CHAPTER - IV
EXPLORING THE SELF: WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS and LIFE AND TIME OF MICHAEL K

This chapter analyses another two novels of J. M. Coetzee which are *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Life and Time of Michael K*. These novels are a forceful investigation of the subject of selfhood. The characteristic of reflexive self-consciousness of his works did not merely emphasize the constitutive functions of language but it also informed the historical and political conditions that govern the writing of fiction in South Africa.

*Waiting for the Barbarians* – (1980)

Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* narrates the task of bearing witness to the abundance of real suffering produced by apartheid and by the history of colonialism. This task is established strategically within the crucial moment of suspension when an increasingly defensive imperialism begins making plans for a final calculation with its enemies. This is a fundamental text in the sense for the first time in the sequence of novels; ‘History’ emerges as an object in itself. This novel was published when the socio-political situation in South Africa seemed to be degenerate. An evil off-shoots had already resulted into Sharpeville Massacre (1960) and Soweto School Rising (1976) while protest against apartheid. In the year 1952 the passive resistance was initiated by African National Congress (ANC). Now in the South Africa the time gained its momentum with the origin of militant organizations such as ‘Pan African Congress’ (PAC) to protest socio-political exigencies of the time. The White Nationalist Party in power resolved to maintain the status at all costs. This crisis resulted in increasing violence, mass arrests, militarization,
torture, and denial of natural human rights. One of the burning issues of South African socio-political history is torture and it became out of control in the state. The violence and cruelties imposed upon the prisoners during imprisonment. In 1977, mysterious death of Stephen Biko the popular leader associated with Black Consciousness Movement stands evidence to this fact. This issue attracted the attention of world community. The year 1978 was declared as an International anti-apartheid year by the United States and Political Imprisonments in South Africa.

‘Waiting for the Barbarians’ this title of the novel writer takes from a poem written by the Greek poet Constantine Cavafy in 1904. The poem also provides the essential foundation in order to have something like an Empire to exist. It must have something to exist against to define itself. Such as white needs black; cold must have hot; and civilization needs barbarism to show its significance. Constantine Cavafy’s this poem highlights the ceremonial trappings and opulence of Empire. It also stresses a legislating senate, an enthroned emperor, the dazzling show of its consuls, and the contrived rhetoric of its orators. This poem also says little about the barbarian except as they are observed to stand in relation to the matter of Empire.

As the Empire is concerns, there is a strange irony: Empire cannot take rest. Empire cannot look upon the other and be satisfied but Empire must expand, either by transforming the other, or by destroying the other, wiping it from the earth. Either the Empire seeks to eliminate the very ‘otherness’ upon which its own existence depends or the ‘other’ must become the ‘enemy’. The Magistrate is the protagonist and also the narrator of the novel. The Magistrate is
an official in the service of the Empire so his work is to collect taxes, administers the communal lands and presides over the law-court twice a week in his area. Though Magistrate is an isolated figure but he lives a peaceful and contented life. In the novel there are no any direct or indirect references to his family, friends or relatives. However, the Magistrate does not have a proper name, the only identity he has is the identity given by the Empire. Hence, he is a paid servant of the Empire and represents one of the faces of the Empire.

The novel begins with the arrival of Colonel Joll from the Third Bureau in the area of Magistrate. The Colonel Joll arrival is significant because there are stories regarding the unrest among the barbarians in this area. There are gossips of the barbarian tribes as they are arming themselves to fight with Empire. The general staff officers are sent on tours of the frontier hence, for the first time the officials of the Third Bureau are seen on the frontier. As a writer John Coetzee calls them ‘devotees of truth and doctors of interrogation.’ (WFB 23)

The soldiers caught two prisoners who lie bound on the floor; one of them is an old man, and the other is a boy. They have been caught after a raid by the soldiers. The Magistrate introduces those prisoners to Colonel Joll in the intercourse the prisoners inform the Magistrate that they are not thieves but the soldiers stop and tie them for nothing. They are coming there for the young boy has a sore and it does not heal so the old man brings the boy for treatment and this clarification is the only truth. Nonetheless Colonel Joll, who also represents the Empire, has come here with an agenda to suit his cruel purposes so he is not satisfied with the explanation given by the prisoners. After that both the prisoners are kept in the granary and
there the old man is beaten severely and he dies there. The remaining person is the young boy who is seriously injured by Colonel Joll. Joll has a plan to launch a raid on the nomads and take more prisoners to show his cruelty and he thinks that the prisoner-boy should perform duties as a guide for them. The Magistrate tries to divert the mind of Joll so he tells Joll that boy is a stranger and the barbarians will disappear when they smell his arrival. However, Colonel Joll is very stick to his decisions that he goes ahead with his plan.

To show a sign of courtesy, the Magistrate rides out with Colonel Joll as far as where the road turns north. After that the Magistrate comes back. The Magistrate has a great attraction for ruins and hence he has made attempts to excavate the ruins. However his all the attempts prove to be futile at the end. At one point he thinks that there has been something staring him in the face but he is unable to see it. The Magistrate is able to recognize prisoners who are sent four days after Joll's departure, as they are not barbarians but fishing people. Colonel Joll has sent a message which informs the Magistrate to hold the prisoners till he returns from the front. After seeing the message the Magistrate gets angry and he throws the letter of Joll. In those prisoners, there is a barbarian woman. She makes her living by begging. He decides to carry that woman to her own people but in due course he has sexual relationship with that woman. He washes her body with water and soap and after this he massages her body gently with almond oil. On the woman's body there are some marks and he tries to interpret them but his all attempts to understand the meaning of those marks proves to be unfruitful. She serves the Magistrate in the absence of Colonel Joll though there is no any bond of love or genuine human relationship between him and the barbarian woman.
These bodies of hers and mine are diffuse, gaseous, centre less, at one moment spinning about a vortex here, at another curdling, thickening elsewhere; but often also flat, blank. I know what to do with her no more than one cloud in the sky knows what to do with another. (WFB 36)

The Magistrate writes a letter to the Provincial Governor of the Empire. In the letter he informs him that he wants to repair some of the damage wrought by the entry of the third bureau. The Magistrate wishes to restore some of the goodwill in the area so he undertakes a brief visit to the barbarians. In this journey the Magistrate was accompanied by three men and the barbarian woman. Magistrate tells the barbarian woman that he is taking her back to her own people. After travelling for ten days, they cross the limit of the Empire and sent off the woman to the barbarians.

After returning from the journey the Magistrate finds a warrant officer sitting at his desk. The warrant officer lay blame on the magistrate of treasonously consorting with the enemy. The Magistrate tries to persuade him that they are at peace and there are no enemies now. He also inquires the magistrate why he has left his post without an official permission of Empire. The Magistrate tries to explain him that it is his private matter. The Magistrate now thinks that he is a free man and his alliance with the Empire is over. He gives a detailed account of his journey to the officer but the officer is not satisfied with his explanation so the Magistrate is imprisoned and becomes the victim of the Empire.

The novel’s narrative is in the present tense. The Magistrate is precisely unable to place the events into a linear narrative context. He does not know what events are important. He does not engage us in the usually deliberative process of the story teller, with its essentials guiding of dilemma: what to leave in and what to leave out or where to draw the shaping lines of the story.
He supervises a town of 3000 souls over the frontier settlement and he is on the border between the Empire’s holding and the Barbarian lands. The Magistrate has never crossed over that line into the barbarians' world. He can only imagine Empire’s landscape only through maps that ‘are based on little but hearsay, Colonel. I have patched them together from traveller’s accounts over a period of ten or twenty years.’(WFB 13) The Magistrate only knows its peoples only by observing what he calls: ‘They are mainly destitute tribes’ people with tiny flocks of their own living along the river.’ (WFB 04)

A strange reality that he has not been visited the capital, of the Empire in last two decades, not seen it since he was a young man. The reason behind it is the distance of space and time. The Magistrate knows little about the new goings on in the Imperial Capital and same as Empire does not know about the ways he uses for the barbarians. Certainly Colonel Joll of Third Bureau knows more about the activities of the barbarians than the Magistrate who is closer to them geographically. As a consequence, the Magistrate is a figure of the margin of the both Empire and barbarians. He has led a coffee table life for many years on the borders lines so he takes care only of the paper work and performs the day-today business of the Empire. As a Magistrate he acts as a civil authority judge and a tax collector for the Empire. Hence his works leave him plenty of time for hunting and other hobbies, such as archaeology and in recent years, visits to the second floor of the local inns and the rooms of whores.

