CHAPTER ONE

IN THE LAND OF PAIN

Where to our health is bound. We are not ourselves
When nature, being oppressed, commands the mind
To suffer with the body. I’ll forbear,
And am fallen out with my more headier will
To take the indisposed and sickly fit
For the sound man. – William Shakespeare

A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and
language seemed to repeat it inexorably. – Ludwig Wittgenstein

Who am I to myself? Just one of my sensations. My heart drains out helplessly, like a broken
bucket. Think? Feel? How everything wearies when it’s defined. – Fernando Pessoa

In my suffering there is nothing ennobling. Little of what I call the suffering is even pain – J.
M. Coetzee

THE WORD PAIN is derived from the Latin term poena, which means suffering, inflicted as
punishment for an offense. The Latin term is the root of the old French word peine, which means
a penalty, and later became ‘peyne’, pain.\(^1\) The development in meaning and etymology do not relate only to the sensation of pain but the complexity with which it arises and gets contextualized. Every century has defined pain differently, depending upon the knowledge and subjective experience of pain. It is a complex phenomenon—like a complex web. The varying degree and nature of pain leads to a complex expression. The history of human civilization witnesses pain in various dimensions in different cultures, civilizations, space, and time. The difficulty in capturing a singular definition indicates its elusive nature.\(^2\) As living beings cannot ignore pain, its essence is realized through the experience and expression of pain. Wittgenstein suggests, “There is no pain without . . . pain behaviour”; he further questions “what would it be like if human beings did not manifest their pains (did not groan, grimace, etc.)? Then it would be impossible to teach a child the use of the word ‘toothache’” (PI 99). He also points out that it is not always necessary that somebody expresses his pain. Pain is a metaphysical visitation—an integral part of ourselves through which we restructure our individuality. It is not a definite entity; it denies any definitive, ideal definition of being. Its sources remain in the periphery of the known and unknown. It has ontological priority, which calls for a solidarity across species.

The narrative of pain removes the curtain of its complex internal sources to show the subtleties and infer a better understanding of pain. The structures of narrative (plot, closure) help to reflect upon external and internal incidents to draw the relationship between them. The purpose of the narrative of pain is to demonstrate pain through different narrative techniques,

\(^{1}\) The Oxford English Dictionary defines pain as follows: penalty, punishment, and suffering, distress caused by fear of possible evil, anxiety, cause to suffer, hurt, to torment, to take pains or trouble. From 1300 to 1650, the word was spelled as ‘payne,’ and ‘paine.’ Chaucer has spelled it as ‘peyne’ (1386). Encyclopaedia Britannica defines pain, “as a complex experience consisting of a physiological and a psychological response to a noxious stimulus. Pain is a warning mechanism that protects an organism by influencing it to withdraw from harmful stimuli; it is primarily associated with injury or the threat of injury” (https://www.britannica.com/science/pain).

\(^{2}\) Aristotle thought of pain as an emotion. Thomas Moore described pain as the “direct opposite of pleasure.” Rene Descartes has felt it as a sensation like hot or cold.
which is otherwise very difficult to express. The representation of pain does not depend only on the subjective experience but also rests on the “imaginative combination of one’s own past experience of pain with deductions drawn from observing how other behave” and it becomes “a matter of cumulative experience and attention” (Lewis 122).

The basic understanding of pain comes from the realization of being hurt, or from certain unwanted sensations in the body. Pain perception however, is not simple to comprehend. Ronald Melzack and Patrick D. Wall have pointed out in The Challenge of Pain (1982) that pain perception “cannot be defined simply in terms of particular kinds of stimuli. Rather, it is a highly personal experience, if not a cultural learning, the meaning of the situation, and other factors, that are unique to each individual” (Melzack 15). The meaning of pain is not confined to one singular language but varies in different languages. The invariable use depends on the context, as the French douleur and Latin dolor do not separate physical pain and mental pain. In Buddha’s teaching duhkha/duhkka is the fundamental problem of existence. The immediate feeling and reaction about pain is negative, something that everyone wants to avoid. Pain in the twentieth century has been mostly medicalized, and huge commercial industries have emerged for pain management.

