Coezze 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.Coezze is hinting at how interviewers
make use of even a tiny slip. They would use anything one says to suit their purpose.
J.M.Coezze 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 ‘celibitaire’ “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’mé 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’mé 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 loved, cherished and remembered.
Notes


7 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.