The Magistrate is very easy going person and his easiness is borne of a carefully cultivated ignorance:

I am a country magistrate, a responsible official in the service of the Empire...I watch the sun rise and set, eat and sleep and am content. When I pass away I hope to merit three lines of small print in the Imperial gazette. I have not asked for more than a quite life in quite times. (WFB 08)
Even the Magistrate is also; at least, a creature of an imperial past so when he speaks with a young officer of the Imperial army he consciously contrasts his memories of the capital with the dusty, desert oasis that has been his environment for so long. Even we have all ready noted that colonel Joll tortures barbarian prisoners too seemingly harmlessly and at that time the magistrate’s inability or unwillingness to hear the screams coming from the granary hut provides way to his need to understand what happened-to investigate, to excavate.

I did not ride away: for a while I stopped my ears to the noises coming from the hut by the granary where the tools are kept, then in night I took a lantern and went to see for myself. (WFB 09-10)

As a truth this situation is the beginning of his awakening and transformation. Therefore he starts asking questions to the Empire by challenging Colonel Joll and the Colonel’s awareness. As novel proceeds he makes a conscious attempt to do so. The Magistrate in his sleep, unconsciously, pushes his regular prostitute out of bed as it suggests that he is rejecting his old, comfortable life.

As the novel goes on, its second part is concerned with the barbarian woman whom the Magistrate takes into his bed, his lantern-lit investigation of the granary hut or torture room. It has shown him only the marks of torture remain on the bodies of the barbarians, the signs that something has come out. The magistrate attempts to read their bodies and the marks on the walls of the room but he cannot. Even he tries his strange attentions to the injured body of the barbarian woman, his ritual washing and caresses become another attempt at reading the body as an inscribed yet inscrutable text.

The Magistrate makes an attempt to read the slips of poplar wood. He is keenly aware of these things so he often equates his
attempts to read the marks of torture, the puncture marks on the boy’s stomach and legs, the caterpillar’s scar near the eye of barbarian woman with the kind of investigations that Colonel Joll conducts on prisoners. The Magistrate in the early stage tries to say that Joll’s work is to find out the truth but as the time goes on he understands that, from the barbarians’ perspective, there is little to distinguish him from Joll. Hence while attending the young boy he thinks:

*It has not escaped me that an interrogator can wear two masks; speak with two voices, one harsh, one seductive.* (WFB 08)

As the perspective of a barbarian woman, he thinks the distance between himself and her torturer he realized was negligible. However there is a difference; the Magistrate is not a torturer and he does not have a baton or he does not carry hot pokers to hit the prisoners. Colonel Joll wants the truth about barbarian’s war plans against the Empire, while the Magistrate is looking for the truth about what Joll has done to the barbarians and by extension, what the Empire has done to ‘The other’. Colonel Joll makes use of instruments of the pain on the body, cutting into it, using it to get the truth out of his victims while the Magistrate moves his hands over the barbarian woman’s body asking her questions, also seeking truth. As he admits:

*It has been growing more and more clear to me that until the marks on this girl’s body are deciphered and understood I cannot let go of her.* (WFB 33)

For the Magistrate the Barbarian woman's body remains inscrutable same as the wooden slips. She is an example of a figure which is common in Coetzee’s fiction: The figure of the voiceless or unspeaking “other”. As in *Life and Time of Michael K*, Michael’s cleft palate and hare lip distort and obscure his speech and *Friday* in the novel *FOE* is tongue less without voice. This type of Coetzee’s
recurrent figures are also unknowable, a cipher of undefined meaning and significance of his writing. In this novel the barbarian woman can able to speak, but she remains largely silent for giving response to the Magistrate’s questions. Even if she was willing to do so, as the Magistrate feels: ‘In the makeshift language we share there are no nuances.’ (WFB 43) The barbarian woman may be able to inform him what happened with her, but may be telling will not necessarily give him the kind of the information he tries to seek and hence he has left his attempts to read what he calls: ‘It has been growing more and more clear to me that until the marks on this girl's body are deciphered and understood I cannot late go of her.’(WFB 33) The body of the barbarian or the other one is closed ponderous seems to beyond his comprehension.

I have a vision of her closed eyes and closed face filming over with skin. Blank, like a fist beneath a black wig, the face grows out of the throat and out of the blank body beneath it, without aperture, without entry. (WFB 45)

In this moment he co-relates himself and Colonel Joll. He has not yet made intercourse with the barbarian woman; his attention has been something other than sexual desire. He wonders:

Is this how her torturers felt hunting their secret, whatever they thought it was? For the first time I feel a dry pity for them: how natural a mistake to believe that you can burn or tear or hack your way into the secret body of the other! . . .I behave in some ways like a lover – I undress her, I bathe, I stroke her, I sleep beside her – but I might equally well tie her to a chair and beat her, it would be no less intimate. (WFB 46)

The Magistrate and Colonel Joll seek to make the other person speak against his/her ability. These methods are unrelated if they are meant to force utterance what the other would keep it hidden. Both of them in their ways insist on other’s possession. The Magistrate is not the lover of the barbarian woman, but could acts as her interrogator.
Once the Magistrate has seeks to destroy this relationship by redefining himself relative to Joll and to the Empire. This attempt of redefinition takes two forms, first, his verbal dissent before a imperial army officer and second his journey across the border of the Empire to return the barbarian woman to her people; both of which involved him crossing a line but these acts do not seem to be deliberate or conscious in his life. The young imperial officer asks a question to him regarding the dissatisfaction among the barbarian and their needs but his response to him with arrogant mentality on condemnation of Empire oppression. This touches a new height when he says:

Shall I tell you what I sometimes wish? I wish that these barbarians would rise up and teach us a lesson, so that we would learn, to respect them. We think of the country here as ours, part of over Empire – our outpost, over settlement, our market centre. But these people, these barbarians do not think of it like that at all. . . but they still think of us as visitors, transients. . . That is what they are thinking. That they will outlast us. (WFB 55)

But suddenly the Magistrate understands that by what authority can he speak of this and what of the barbarians think about anything? His expression is in fact an act of conveyance to the officer. May be it is his own projection of archaeological imagination, which has uncovered an older Empire out in the desert. This projection of his ideas on to the barbarians is momentary, figurative and border crossing, a leap into a mind of the other but in fact, the mind of the other remains closed. He has thrown himself into the desert like Empire. In his life the second act in which he seeks to distance himself from Colonel Joll it is a literal border crossing, as he leaves the known imperial lands to return the barbarian woman to her people. In the novel barbarians are variously described as both desert nomads and settled farmers as well as herds of men and fisher-people.
As they live near the imperial settlement and they live far out in the unmapped land, they speak languages that are known and languages that are unknown to them, they are peaceful and warlike, pitiable and at the same time fearsome.

Who are they? What are they? The answer is simple: They are whatever but not same as we are. The term ‘barbarian’ signals a common tactic of imperial rhetoric to conceive of the infinite diversity of heterogeneous otherness as one homogeneous entity. At one point a young imperial officer tells him that they were followed by the barbarian. The Magistrate asks to the officer how he can be sure about this. For the imperial mind such an argument is incontrovertible. If it is not US, it must be THEM. Hence Magistrate attempts to distance himself from Colonel Joll and Empire by returning the barbarian woman to her people to her family. Even as he rejects the absorption of the “other” in to Empire – he cannot escape him from his own imperial mind, who, exactly are her people? And how will he find her family? He never even asks her about her family. Such questions do not occur in front of him. His journey across the border will be enough to find her people and the first group that they will find necessarily is the right people, simply because THEY are not US.