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3 Different experiences of pain have been captured through different explanations. A number of theories have been posited in several centuries (Melzack & Wall 165):

1) INTENSIVE THEORY
2) SPECIFICITY THEORY
3) STRONG’S THEORY

4 The reaction to pain shows cultural differences in the expression of pain – in English Ow! French Aie! New Guinea Udei!

5 I am using the term ‘existence’ instead of ‘life’ because of its broader sense to have the larger context in which Buddha has used the word duhkha. One of the earliest summaries of his teaching says: “This is the noble truth of suffering: birth is suffering, ageing is suffering, sickness is suffering, dying is suffering; being united with what is not liked is suffering, separation from what is liked is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering; in short, the five aggregates of grasping are suffering” (qtd. in Gethin 59).
According to the International Association for the Study of Pain, “Pain is an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage, or described in terms of such damage” (IASP). This definition is contradictory because pain does not only depend on the potential for tissue damage. Interestingly, the IASP has put a footnote on the definition, which says:

The inability to communicate verbally does not negate the possibility that an individual is experiencing pain and is in need of appropriate pain-relieving treatment. Pain is always subjective. Each individual learns the application of the word through experiences related to injury in early life. Biologists recognize that those stimuli which cause pain are liable to damage the tissue. Accordingly, pain is that experience we associate with actual or potential tissue damage. It is unquestionably a sensation in a part or parts of the body, but it is also always unpleasant and therefore also an emotional experience. Experiences which resemble pain but are not unpleasant, e.g., pricking, should not be called pain. Unpleasant abnormal experiences (dysesthesias) may also be a pain but are not necessarily so because, subjectively, they may not have the usual sensory qualities of pain. Many people report pain in the absence of tissue damage or any likely pathophysiological cause; usually this happens for psychological reasons. There is usually no way to distinguish their experience from that due to tissue damage if we take the subjective report. If they regard their experience as pain, and if they report it in the same ways as pain caused by tissue damage, it should be accepted as pain. This definition avoids tying pain to the stimulus. Activity induced in the nociceptor and nociceptive pathways by a noxious stimulus is not pain, which is always a psychological state, even
though we may well appreciate that pain most often has a proximate physical cause”

(IASP)

There are several issues here that draw our attention: i) pain is subjective, ii) pain is also emotional, iii) the inability to express does not justify the absence of the experience, and iii) pain has a physical casualty. This justifies that pain is not only a biomedical phenomenon, and does not remain in the domain of medicine, but encompasses and is fused with culture—the modes of a sedentary lifestyle, stress, poor diet, and social and economic condition. As a powerful emotion, pain creates a pathway in understanding our existence in the world and our relationship with the world in a better way. Understanding pain opens up the various doors of compassion and sympathy, explains its mechanisms and calls for a careful study and interpretation.

According to Julien Teppe:

Pain of all the psychological states, is the one which takes over the entire being, both the flesh and the spirit, with the greatest urgency and force. It is a disposition which sweeps away, blots

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7 French writer and journalist Julien Teppe started the ‘dolorism’ movement. The word dolorism refers to the value of pain. In 1935 Teppe published the ‘Dolorist Manifesto,’ and in the same year he started the Revue dolorist which included writers like Andre Gide, Paul Valery, and other like Benda, Colette, Leautaud, and Daniel-Rops. Teppe treated pain as a source of self-learning and self-discovery, and a source of purification. He has argued that “I am suffering therefore I am.” Teppe has suggested for a better understanding of pain and as a part of education, one needs to visit sanatoriums and hospitals. Much of Teppe’s work is not available easily. Providentia, a website on Psychology has a page on Julien Teppe which states:

That dolorism became a hotly debated subject before and after World War II is perhaps not surprising given the political and economic struggle to rebuild Europe. Theologians continued to advocate pain as a necessary evil while neurologists and physiologists weighed in on the medical aspects of pain. Teppe's chief opponent was prominent surgeon, Rene Leriche. Gaining experience in treating pain associated with the battlefield injuries in the World War I, Leriche's book La Chirugie de la douler (The Surgery of Pain) quickly became a classic in treating “pain disorders” after its publication in 1937. As a militant humanist as well as a surgeon, Leriche avidly fought any attempt to glorify pain and argued against the idea that pain could be beneficial or useful in any way. Ironically, Leriche actively spoke against the use of pain medications such as morphine and argued that surgical approaches were the ideal method for pain relief. Another prominent dolorism opponent, prominent neuropsychiatric Jean L'hermitte argues that "the first duty of medicine is to heal when it can, to relieve often, and to comfort always. As a result, a physician's role is not only to relieve moral suffering often but also, insofar as it is possible, to alleviate pain and its repercussions on the different organs."