The Magistrates handover the woman to God knows whom and returns to the settlement and thinks that the mission is completed. However the Magistrate is to redefine himself out side of the Empire, he must learn what ‘otherness’ really means. This is not a lesson to be learnt among the barbarian in the desert, but dancing with wolves or communicating with the land from which they grow. As an alternative lesson for of ‘otherness’ can be learnt only at the hands of
Empire and within its borders where the conception of the ‘other’ takes place. This process begins with the Magistrate is imprisoned for ‘treasonously consorting with the enemy.’ (WFB 85) Here he says in isolation, as ‘A bestial life is turning me into a beast.’ (WFB 87)

It is frequently in the case of Coetzee’s fiction, his protagonist paradoxically derive strength from being stripped of all external dignity. Magistrate stripped from his office and his imperial notions of dignity, imprisoned likes the barbarians; he becomes open to “Otherness” as he had not been before. The indignities suffered by his body figuratively transport him across the border in a way that his physical journey in the previous section could not do:

I am aware of the source of my election: my alliance with the guardians of Empire is over”, he says “I have set myself in opposition, the bond is broken, I am a free man. (WFB 85)

At one point, the Magistrate plans to escape from the prison and actually crosses the gated threshold of the town, but then he returns, and welcoming his reincarnation and even his subsequent torture. The question is why doesn’t he fight out for the territories beyond civilization, beyond grace for the Empire? The Magistrate makes three statements and these statements might answer to this question. The first statement is made at the moment when he decided to return to imprison which meant:

Why should I do my enemy’s work for them? If they want to spill my blood, let them at least bear the guilt of it. (WFB 110)

This is the Magistrate’s initial underlying principle. It is a refusal to stop the process of his own transformation, his translation into otherness and this transformation must be performed by the agents of Empire, for it is they who conceive of the other.

He made the second statement when Warrant Officer Mandel and his assistant begin to torture him apparently without any intention of interrogating him:
They came to my cell to show me the meaning of humanity, and in the space of an hour they showed me a great deal. (WFB 126)

This is his further rationale though he made his decision returning to prison is irrevocable. It is a logical extension of the first statement that is they are torturing him, and he takes that torture as transformative now, from this he learns the meaning of humanity.

His third statement comes much later and it is not vocalized. This statement conveyed to Colonel Joll through the glass window of Joll’s carriage as the Colonel departs from the settlement for the last time. He calls the statement:

I have a lesson for him (Joll) that I have long meditated ‘The crime that is latent in us we must inflict on ourselves’ I say. (WFB 160)

Though forth coming weeks after his decision returning to his imprisonment, to continue his translation into otherness, the lesson has been “long meditated” and it is clearly linked to the transformative process for The Magistrate. His migration into “otherness” is signalled most clearly, when a group of barbarians is led into the settlement for public display and public flogging. There are wires run through the flesh of the barbarians’ hand and cheeks to keep them still, obedient and docile. Colonel Joll inscribes each of their back bodies the word “ENEMY” with Charcoal and then his henchmen beat the word off them with lash of flog.

As with his more mysterious inscription of scars and bruises on to bodies of barbarian. Here Joll’s goal is to marks “the other” with the text of Empire. But the meaning of the text must be disgustingly clear, because this is a public and published text, not merely private diary of torture as we have been seen to earlier part in the novel. What is the meaning of ‘other’? The other is ‘ENEMY’. The Empire
must conceive of ‘the other’ as enemy, and it must erase the enemy and this erasure is accomplished literally and figuratively by the beating of barbarian. The Magistrate’s response to this is a clear signal of his migration to the status of what to Empire would call them ‘other’. Joll protests, but in the obscured inarticulate language of the “other”-

“No”! I hear the first word from my throat, rusty, not loud enough. Then again ‘No’! This time the word rings like a bell from my chest. The soldier who ...crowd: No! No! No! (WFB 116)

He can say only “You” to Colonel Joll but the fractured speech and the failed line of argument of the Magistrate make no impact on the imperial ear. Further the Magistrate undergoes for his degradation, but he is finally left to wander around the settlement as a harmless beggar like one of the pitiable barbarians we glimpse here and there in the novel. He says that no one can accept that an imperial army has been annihilated by men with bows and arrows and rusty old guns who live in tents and never wash and cannot read or write. He expresses his aspiration in the following words:

Is there any better way to pass these last days than in dreaming of a saviour with a sword who will scatter the enemy hosts and forgive us the errors that have been committed by others in our name and grant us a second chance to build our earthly paradise? (WFB 157)

After three months in the desert the expeditionary force finally returns to the settlement. Citizens discover that actually the man of Empire have been scattered there is nothing like battle. As one of the soldiers has explained that they froze in the mountain and starved in the desert while the barbarians led them out in to the desert and then vanished. The barbarians lured the force on and on, they could never catch them. There are no barbarians captured by them. The barbarians cut the ropes of their horses, loose them in the night. Hence it is clear
that the barbarians do not come to attack the Empire but the Empire goes to attack on them and ultimately the Empire’s power is scattered.

At this moment the imperial forces leave the settlement and also leaving those who remain to erect straw men along the battlements. Coetzee explores this novel as a discourse of postcolonial operations and he focuses on the concept of power to depict and uncover the oppressive South African environment. Stephen Watson described this aspect of postcolonial environment: The human relationship that is basic to it is likewise one of power and powerlessness . . . (14)

As a result of colonialism and the oppressive laws of apartheid is a dynamics of power that divides a nation by those who take power and those who become powerless. The title “Waiting for the Barbarians” explores and exemplifies the presence of existentialism in the novel. It shows more particularly the notion of purposelessness.

Title of the novel resembles that of the existential play *Waiting for Godot*, by Samuel Beckett, where the action of the play revolves around two main characters. They are aimlessly waiting for the presence of a vague entity, ‘Godot’. Samuel Beckett’s play begins with waiting and concludes with the same anticipation of something that will never appear in front of the person. The construction of the play is circular, beginning and ending with waiting speaks to the human experience and raises the questions of whether life and the search to find the purpose of life remain hopeless.

In this novel the word ‘waiting’ is as the existential expression of purposelessness. It is present through the concept of the Empire and also appears in the Magistrate’s description of his life. In the novel the Empire exists as a vague entity that rules over the
settlement where the story takes place and it gains power through protecting the citizens from the barbarians. The Empire and its citizens remain in a constant state of waiting for the barbarian aggression.

John Coetzee constructs the acute feeling of purposelessness which supplements the human condition. This ‘waiting’ happens to be the main plot of the novel which speaks of the Empire’s continuous anticipation of barbarians attack. The magistrate expresses that he wants to live his life in a familiar world and die in his own bed. He does not seek adventure to change or honour his life, instead of that he was resigned to his job, for a life which is ‘waiting’. J. M. Coetzee presents the image of a man in search of his own identity and a quite life to pass the time until his death. This symbolises the existential notion of the purposelessness for the human existence.

The individual is born in to this world of limits and suffering, and doomed to wait until his death and under this title of the attached notion of purposelessness. Coetzee presents this story of a man who becomes an oppressor and furthermore the oppressed. The title summarizes the cycle of oppression as we view the purposelessness of the Empire to the term ‘waiting’ and the attempt to gain purpose and power through naming the ‘other’ as enemy. For the Empire, their enemies are the native of the land who existed on the earth before the Empire emerged and as the Magistrate confess that they will remain after the Empire is gone.

The term ‘barbarians’ or ‘other’ speaks of the perspective that the individuals outside the Empire and they are considered as uncivilized. The reason behind it is the civilization to the Magistrate and the government exists only within the rules of the Empire. Hence,
paradoxically, as the novel progresses the Empire’s officers become barbaric because they torture and kill innocent people.

The reader becomes familiar of the fictitious accounts of the barbarian aggression reported from the capital. The Magistrate reveals doubt about the threat of the barbarians and in private he observed that once in every generation, without fail there was an episode of hysteria about the barbarians. If anyone is ready to show him the barbarian army only then he believe that barbarians are threat for them. Such kind of understanding and observation asserts the magistrate’s disbelief in the barbarian as threat. However, he thinks, this fear of the barbarians is a creation of the Empire as a means of controlling the citizens and creating a false sense of legitimacy.

The Empire declares its importance through promising safety to the citizens from the barbarians and in fact, the Empire seems to exist only in relations to barbarians. While showing or defining the barbarians as ‘other’, the Empire gains power and authority. The title of the novel ‘Waiting for the Barbarians’ suggests about the desire of the oppressor to name another individual as ‘other’ in attempts to gain purpose and power in the state.

This story takes place during the fall of Empire from power which is experienced by the protagonist. J. M. Coetzee introduces the cycle of oppression through the image of the protagonist in the past, during his starting position of the power. The reason behind it is the reader becomes aware of the characters in which extent they fall and the manner in which he loses power and the desperate state of results.

In the novel the cycle of oppression begins with the evidence of the Magistrate’s previous political and social power granted by the Empire. The Magistrate, as an officer of the Empire reigns over tiny
settlement in the outskirts for decades and receives power through his relation to the governing body of the Empire. While commanding other officers and serving as the link between settlement and the capital, the Magistrate living in the settlement to be the highest ranking officer and the highest authority within the small community. It places him in a position above everyone else in the settlement. The Magistrate speaks about his powers including sexual power which he had in his youth:

I remember how in the first years of my appointment here . . . how sometimes a restless wife, leaning over the half-door with the hearth fire gleaming behind her, would answer my gaze without flinching; how I would fall into conversation with young girls promenading in twos and threes, buy them sherbet, then perhaps lead away to the darkness . . . for years I wore the well-fed look of a prize boar. (WFB 48)

He explores his youth time as armed with the power granted to him by the Empire. The Magistrate speaks of himself through the female gaze, naming himself as a ‘prize boar’. This term speaks of a sense of economy advantage and ‘prize boars’ are well-fed, fat, and grandiose and therefore they are asset to its owner. This shows about the Magistrate’s political power.

Above quotation also describes his sexual power that was derived from his attractive appearance in his youth. The term ‘prize boar’ represents of an animal judged by appearance in a contest. It is compared to others and is deemed the winner. Through above quotation reader able to find that the magistrate’s pride lies in his ability to attract women which exists as a sexual power. It also shows the magistrate’s position of power in the past.

But at this stage the very idea of justice is nullified. Now the Empire exercises its power as an example the Magistrate is forced to wear a woman's calico smock by Mandel. The Magistrate thinks that
he will die like a dog in a corner because the Empire has made it impossible for individual to live a happy and peaceful life. As becoming the victim of Empire the Magistrate realized that the time of history is the creation of the imperial power. It has located its existence not in the recurrent spinning time of the cycle of seasons but in the jagged time of rise and fall. The Magistrate knows that the imperial power is cunning and ruthless and it feeds on images of disaster which include sack of cities, rape of population and pyramid of bones.

In this novel the presented society share a preference for immoral actions over moral behaviour in terms of sustaining the society. As the magistrate he realizes that the ‘new barbarians’ are not the nomads outside the citadel causing a threat, but are the men of the new government, the barbarian within the gate.

This novel very realistically and allegorically explores this situation in which pain, torture, oppression, violence are at the centre. Coetzee, as a writer himself tries to state that *Waiting for the Barbarians* is a novel about torture and he wanted to examine the effect of torture on human consciousness.

There is talk in this novel starting from the first pages on, about slaughter, rotting carcasses, nasty open sores on the body, the corpse of an old man with crushed lips and broken teeth, prisoners being humiliated and tortured, screams coming from a granary. Civilized human beings deliberately humiliate, degrade, and dehumanize defenceless individuals and they leave scars on the tortured bodies of young men/women.

Probably this novel is not set in South Africa. It broadly conveys events taking place during the sunset years of an unnamed and unspecified ‘Empire’. David Atwell asserts that
The Empire is a parody of the apartheid order, presenting its paranoid nature and its attempt to control history. Empire constructs otherness by announcing the separation between civilization and barbarians. The latter are linked with several myths supporting the idea of savagery of the suppressed by torture and humiliation. As much as “torture is in fact a way of producing the soul” (80)

This is also a technique of producing an image of otherness. Therefore the society is a society where everyone has a dormant capacity for crime. In this novel this process of branding the other by torture is most clearly expressed when a group of barbarians is publicly tortured in order to make them kneel. The empire shows its power by cheating and suppressing the other Barbarians. In this situation one man existed in this outermost settlement of the empire who in his heart was not a barbarian. This story is narrated from the perspective of this man and he is an unnamed Magistrate, a judicial official of this outpost. He has a goal at the opening of the story to live out his days quietly and simply until his pending retirement. At the opening of the story, the Magistrate knows enough to doubt any official story that is sent down from the government, but he is nevertheless content to carry out his role as judge. He may live with this basic incoherence until a turn of events forces him to engage with the bodily suffering. When Colonel Joll comes to town and initiates torture and interrogation against some helpless barbarians, his position as a magistrate shifts by the Empire. This novel presents an account of horrors that the narrating Magistrate wishes to see and at the same time not to see. With the lantern he visits the granary hut which is used for the questioning of prisoners allows him to see only violence, torture, humiliation, rape, mutilation.

The soldiers have captured and keep in custody a boy and an old man. The old man attempted to explain that they were coming to
the town to see the doctor as the boy has a sore and he has nothing to
do with the thieving. Even Magistrate considered that the old man is
telling the truth but Colonel Joll wants to question them. The most
dreadful crime is committed by the officers because in questioning
the old man is died and the young boy is asked to sleep near the dead
body of his grandfather. The Magistrate constantly returns to one
question of evil is that; what kind of people Joll and Mandel are?
Mandel’s reply for this unasked question is a powerful stroke and a
curse with shame full words like as, bastard! Old lunatic! Get out! Go
and die somewhere! (WFB) At this moment the Magistrate realizes
that the oppressors do not belong to the human order where the eating
of bread with other men or the performing of rituals would have any
symbolic value. There is no any ritual of cleansing or purification to
wash away the blood from their hands. Colonel Joll and Mandel are
the tools of the Imperial powers. They have no intention other than
ruler power and they are the men doing their jobs without any
reflection or questioning.

Colonel Joll and his men behave like worthy, virtuous warriors
who have fought for a noble cause and deserved to be honoured. The
process of textual creation of enemies is particularly forcibly in the
scene in which Colonel Joll writes with charcoal the word ‘ENEMY’
onto the back of the prisoners. The barbarians put into a state of
disgrace by torture, but their branding as ‘ENEMY’ earlier makes
their status explicit and at the same time serves as justification for
their treatment.

The double structure of the empire and barbarians is at once
established and confirmed by them, on the backs of this concrete
group of people. However it also forms a connection between torture,
shame and the communication of morality in the form of a command. Pressure, pain, and isolation lead to the access of guilt, to the so-called truth.

The magistrate’s quest for truth, is associated with colonel’s search for truth on one criterion because both take advantage and attempt to invade someone else’s body to find the truth.

In reality, the magistrate himself does not know what to make of his lack of sexual desire for the girl. The incident suggests that the magistrate is of a higher moral standing than he really is but his lack of sexual interest is not by his own choice.

It is marked that the magistrate fights to comprehend what he is seeing in her and extra support for this is found in the fact that he has no female acquaintances that are not, or have not been, his mistress. In this way it can be assume that the only use of women sees the magistrate for sexual desire. Therefore torture and pain reaches its highest point in the case of the barbarian girl. She is portrayed as the victim of torture and pain. This barbarian girl was one of the ‘barbarians’ interrogated by Colonel Joll and her presence in town is a disturbing aspect for the magistrate when the town returns to ‘normality’ after Joll leaves.

Girl’s father died during interrogation, and her people have left behind her. Now like the magistrate, she is a solitary and isolated creature and searching for herself. After discovering her magistrate quickly takes up an unusual relationship with her. The Girl’s body has the marks of Joll’s third degree and due to this her eye sight is damaged. She is leaving with her peripheral vision and her feet have been broken badly. The scars on the outer body, however, only begin to reflect those on her inside. Same as the torturer, the magistrate also
prevents outsiders from seeing what is going on in investigation. The magistrate’s fascination with the girl’s broken body is one which has been emphasized again and again by the critics. He tries to read her as he would be a text or the torture room itself. Though, her body is foreign to him, he fails to find a way to invade her and find the truth.

Despite of the pain and torture inflicted on the human beings, J. M. Coetzee has also depicted pain inflicted on the animals. The Magistrate has decided to lead the barbarian girl to her abode so he undertakes the dangerous journey and the horses are greatly helpful to him to accomplish his decision. Though, one of the pack-horses is tired and that night it refuses its feed and in the morning, even under the severest flogging, it will not rise. The infliction of physical pain and flogging become the determinants of the horse’s will to live and measure the truth of its tiredness. At the same time, he presents the barbarian view of the world where one life is mutually dependent upon the other. As a writer John Coetzee emphasizes it as a torture without the torturer.

In *Waiting for the Barbarians* Coetzee swings the focus of his interest from the torturers to the consequences of their aggressiveness. The impact of violence has on the oppressed who are aware of oppression of others and this idea is expressed with astonishing force from the first page of the novel.

The Magistrate is disturbed by the suffering of Joll’s victims so he wants to understand the meaning of scars on their bodies. The body of an old man who has been tortured to death, the wounds suffered by the boy accompanying the old man, and especially the barbarian girl’s damaged eyes and broken ankles all stimulate the Magistrate’s interest. He himself has entered the realm of torture, not
as an onlooker, but as a victim. Hence after returning from the
dangerous journey, he is arrested and detained in the cell. There he
begins to understand and truly identify the suffering and silence of the
boy, old man, the barbarians, the girl and even the pain of the horse.