As an important example, L'hermitte describes cases of syringomelia in which patients with interrupted sensory nerve fibres injure themselves due to their inability to feel pain.
out, and annihilates all the rest. It does not allow for cheating or compromise. It is there and enough to eliminate all the rest. (qtd. in Rey 318)

On such a parameter, the discourse on the narrative of pain engages with an unexamined disposition of observations in our shared world. Robert Coles, a Harvard University psychologist, has emphasized that narrative has helped in the lives of his patients as a moral force. Scottish physician and writer Gavin Francis observes:

Patients spend more time with a writer than they can ever spend with their physician, and the hours it takes someone to read and reflect on a book can be time well-spent. There are parallels between generating and appreciating lasting stories and art, and generating and appreciating healing, therapeutic encounters. Both are helped by adopting the same attitude of open curiosity, of creative engagement, of seeking to empathize with the predicament of the other, of tapping into the wider context of human lives. (Francis 2)

Gavin Francis emphasizes that the use of metaphor offers “enchantment” and helps to make sense of the world. Deeper engagement with literature will allow clinicians to understand various types of pains through different tropes (Francis 3). David Biro suggests “one cannot fail to be impressed by the power of metaphor” (Biro 77); and historian Joanna Bourke suggests: “Figurative languages are indispensible when we seek to communicate unpleasant sensations to ourselves and to others” (Bourke 53). It is particularly useful to convey the experience of pain, especially those that are resistant to expression. Cultural theorist David B. Morris proposes that we need to think “with stories” rather than thinking about stories, so that narrative, “in which we as thinkers do not so much work on narrative as take the radical step back, almost a return to a

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8 However, Susan Sontag has warned of using metaphors in her book Illness and Metaphor (1978). Please see Sontag for such discussion.
childhood experience, of allowing the narrative to work on us” (Morris 55). He argues that we encounter different kinds of narratives in recent times where the conventional elements of fictional and nonfictional stories are thoroughly eroded (Morris 56). In such cases, the narrative of pain helps to bridge the gap between medical interpretation and literary narrative. John Maxwell Coetzee’s proclamation “pain is truth; all else is subject to doubt” (WB 03), invokes pain as a fundamental category. It of course, raises several questions related to pain: if pain is truth, what kind of truth is it? What is the substance of this truth? Is pain truly representable? How is this knowledge of truth important? Why is everything else a matter of doubt except pain? Who authenticates this pain? How do we contextualize different forms of pain? How does pain guide our being? How does a narrative of pain help to understand the complexities of pain? How does narrative help in understanding the psychological, social, and political aspects of pain? This dissertation considers such questions and other related issues by examining the narrative of pain in selected works of J. M. Coetzee: Dusklands (1974), Waiting for the Barbarians (1980), Life & Times of Michael K (1983), Age of Iron (1990), Disgrace (1999), The Lives of Animals (1999), Elizabeth Costello (2003), Slowman (2005), and The Childhood of Jesus (2013). I have also incorporated other fictional and non-fictional works of Coetzee and other literary and non-literary writers wherever necessary, for the required observations. In particular, the dissertation brings forth the importance of narrative in the understanding of pain. It aims to engage with the questions—the nature of pain that Coetzee deals with in his novels, the relevance of narrative to the task of gaining a clear knowledge about the complexities of pain, and the understanding of pain beyond the medical parameters. The dissertation also aims to show how the discourse on the narrative of pain is essential to traverse the different unexplained natures and conditions of pain in the human and nonhuman animal’s life.
IN THIS CHAPTER, “In the Land of Pain,” I introduce various ideas available on the discourse of pain. I follow the debate and reflections of different therapists, biologists, neurologists, psychotherapists, cultural theorists, philosophers, and sociologists to show the different notions of the representation of pain and their responses. I suggest that fictional engagement with the understanding of pain helps to remove different misconceptions about pain. It helps to unfold different sociocultural and economic issues interrelated with psychological pain. Citing the works of different artists, poets, novelists, and dramatists, I show how art and literature express pain and draw our attention towards the agency of pain.