However being reduced to the basic humanity of being a body
in pain, the magistrate is once assert his distance from Colonel Joll.
As a reader we can see that the magistrate identifies more and more
knowledge about the barbarian or ‘other’. In the last phase of his life,
physical abuse liberates him from participating in acts of torture. We
can recognise Human beings are human in so far as they bear witness
to the inhuman. Pain and torture is a shame for any society. Hence
Shame is a sort of national shame which is connected to the politics
of the country. Even, the decisions and actions of those in high office
to a large degree affect its citizens and it relates to the notion of the
site of torture’s impact on the mankind, rather than torture’s own
impact. As a novelist J. M. Coetzee’s description of torture is implicit
rather than explicit. Throughout the novel the violence is implied by
such a powerful description and it is forceful enough for readers to
imagine the brutality of the torture.

In the novel Colonel Joll and Mandel are only two proper
names. The whole novel is based around them. The novel’s setting is
strangely unspecific and John Coetzee purposefully avoids using a
proper name. Such as for the Empire he uses the only word Empire.
In this way the work becomes allegorical and universal at the same
time. It unfolds the dynamics of the power and identity besides the
master-slave discourse. Throughout the novel the action follows the
cycle of seasons instead of a chronological order of dates and months.
In the novel the description of the landscape is graphic but no proper
names of the places are given.
He wants to live outside the history as it is the creation of the powerful to rule for the powerless. Hence throughout the novel power is presented as a destructive force that erases an individual's identity, freedom and dignity. Even though The Magistrate tries his level best to explores his Self Identity in this situation.

*Life and Time of Michael K (1983)*

*Life and Time of Michael K* is J. M. Coetzee’s first novel which wins Booker Prize. The entire novel and the title of the novel are ironical. In this novel there is nothing which focuses on the life or time of the central character Michael K. Michael, the central character is an angel like human being who cut off himself from all sorts of various social relationships. This novel portrays his revolt against the socio-political system of then South African society which has been constantly attempting to convert Michael as slave for the welfare state.

Michael has a harelip by birth and his activities of mind and body are not quick. He has a mother who works for other and he has no father. Michael spends his childhood at the expense of the state with the company of other such unfortunate children. When he was fifteen years old, he joins the park and gardens division of the municipal services of the city of Cape Town as a gardener grade 3b. In this park and gardens division he works for three years. After this, he gates a job as night attendant at the public lavatory on green market square but one day he is beaten by two persons and they rob his everything.

After that Michael returns to the parks and gardens and becomes a gardener again. All this information is about his past life. This novel focuses light on what happens in the life of Michael K
when he was thirty-one years old. In this view the novel’s epigraph is very significant: ‘War is the father of all and king of all. Some he shows as gods, others as men. Some he makes slaves and others free.’(Kirk 123)

Coetzee shows that the civil war is at the backdrop of the novel and also the time of disorder and anarchy. Hence the authorities are always present there to monitor and control the situation. In the hospitals serious patients are lying in the corridor and there are scenes of victims of beating, stabbing and gunshot wounds therefore Coetzee calls the hospital a purgatory. At that time the individuals are simply the objects for oppressive and the absurd formalities and even the hospital symbolizes one of the power structures of the state in South Africa.

Novel informs us about Michael’s mother but could not inform about his Father. The father in the novel is the political father and with no any family relation, Michael is the son of this father. Hence he is a victim of this Civil and Political war. More precisely it has widened the gulf between the rulers and innocent people who are being ruled and punished by colonizers. Michael K is an ugly child of this South Africa who is yearning for freedom in the inhuman order of the day. His mother is released from the hospital so he brings her back to Cape Town, but the town is in the state of turbulence and disorder. Therefore Michael’s mother Anna K suggests that he should quit his job as a gardener and accompany her by train to Prince Albert which was her native as well as birth place. In Prince Albert she would have room and she would have some work on a farm. They decided to go there but there is no quick reservation in trains so they are asked to wait for two months for their journey. Hence they could
not get the permit to leave the Cape Town city. In this crisis Michael think and feels that the war has turned them into prisoners in their own country. There are Curfews, Strikes, ransacked flats screams have become the integral parts of the life in South Africa.

Michael very cleverly chooses the shortest route in which nobody would question him. For the safest journey of her mother he makes a barrow for his mother but as his fate, midway, his mother falls ill and so she is hospitalized. Long journey and bad health made her weak and finally she dies in the hospital. As per as the procedure of hospital is concerns, he must follow to give a detailed account of his mother. He lost everything with his mother’s death. He loses his nearest and the last relative in the death of his mother. Hence he is an orphan now. In this situation Michael is reaction and senseless. The nurse from the hospital gives him a parcel which contains his mother’s ashes and a few things like a safety razor, a bar of soap, a hand towel and other petty things. Michael does not want all these things. In fact, he throws soaps, hand towel and razor away.

After this mishap he is on his way to Prince Albert but midway he is caught by a soldier. Soldier calls him a thief running away over the mountains but somehow he escapes and comes to a place where his mother wants to come with him. This place is a piece of abandoned land and has patches of vegetables. He lives there for some time and again starts his journey. Again he was caught by the policemen now he is in the company of fifty strangers. There he has to work hard on the railway line to firm the bed of an empty track to advance to the foot of the slide. Now Michael is totally tired and exhausted too. Even he is unable to walk but the supervisor raises his stick and prods him in the chest.
Michael is now a member of a labour gang but he does not want to accept the life of a prisoner so he escapes from camp. He decides to enter the town from the South there he asks a shopkeeper about Mr. Vasloo or Mr. Visser, these are the names referred to him by his mother. At that place there is no person like Mr. Vasloo or Visser but there is Visagie’s place which has been deserted for years. Michael approaches the house and made a round or circles of it then he thinks that it is a safe place for him. There are goats and he spends the day hunting them down. There he finds a water pump and dam, muddy water and marsh grass as well but there is nothing in the house with which he can get a clue about the Visagies. He makes a catapult to knock birds out the trees. He has a packet which contains his mother’s ashes there he spreads it over the earth and cultivates the land and plants some seeds. One afternoon, a stranger appears there, he is Visagie’s grandson who is a deserter from the army.

In the house Michael sleeps on the floor like an animal, lives on birds and lizards. He does not know anything about money. One day Visagie’s grandson asks him to go to Prince Albert to bring something for him and advises him not to talk to anyone. Michael leaves the farm carrying the list of things but at the gate of the farm he buries money in the tin under a stone. After that he goes in the direction of Prince Albert there he finds a cave but again he is caught by police. This time he is taken to the police station and he is locked with other five men. Michael has just a skeletal figure and he has no papers or a green card. The police file a charge sheet against him and referred to as Michael Visagie. – CM –40–NFA unemployed. Michael has no official permit and no identification document. He is the neglected child of South Africa who is born in the Africa but still
he must have documents to prove his own identity in his own country. There is a resettlement camp, and once again he becomes a prisoner.

He wants to ask several questions but he lacks courage to speak and says ‘It is like a nightmare.’ He is told that it is not a prison but a camp and it is for people without job. Actually, the people in the camp are the cheap labourers for the state. If anyone from the camp goes to Prince Albert to buy some things, then all of a sudden prices of things go up. The shopkeeper cheats the people from the camp for money. Coetzee portraits the picture of camp life which presents a grim picture of the state sponsored atrocity and exploitation. On the camp all the formalities are strictly observed by the state authority. Every Sunday, a pastor visits the camp to conduct a prayer service and he think it is a sophisticated form of hypocrisy and conspiracy of the state. There is no doctor or medicine in the camp. Michael’s companion in the camp tells him:

You have been asleep all your life. It’s time to wake up why do you think they give you charity, you and the children? Because they think you are harmless, your eyes aren't opened you do not see the truth around you. (LTMK 88-89)

Michael revolts against this system because the camp provides food, shelter and clothes but is systematic way of making the people prisoners and labours forever for state. Michael does not want to live this kind of life instead of it he wants to earn his bread on his own way. J. M. Coetzee uses the metaphor of parasitism for it and Persons and institutions are projected in terms of parasite-host relationship.

We find a notion of power as a force through every level of social relations hence for Foucault power is both pervasive and productive. If we examine the novel carefully, we find that power is pervasive throughout but it is not productive in any sense. It is
corrosive power. The state has thrust its legitimacy to exploit the poor as it is more powerful. This power has broken the very backbone of the civil life in South Africa. The people in the camp are called a nest of parasites: ‘who eat substance, giving no nourishment back.’ (LTMK 116)

There is a thin line of separation between a host and a parasite. The more powerful has an upper hand and can easily reverse the position ‘Perhaps in truth whether the camp was declared parasite on the camp depended on no more than one who made his voice loudest.’ (LTMK 116) At this situation the only alternative for Michael to resist the corrosive power is gardening. Michael begins his life as a gardener and even at the end of the novel he finds his real place in the world. He asserts ‘The truth, the truth about me.’ ‘I am a gardener.’(LTMK 181)

This thought of gardening should be examined in a wider perspective because it is something opposed to the war or the destructive forces. This is a step ahead in reaching to mother Earth. Firstly, he scatters the ashes of his dead mother all over the uncultivated land then after he cultivates some of the patches and grows melons and pumpkins. This is Michael’s Eden, where one can see the bounty of the earth and whatever grows in the field is applicable and useful for all human beings. He has no sense of possession and wealth though his tender hands have worked day and night to grow the vegetables. As a fate once again he is caught by the police. They take away his vegetables but Michael does not be disappointed. He says: ‘We are all the children of the earth.’(LTMK 139) As a creative writer Coetzee seems to equate Michael with the Eternal Gardener-Christ; Michael’s gardening negates the destructive
power in a very humble way. As per as Michael is concerns, his mother is not dead but she has mingled up herself with the mother earth. He thinks ‘She makes the plants grow.’ (LTMK 130) Michael is aware of the absurdity of the war and he knows the reasons:

Because enough men had gone off to war saying the time for gardening was when the war was over; whereas there must be men to stay behind and keep gardening alive. (LTMK 109)

Throughout the novel, Michael is blank of any genuine human relationship. Hence doing a work of gardening he creates a sense of community for himself. There is no any strong bond of human relationship among the persons in the novel so at one stage he calls his melons and pumpkins as his close relatives.

Once again he is caught by the police but this time he is admitted to a hospital. The doctor, who is also the narrator of the novel, is astonished to see Michael who weighs less than forty kilos. The doctor thinks that Michael does not belong to this Earthly world. He calls Michael as Michaels. Michael’s only wish is to be free he says, ‘I used to think about flying. I always wanted to fly.’ (LTMK 133) He has the tenacity to survive hence he has been protesting against the polished system of slavery of the state. The doctor is right when he says: ‘He passes through these institutions and camps and hospitals and God knows what else like a stone. Through the intestines of the war.’ (LTMK 135) He even refuses the baby food which was offered to him in the hospital as: ‘He only eats the bread of freedom.’ (LTMK 146) The doctor is able to perceive the divine spark in Michael as:

... a human soul above and beneath classification, a soul blessedly untouched by doctrine, untouched by history, a soul stirring its wings within that stiff sarcophagus, murmuring behind that clownish mask. (LTMK 151)
Michael escapes from the hospital too, because he wants to live like a bird like a free soul. The doctor thinks that Michael is an angel who comes from the Garden of paradise. When Michael was admitted to the hospital, his weight was thirty – five kilos only skin and bone. He did not eat anything for last two weeks so he was even unable to stand up and walk and still he climbed wall and escaped. It is a miracle for the doctor who treats Michael. Lights and Shades of divinity sparkle in Michael's personality because he wants that food of freedom which neither the camp not the hospital is able to offer.

One day Michael sits on the bench facing the sea. There are three people who also astonished to see Michael and offer him wine and meat. One of the persons rightly says: ‘It is difficult to be kind to a person who wants nothing. You must not be afraid to say what you want, and then you will get it. That is my advice to you, my thin friend.’ (LTMK 179) The Doctor who treats Michael in the government hospital attempts to comprehend and represent Michael’s otherness. But these tries prove to be futile as Michael’s otherness remains mysterious perplexing and intact – both in the eyes of the officer and the reader. Even Michael does not attempt to give a logical account for his escape or plausible explanation of his life. Michael accepts the life as it is as a matter of fact and very well aware that he is a small insignificant creature in his own native country in which strife has become perennial and the dignity of the human being is threatened by the oppressive system. Coetzee offers us a number of hints to show Michael’s actuality and the opposite model of the identity constructed by the world around him in the South Africa. Starting from his birth to his final escape there develops a sharps contrast between what Michael is capable of doing and the projection of the ability as constructed by the people in power.
He is an ugly and unwanted child of South Africa. At the time of birth Michael’s little lip curls like a snail’s foot so his vulnerability runs throughout the novel. Even as a small infant Michael is unable to suck milk from the breast of his mother and when the bottle is used he coughs and splutters. This incident suggests that his life is not going to be easier in the course of the time. His mother is a house maid. She takes him with her as there is no one to look after him. In the novel it is concluded that because of the disfigurement his mind is not quick and he is almost labelled as someone abnormal or mentally challenged child in the society. Michael is taken out of the school after a very short period of time assuming that he is incapable of doing anything creative useful or practical. Overall process of classification is at work to locate Michael within the accepted standard of the system and without his desire or consent he is taught only the tasks of manual labour which includes swiping, scrubbing and digging.

Michael is like an orphan and he is kept in the orphanage run by the government of the apartheid South Africa. At the public lavatory he does the insignificant job as night attendant. Due to bad health his mother is always ill and incapable of bringing him up. The condition of the hospital is grim in the police state. In the hospital there are victims of stabbings and beating. When his mother is admitted to the hospital she cannot sleep as the sound of gun shots keep her awake throughout the nights hence instead of curing her, the hospital makes her life unbearable. She wants to leave the hospital on the third day but she fails and the sixth day she is allowed to leave.

Coetzee graphically describes Anna K’s experience as: ‘he tears she wept on the sixth day were thus largely tears of relief that
she was escaping this purgatory.' (LTMK 05) In the hospital even elementary things like a bed pan and wheelchair are denied to them. In the State travelling has become impossible for ordinary people as they require special permit from the police authorities to go to another district. The novel explores that the whole country has been transformed into a prison house or a police state and the maze of bureaucracy.

We find the same world in Franz Kafka’s *The Castle*. Delays suspicions, gloating and violence have thrown the civilian life out of gear. We have already seen that Michael is presented as someone stupid and incapable of doing any work that requires a special skill. But to clear this point Coetzee suggests that Michael is intelligent in doing some works precisely and this can be seen when Michael makes the wheelbarrow with the box seat using the wheels from his bicycle for his mother. There at one point he confronts a new problem of how to prevent the wheels from spinning off the axle and works all afternoon using a hacksaw blade and during this work he hardly eats or sleeps. Michael shows his skill and creativity in building the wheelbarrow but interesting things about the whole matter is that Michael himself is unaware that he has done such a nice job. This is his behaviour to make thing naturally without any preparation. In the novel it makes him almost an angel like figure. After his mother’s death he comes to the Visagie’s place at Prince Albert. While living at this place he cuts a Y-shaped stick and with the tongue of the old shoe and strips of rubber of an inner tube makes a catapult for himself. With the help of it he knocks birds out of the trees.

Hear Michael shows his amazing skills and love as a cultivator and thinks that nothing is useless in the world. He miraculously
solves practical problems using his natural abilities. In a week he clears the land near the dam. He restores the system of furrows that irrigates the land. Michael may always think that he is a free man and out of the clutches of the military regime. Coetzee explores this as: ‘He was not a prisoner or a castaway, his life by the dam was not a sentence that he had to serve out.’ (LTMK 115)

Michael has learnt from the seed of freedom to rise up. This is not the coarse dogma of a terrorist or a rebel. He never joins the guerrillas. He is able to see vulnerable children on all sides to be taken care of. He always craves for freedom or free life. He is unable to eat, swallow or get proper nourishment behind the gate of the camp. Michael’s food is his freedom and hence his body is crying to be fed on its own food and it is not present behind the wire fences.

He is set aside by others as a rough, mindless, lost, unfit, creature as well as a simpleton or an idiot. The Medical officer observes and astonishes to see that Michael has been able to keep himself alive without food for some days. He doesn’t understand the colour of body and power of State. He knows and cares for those things which are divinely ordered and same and good for all mankind.