The various doubts about pain are due to different misconception and ignorance about pain. I believe we are living in a different time—environmentally, politically, socially. With increasing violence around the world—and the future of the world itself is now a concern to mankind—human beings become a threat to themselves and other living beings. Therefore, the production of knowledge—Nietzsche would say the real knowledge in the making of the world—should be aimed at; not how one should, but how one ought to live. It is time to ask what literature can do in the political, environmental, and economic crisis we are living in. It is important to pay attention to every kind of narrative that reflects the existential, psychological, and emotional question. I observe and suggest that literary narrative helps to understand these issues in a much broader sense. “Pain is something we must learn to use in our thinking,” writes David B Morris (CP 289). Utilizing conventional structures and patterns, the narrative of pain generates different external reasons for pain (considering its elusiveness), “which will not be understood solely as a medical problem involving the transmission of nerve impulses, but rather as an experience that also engages the deepest and most personal levels of the complex cultural and biological process we call living” (CP 7).
In Chapter 2, “Arteries of Pain: Narratives of Discontent,” I embark on an interdisciplinary exploration of the dynamics of the fictional importance of J. M. Coetzee’s fictions in the understanding of pain. I demonstrate that physical pain and emotional pain are intricately fused and difficult to disentangle. I study Coetzee’s engagement with the idea of discontent, its relationship with his critical activity and fiction, which rests upon the concept of ‘higher truth,’ though not to claim that there is only one form of truth. Plato’s extensive discussion on poets manifests his antagonism because according to him, the poets are not faithful to the truth and they easily sacrifice the truth for beauty. The poets defend their position claiming their own definition of truth and reality. Coetzee asks: “Can the truth—the whole truth—be attained without interminable analysis?” (GS 8-9). Arteries play a crucial role in the body to deliver oxygen and nutrients to all cells. I observe that different kinds of pain are like arteries of the body—it builds and rebuilds the physical and mental state of the body. Therefore, pain is a relational category, always in relation to something. The empirical evidence of pain is necessary to formulate our knowledge. However, in terms of pain, the empirical knowledge is not the ultimate source of the formation of any particular knowledge. The subjective inquiries of pain become poignant for the objective reflection like care and empathy in understanding the pain of the other. Coetzee’s narrative of discontent reflects on the different meanings of pain. The magistrate’s pain and his suffering in the Waiting for the Barbarians helps him to understand the pain of the Other. The knowledge of pain enables him when confronted with the Barbarian girl’s pain. Whereas Michael K’s pain in the Life & Times of Michael K leads him into despair, he tries to find the meaning of life in isolation with the mother-earth and embraces pain and suffering. Eugene Dawn’s physical exhortation in the Dusklands, in narrating the Vietnam War Project affects his psychological state, and he loses his mind. Mrs. Curren’s cancer in the Age of Iron
becomes an allegory for her own body (in last months of her life) and the turmoil of the land (South Africa). I show that the biomedical view of pain (neurophysiology, neurology, and neurosurgery) is not enough to understand the complexity of pain. I suggest that the social understanding of pain unravels the subtleties of pain. I also suggest that Coetzee’s narrative of pain helps to understand the meaning through other emotional entities like generosity, altruism, benevolence, compassion, and empathy. I argue that Coetzee’s narrative of discontent reflects on the structure and use of torture to show how the infliction of pain on others destroys the basic tenets of humanity.

**In Chapter 3, “Being and Becoming Mother: Pain, Love, and Care,”** I begin by endorsing the importance of mother and motherhood in our life. I show that representations of mother and motherhood vary from time to time and society to society. I observe that in various religious beliefs, especially in Christianity, Mary becomes a mother conceiving Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. In all the major religions (Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, and Islam) motherhood plays an important role. In most cases, it is idealized, though the idealization can be read as a form of belief. Motherhood in Africa is influenced by diverse mythologies and local lore. The figure of the mother is central to African philosophy and spirituality. The deities in Indian cultures for that matter are addressed with the noun mother. The process of being a mother or the state of being a mother is familiarly understood as motherhood. Mother is a more specific term whereas motherhood is accepted in a broader sense—one: the being (a mother); and another: the process of becoming. Being mother rests upon in giving birth to a child: a passion—Kristeva claims—a driven force as a medium of the reflexive consciousness. I observe that being a mother is a painful process. Being mother is a process of becoming a mother, which develops through pregnancy and reflexive consciousness. The concept of a ‘good mother’ does depend on an
understanding, not as a biologically given, but as a process through which an individual acquires the knowledge of care and love. Both the mother and the child start off as an other to each other: both of them become familiar and learn to accept each other, and generate tenderness, care and benevolence.