Michael cares for his mother as same as the mother Earth. Starting right from his orphanage, he experiences the harsh realities of the South African life. Many violent things such as curfews, permits, interrogation, patrol, guns and violence leave dark images of apartheid on his mind. Michael does not want to come back to Cape Town after his mother’s death because he wishes to live apart from the world of war. He decides to start his life as a cultivator or a gardener.

At last land cultivation give him a new and healing vision beyond the war going on all around him. One night a flock of black
guerrillas came near his farm to eat his pumpkins and melons. He hides himself out of this sights only listening to the proud laughter and battle. He is at first surprised and even thinks that in the morning he will come out of hiding and he will be asked to join the warriors. After a moment’s reflection reminds Michael of his new and sacred vocation, one which he cannot discard:

Because enough men had gone off to war saying the time for gardening was when the war was over; whereas there must be men to stay behind and keep gardening alive or at least the idea of gardening; because once the cord was broken, the earth would grow hard and forget her children. (LTMK 109)

The land wants his power for cultivation. Michael is not a soldier, or a refuge but a gardener. The vision of peace which Coetzee’s protagonists reach in their lives is not without consequences but it is hidden within history. He shows the possibility of another way of living in relationship with history and people. This is a way beyond the master – slave relationship.

At one point when he escapes from the camp, he walks all over the night but he does not feel fatigue, even he trembles with the thrill of being free. Hence he shows that he is without any burden or pressure. He does not feel or barely remembers a sensation of hunger. For him the food from the camp had no taste or tasted like dust. After coming to the Visagie’s farm he tells himself that when food comes out of the earth, he will recover his appetite and that food will have taste, savour and flavour too.

He has become almost a skeleton after the hardships experienced in the camp. Only after his escape from the camp, he starts to do work in his field and feels a deep joy in his physical being and reaches the stage of weightlessness because of joy of freedom. As a writer Coetzee rightly portraits Michael’s state of bliss:
His step was so light that he barely touched the earth. It seemed possible to fly; be both body and spirit. (LTMK 102)

Michael’s natural abilities come out when he is free. At a one moment when he thinks of burning fire then he opens the suitcase of broken toys and finds the telescope. He uses one of the lances to focus rays of the sun sharply in to coax smoke out of a handful on dry grass. Hence he knows the art of making simple tools using wood, leather and gut. Michael doesn’t believe in leaving any proofs of his identity after his departure from any place. He thinks that the insets will eat the tools when he does not need them.

There are implicit references made in the novel by writer to show Michael’s relationship with his father. Narrator already noted that Michael is presented as an orphan. It is the State who is Michael’s implicit father. As he says:

... and my father was Huis Norenius. My father was the list of the rules on the door of the dormitory, the twenty-one rules of which the first was ‘There will be silence in dormitories at all times,’ and the woodwork teacher with the missing fingers who twisted my ear when the line was not straight, and the Sunday mornings when we put on Khaki shirts and our Khaki shorts and our black socks and our black shoes and marched two abreast to the church on Paapegaai Street to be forgiven. They were my father,... (LTMK 104-105)

The strict rule and regulation of the State is his father. This father has made the innocent children as victims, prisoners and criminals. This (State) father has played an oppressive role in making innocent children as prisoners in the camp.

Michael K the protagonist of the novel knows that the father is a protector and preserver for their children but this father has failed to play a generous role. He thinks that he is fortunate that he has no children and feels that he will fail in his duties and he will be the worst of fathers. Michael knows that children need milk, clothes,
friends and schooling as well. Even he has no desire to be a father. He knows that life in South Africa only passing of time. He remembers parents bringing up children behind the wire when he is a prisoner at camp. Hence he tells himself ‘That is why it is good thing that I, who have nothing the pass on, should be spending my time here where I am out of the way.’(LTMK 105)

Michael is very well aware of the plight of children in Africa who have become prisoners in the camps without committing any crime. He is able to isolate himself from the civil war and its impacts. Therefore he chose to live an insignificant life as an insect leaving no trace on his personality. Coetzee puts Michael’s attitude in the followings lines:

What a pity that to live in times like these, a man must be ready to live like a beast. A man who wants to live cannot live in a house with lights in the windows. He must live in a hole and hide by day. A man must live so that he leaves no trace of his living. That is what it has come to. (LTMK 99)

In the camp the officers are the parts and parcel of the larger framework of the power structure of the State. The State ran the institutions such as hospitals, camps, and military head quarters. On behalf of the State these Officers exercise their power on the innocent and helpless people which include women and children. The prisoner people are always called as nest of criminals and they are always reminded that the State is not running the holiday camp for them. Hence it is a work camp and its function is to teach lazy people to work.

The young persons are addressed as ungrateful bastards by the Officers. The Police officer stressed that the State builds house for the people but they appreciate nothing. The State provides food and shelter for them and hence they have to repay to State by their work.
In the camp if any women or child will seen outside the wire of the camp, will be shot without any questions or inquiry. Therefore freedom has no place in the word of camps. The whole State is in the hands of the oppressors. As one of the Police officer comments on the day to day work of camp as: ‘No visits, no outings, No picnics. Only Roll-Calls morning and evening’ (LTMK 92) The Medical officer in the rehabilitation camp hospital has a keen fascination for Michael. This officer is amazed to observe that Michael weighs only thirty five kilos though he is able to escape from the heavily guarded camp. Due to strange sympathy towards Michael the Doctor wants to help him in every possible way. He is able to see a glimpse of divinity on Michael’s face and thinks that Michael is someone who should never have been born in a world like that and it would have been better if his mother had quietly killed him as child. The Doctor tells another officer whose names is Noel that he will write out a death certificate of Michael and tells him to do counter sign on it. After that report will be submitted in the military head quarter named the Castle. The clerk will file the certificate without any questions and that will be the end of the story of Michael’s.

In the whole novel we find the shadow of Kafka’s The Trial and The Castle. When there is anarchy and chaos in the society, and when the State assumes the legitimate role of an oppressive master, then all values of a civilized society erode. In such society a man is reduced to a small insect or creature trying to protect and preserve himself against the system. The Castle is the name of the police headquarters which operates on its own terms and conditions. This Castle closed from all sides and there irrational and inhuman rules are implemented there very brutally. It has its own agenda, rules and regulation to turn insignificant person like Michael into an insect. All
the rules and regulations are framed with great care and precision and they are implemented through corrupt and insensitive bureaucracy of the state.

In this bureaucracy the existence of a human life is registered in the record book and a human being is given a unique number and put them in various categories of crime. Maintenance of the official record and report are the prime concerns of this system. It is a subtle world of time tables, maps, figures, openings and closing camps and renaming them. This system carries the agenda of bureaucracy to run and develop the State.

It is Michael’s objection to exit outside through time and history. Throughout the novel we find a number of references which show that he successfully escapes from the world of records, dates and as well as history. As a writer J. M. Coetzee tries to construct Michael identity in terms of small animals and creatures in the South Africa. He is equated with a mouse that guts an over–crowded foundering ship. Further he is also presented as a lizard under a stone and like a snail with its shell. When Michael is on the farm house, he hides himself from the police. He never comes out in the daylight. He feels himself as naked as a mole in daylight. He knows how to live beyond time and the depressed history of his own country. When Michael comes near the dam wall he closes his eyes and holds his fingers in the stream. Coetzee writes:

He lived by the rising and setting of the sun, in a pocket outside time. Cape Town and the war and his passage to the farm slipped further and further into forgetfulness. (LTMK 60)

After Michael returns to the farm he finds himself more luxurious in the sensation of endless time. He has fulfilled his responsibility towards his mother by mixing her ashes in the farm
where he believes she was born. He made himself free from any obligation to use his time more fruitfully than before as:

> Since time was poured out upon him in such an unending stream, there were whole mornings he could spend lying on his belly over and ant-nest picking out the larvae one by one with a grass stalk and putting them in his mouth. (LTMK 102)

Derek Attridge writes:

> K’s relishing of time without divisions and duties it’s linked to an understanding of the future: in complete contrast to the drive to make one’s mark before one dies, K longs to leave no trace. (56)

Michael says that there will be not a single particle left bearing his marks. There is something positive in K’s temporal experience because he is able to give himself the endless of time of empty days and a profitless existence. Derek Attridge writes: ‘There is a kind of openness to the future, a kind of trust in events that has no relations to the calculations by which most of us live.’(56-57)

Michael’s status in the world is aptly described by the doctor who says about him as:

> No papers, no money; no family, no friends, no sense of who you are. The obscurest of the obscure, so obscure as to be a prodigy. (LTMK 142)

The doctor also stresses that Michael is not a creature of this world he belongs to another world. He does not keep an account or record of his life. ‘He had kept no tally of the days nor recorded the changes of the moon.’(LTMK 115) Michael only shows his sensitivity and tender attitude towards gardening. We can see this attitude as even he places pads of grass under the melons so that their skin should not bruise. As the novel goes on Michael loses his personal name in the eyes of the doctor and he calls him Michaels. As doctor is concerns Michael becomes the representative of the ordinary
individuals being who is crushed by the political and military forces of the country.