Coetzee very strongly represents this painful process in his work through the representations of mother characters from different strata of life. He emphasizes that motherhood is also a matter of choice, though in many societies it is controlled and accepted as a given role. Coetzee does not deal with the pain of pregnancy as of becoming-a-mother but moves towards become-a-mother. The chapter shows that writing is a process of becoming. In the process of becoming, one transgresses one’s self and plays the role of the other. The important part in the process is the imagination, and the act of being dog or man or a woman: “Writing is inseparable from becoming: in writing, one becomes woman, becomes animal or vegetable, becomes molecule, to the point of becoming imperceptible” (Deleuze 225). The act of ‘becoming’ transforms the writer, and her or his gender and identity. Coetzee’s portrayal of the women characters formalizes the process of becoming, not only to attain a form but “to find the zone of proximity, indiscernibility, or undifferentiation” (Deleuze 226) where it is difficult to distinguish between a man/a woman/ a molecule. The chapter also sows that Coetzee’s narrative moves beyond the conventional structure through which we generally understand pain, love, and care. He does not either provide a manifesto of these elements or direct his readers towards a simple solution for the suffering body, for someone who is looking for love, or for someone who needs care, but represents a conflicting structure where the truth is not one-dimensional, but emerges out of a nuanced understanding of the history of human existence.
**In Chapter 4**, “The Animality in Me: Red Peter and Pain,” I begin by accepting the fact that human beings are anthropocentric; we need to change our views regarding the nonhuman animals for the larger good. I argue for the inclusion of the nonhuman animals as the Other. I agree with the analogies that Coetzee draws through his fictional characters, especially Elizabeth Costello in the *Elizabeth Costello*. The pursuit of those intentions is not a rhetorical but a constitutive feature of Coetzee’s work. I show that the nonhuman animal’s pain has been ignored in various medical definitions and explanations. Human beings have attributed meaninglessness to the nonhuman animal’s pain, and have ignored the sheer amount of cruelty meted out to them. I do not claim that the attitude towards nonhuman animal’s pain will change overnight. What I observe and suggest is that as we are the only talking animals (as far as language is concerned), we need to find a ground where we can see nonhuman animals in a better condition, without the cruel treatment they receive from human beings. I argue my case in the light of the leading views on animality and the nonhuman animal’s pain, including those of Andy Lamey, Barbara Smuts, Carrie Rohman, David B Morris, David DeGrazia, Franz Kafka, Jacques Derrida, Jeremy Bentham, John Berger, Marjorie Barbara, Marc Bekoff, Peter Singer, Peter Holland, Stephen Mulhall, and Wendy Doniger.

While engaging with Kafka’s “A Report to an Academy,” in relation to Coetzee, I observe the substantial reason of being-an-animal, and the importance of sign language not only for the nonhuman animals but also for the many without hearing and speaking ability. This is to emphasize that nonhuman animals and humans who lack normal behavioral patterns are the subjects of compassion.

**In Chapter 5**, “Being Slow: Literature, Philosophy, and Pain,” I claim that there is an interrelationship between these three in its analytic approach. From food (fast food) to other
aspects of everyday life are mostly dependent on the idea of ‘fastness’. The idea of speed comes from the machine where a particular amount of work is done in a minimum frame of time which differentiates man from machine. However, the recent boom in technology and the advent of globalism has changed the attitude of human beings towards different aspects of life. Paul Virilio suggests that speed is the pillar of the technological society (Virilio 2006, 2012). Seldom does man have time to listen to the other. Everything comes in summary. The details of life have unfortunately been summarized. The birth of life is itself a slow process. It is not a negative aspect of life but rather a foundation of life. Being hasty bears the risk of misdeed and misjudgment. Seneca has emphasized that nothing can be attained in a breakneck hurry. Coetzee’s narrative of pain juxtaposes the idea of writing and living in a meaningful manner.

I observe that Coetzee develops a way of writing that is philosophically slow in nature, and it is characterized through a moral and ethical endeavor. His narrative emphasizes that the slowness in pain is a process of learning and understanding experiential entities of an existential, political and social crises. His characters are slow, but they are strong in their vulnerable condition. He has created a host of characters—Michael K, Mrs. Curren, the Magistrate, Vercueil, Jacobus Coetzee, Paul Rayment, and Eugene Dawn—who hover in circumstances, embark upon life in all its slow-feet, set out for a journey in their specific condition. I also try to reflect, very narrowly on what it means to do literature, what it means to do art, what it means to do philosophy in the understanding of the human condition.

**IN CHAPTER 6, “Unending,”** I come towards the end of the dissertation *without an end* because I believe that there is no end to pain. It invites further interpretation in the ellipsis of my arguments and observations. I suggest that pain is essential to human beings for self-understanding, and life itself summons pain when it first comes to existence. Pain is our way of
negotiating with the world we inhabit, and problematizing our relation to ourselves. Suffering, vulnerability, mortality, and loneliness are the fundamental conditions of life. There is no immediate access to understanding the meaning of this truth. I observe that an oppositional interpretation of pain will only claim disciplinary egotism, and we need to approach the study of pain with an open mind, welcoming literary, sensory (a physiological fact), philosophical, and perceptive (cognitive or emotional experience). I suggest that we should consider the biomedical aspects in the study of pain. Further, I suggest transcending the boundaries of the discipline to foster an interdisciplinary approach.

**The language** through which we recognize or understand things is not always the same; the subtle way of expression depends on the particular culture and society. Though understanding is primarily based on knowledge, it is also obtained through lived experience. Depending purely on a priori principle of lived/unlived experience prevents the understanding of sensual facts of human anatomy. Both pain and suffering evoke the question of its usage and its scope to capture the understanding or experience of it. To suffer is to go through an uneasy phase; the word sufferer in Latin means ‘to bear’. Pain is considered physical, and suffering is more of a moral state. The word suffering also refers to spiritual and religious suffering. According to Roselyne Rey, “if we take a closer look at the linguistic meaning of the terms pain and suffering, a second distinction can be superimposed on the first: the word suffering seems more to refer to the subject while pain seems more the objectification of this suffering,…” (Rey 3). Pain is a commonplace term referring to the immediate situation, whereas suffering is related to the whole condition of the being/existence. The knowledge of pain is always limited, because of its subjective nature and the complex structure of the body. In *The Culture of Pain* (1991), David B.
Morris writes about the general idea and the cultural aspects of pain. He proposes that most of our ideas of pain are based on what he calls the “Myths of Two Pains,” namely a) physical pain, and b) mental pain (Morris 9). The general belief is that these two types of pain are different and are seen as immutable. Morris deplores “the artificial division we create in accepting a belief that human pain is split by a chasm into un-communicating categories called physical and mental” (Morris 9). He cites the example of a mourning father who has lost his son, who was suffering from AIDS. However, simultaneously he was also going through inexplicable stomach pain. He argues that these two situations are intertwined in such a way that it is difficult to demarcate two experiences as different. Like all myths, the myth of pain depends on the assumption about the serviceable truth. Morris tries to demythologize the assumption that body and mind yield two different kinds of pain. He points out: “As current research both inside and outside medicine now suggests, the rigid split between mental and physical pain is beginning to look like a gigantic cultural mistake, perhaps similar to the belief that the world was flat” (Morris 12). In this condition, we need to question openly our concept and knowledge of drugs.9

Physicians, philosophers, literary writers have recently agreed that insights on pain can be achieved by exploring the work of artists and writers: “Art affords us the luxury of seeing from multiple perspectives and in a less hectic time frame. It enables us to see and then reflect, thereby representing our reality more fully and accurately” (Biro 17). The different articulations of pain represented through a work of art or literature “does not consist of knowing how to access the private contents of consciousness, but rather of how the experience of human suffering has historically been articulated,” and to understand the elusive and mute experience of pain (Biro 17). For instance, Edvard Munch’s “The Scream” (Fig. 1.1) portrays the inner agony while

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9 We also need to question that how we think about pain (Morris 12). However, the task remains difficult as long as we do not remove the idea of pain as a myth, and explore pain from different spheres of life. Compartmentalization of pain comes from the basic knowledge of drugs, as prescribed by the doctors.
walking with two of his friends in the evening. The expressionistic depection of Munch’s own experience represents a vision of anguish (which he later describes) as “air turned to blood.”