Michael is seen to be made of dust, spat and patting because when last time he comes to the farm it is likely that he will dig his own grave and slip quietly in it and draw the heavy earth over his head like a blanket. He will be far away from the present, past, and future. The doctors understand that Michael originally has the resistance power. He lives on a different kind of food which no government machinery can supply to him. Whenever he is ordered by officers to obey, he remains pliant and his body cries to be fed on its own food.

The doctors knows that he is physically so weak that he is going to die in the near future but at the same time they knows that Michael is not going to change his nature at any cost. The doctor thinks that he is like a bunny rabbit sewn up in the carcass of an Ox. He resists and challenges all techniques used by officers to make him speak and narrate his own story. All their efforts are fruitless in the case of Michael. He knows that they tried to imprison him in the systems and want an adventurous version of life in Africa.

This is not possible to separate Michael K’s fate from the economy of the neo–colonial world system of South Africa. The effect of South African society under apartheid was to turn what remained of the liberal dreams of virtue of and of civic freedom into a nightmare. Economic development became permanent exploitation in the country.

The irony and plight of Michael’s life is signalled by the title ‘Life and Times of’, we might expect the sub-titles ‘as told by him.’ The task of autobiographical narratives has been to let a protagonist’s
unique voice to be heard openly so that the non famous could thereby be ascribed a personality or a subjectivity through it. But Michael declines to tell his story even in encounters with the few decent human beings in the novel; he remains silent. In the hospital yard the man who shares his food with him talks about his own problems, but Michael says nothing to him: ‘K listened to the birds in the trees and tried to remember when he had known such happiness.’ (LTMK 30)

Whereby the normal conditions and inner emotions come out into a personal narration but it is also somehow unavailable for him to express his deep rooted feelings. On one occasion, when he wants to talk to the family of the kind stranger, but at that time words fail him. The narrator by using the devices of inner-monologue tries to establish an important point that Michael’s condition is something other than anger, refusal or stupidity. It may be false to interpret his silence as the mental state. Michael may have thoughts, memories, longing, but all are remain blocked from utterance by a silence that embarrasses listeners:

His heart was full, he wanted to utter his thanks, but finally the right words would not come. The children stared at him; a silence fell; their parents looked away. (LTMK 48)

The habit or discipline of keeping mum or silence may forbid all personal or private conversation with others. In the camp the children of the orphanage are not permitted to speak to the instructor except in response to specific questions with never articulating personal concerns. In the classroom children are compelled to give correct answers of the abstract problems which are largely irrelevant to their lives. Hence silence or the correct answer: those are the only two possibilities to react. But giving the answers to an arithmetic problem does not teach any one to tell a personal story to others. The
answer or feeling leaves behind in unspoken silence, the frantic struggle to solve the problem, the cold sweat of the palms fearing the teacher – examiner. The bafflement of a human being is confronting random exercises of power. In the response personal elements have no value in the category of ‘correct answer’ they would only interfere with the routine in which the orphanage and the institutions function. Therefore having never learnt how to talk about himself, Michael finds it virtually impossible to construct a narrative that would reveal the meaning of his life. Something is happen irregular with him:

> Always, when he tried to explain himself to himself, there remained a gap, a hole, a darkness before which his understanding baulked, into which it was useless to pour words. The words were eaten up, the gap remained. His was always a story with a hole in it: a wrong story, always wrong. (LTMK 110)

This gap is even present in his inner thoughts, because all narration has been contaminated with the violence of the institution. What pupils have learnt is that ‘any attempt to be subjective is already a wrong response. However, that does not mean that the respondents are left in peace. The instructor has power to force them to repeat and to echo the one correct answer. This moment of compulsion remains as the unarticulated accompaniment of every attempt to speak.

In terms of one’s personal story, the compulsion manifests itself in various ways. Therefore firstly there is the compulsion to tell a “Correct story, one in which Michael K’s has broken no laws. Then, there are the pressures to tell a story that is ‘interesting’ one. The paradox in Michael K’s life is that, no matter how exotic the experience of a poor, oppressed individual from South Africa might seem to readers unfamiliar with poverty or the conditions. There his case cannot be a special one when millions are suffering just as
miserably like him. Hence it represents the quotidian experience on an ordinary person might captivate the readers in London or elsewhere in Europe, as it will be hardly worth telling in Africa. He accepts the impoverishment that his life’s story represents the truth that his life is an ordinary one.

He shrugs off the demand to tell an interesting story, one that would satisfy the readers whose pleasure comes from the consumption of narratives. In the closing pages of the novel, he addresses this problem directly.

They want me to open my heart and tell them the story of a life lived in cages. They want to hear about all cages I have lived in, as if I were a budgie or a white mouse or a monkey. (LTMK 181)

Michael would also accept as normal situation in which the speaker cannot even tell his story but must always proffer the accepted version. Overlap with the criteria of correctness and interest are the demands of true stories. The irony is that what is true is determined by the audience, not the speaker. Here true need has not ample importance, as all of Michael’s efforts to communicate with the railway and the police clerks demonstrate. Indeed, some truths would seem to be superfluous:

... the state of his mother’s health did not constitute special grounds, the clerk told him; on the contrary, he would advice him not to mention her condition at all. (LTMK 09)

Later, when he attempts to tell the policewoman about his mother, she interrupts each time the dialogue is about to shift from rot responses to actual personal reporting and the police has no need for such stories. Therefore suffering is neither correct nor interesting when uttered by those without power. The ‘permit’ will be granted only to those persons who willing to make their stories conform to official paradigms.
The compulsion that is implicit in every exchange between the South African authorities and Michael becomes explicit once his interrogation at the hand of the soldiers begins. They need a story in order to be able to carry out their orders and it has to be sufficiently interesting too. The authority cannot use his simple explanations. Michael’s story is like the pumpkins he rises for own survival cannot be integrated into the global system and thus are worthless to the authorities. Since he has nothing to say, the doctor becomes increasingly exasperated and finally desperate. As per as the system and to keep it functioning smoothly, he proposes fabricating necessary story. The Medical officer has no difficulty in spinning out the yarn, because all that is required is that it satisfies the criteria set by the audience.

The Medical officer’s story is the sort of the narrative which is the government wants. By providing such story, he is in fact substantiating the government’s view of reality. The interrogation of Michael takes its examples and its might from the economy upon which South Africa has been constructed.

The doctor sums the destination of South African history as: (‘When was South Africa discovered? ‘1652’ ‘Where is the biggest man-made hole in the world”? ‘Kimberly’). (LTMK 158) Coetzee inhabits the same world as Michael is refusing to answer the questions and by not producing an ‘interesting” story. Michael has avoided becoming the subject of a history written by others. They may speculate about him, but they cannot count upon his co-operation in maintaining the official narrative. Similarly Coetzee’s studied refusal to become a political writer preserves the small space from freedom of expression available to writers in South Africa.
In the struggle to make sense of his life, Michael K knew that he would not crawl out and stand up and cross from the darkness into firelight to announce himself. Michael finds himself wandering around a village or countryside aimlessly searching for nothing and everything. However some commentators have suggested that Michael is trying to search for a grand meaning of his life. Michael is in fact profoundly concerned to arrive at a distinctively metaphysical understanding of him. Michael K. himself continually searches for meaning, and keeps trying to determine what his proper purpose is.

Identity One of the main problems facing South African writers, whether directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, is that of identity. White South African literature has been impacted by the element of displacement it shares with settlers’ colonies like Australia, Canada, and New Zealand-common themes are exile, finding a language to describe the non-European landscape, and emotional/cultural homelessness. There is also the element within black South African literature which has affinities with the rest of Africa—a preoccupation with dispossession, silencing, and marginalization. However, both these elements find common ground in the pressing concerns of identity imposed on all South Africans by the policy of apartheid, which enshrined duality as a way of life. Nadine Gordimer sums up this identity crisis and the contradictory loyalties as a situation in which all South African find them in critical situation.

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