Munch’s works represent the emotional pain at the death of his mother when Munch was five years old, his own suffering, and the death of his sister from tuberculosis: transcribes the internal reality of his sensibility. His inner turmoil becomes the source of his inspiration: “Without anxiety and illness, I am a ship without a rudder. . . . My sufferings are part of my self and my art. They are indistinguishable from me, and their destruction would destroy my art” (Munch).

Vincent van Gogh’s the “Old Man in Sorrow (On the Threshold of Eternity)”, represents the innermost angst (Fig. 1.2). The fiery agony of mental distress captures his loss and sorrow. British caricaturist James Gillray’s “The Gout” (Fig. 1.3) represents pain as a devil and signifying the unbearable moment of pain as a monstrous agent. Theodore Gericault’s “The Raft of the Medusa” (Fig. 1.4) is precisely a timeless representation of pain and suffering of a historic event that happened on the coast of Africa in a French naval expedition. The pain of the people—only 146 men and one woman were loaded onto a wooden raft, with only some dry food, and as a result, many were drawn, many were thrown overboard, or cannibalized—in the historic event of 2 July 1816 is vividly represented through this work of art. The vividness of the painting precisely captures the pain and suffering of the past. The artist marks the timelessness of pain drawing our attention to the certain phenomena of pain that invites interpretation. These paintings bear out the inundating relationship of the representation pain in art. The vividness in a work of art through which an impact is created and reflected is not possible in the medical representation of pain.

10 https://www.edvardmunch.org/link.jsp.

11 For a better discussion please see https://www.edvardmunch.org/link.jsp.

12 https://www.edvardmunch.org/link.jsp.
Fig. 1.1. Edvard Munch. “The Scream.” 1893. Web; 22 June 2016.
Fig. 1.2. Vincent van Gogh. “Old Man in Sorrow (On the Threshold of Eternity).” 1890. Web; 22 June 2016.
Leo Tolstoy’s *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (1886) is a perfect example of the need for the interpretation of pain. The small accident of Ivan Ilyich could be a phenomenological interpretation of pain\(^{13}\) when his pain is a revelation of his entire life of lies and self-deception.

The story of Ivan Ilyich brings to light that interpretation is necessary to discover the multilayered nature of pain. Pain helps explore various unknown and hidden meanings. It demands interpretations, and through it, the individual creates ‘choice.’ As we already noted, pain is a relational entity. The condition of pain and its understating always relates to both the sufferer and the observer. By relational I further mean the variable nature of pain—it differs from individual to individual, and its relation is specific to time and place. However, the physicality of the pain remains the same. If a person experiences pain in the 14th century, the physicality of the pain will be same in the present too. It does not change. What changes is the interpretation and the treatment of that particular pain. The question is, then, do we have a singular definition of pain? That pain as a relational category and is variable in nature negates any definite definition.

The culture of pain, existential pain, and chronic pain are based on the assimilation of different

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\(^{13}\) Phenomenological pursuit seeks to arrive at an essence of experience through the structures of consciousness. A philosophical engagement goes back to the beginning of the twentieth century. Phenomenology has been traced back in occidental philosophy to the Kantian and Leibnizian sense of “phenomenon.” For Hegel, it is the science of human experience, and the experiential ability is not limited to epistemological experience but also religious, ethical, political, aesthetic, and everyday life. Phenomenology (Greek: *phainómenon* means "that which appears" and *lógos* means "study") is basically the study of essence, the essence of existence in its experiential and perceptual sense which “can be practiced and identified as a manner or style of thinking, that it existed as a movement before arriving at complete awareness of itself as a philosophy” (Merleau-Ponty viii). The understanding of being in the world is a quest to know the relationship of being and the world. On the one hand it is a transcendental philosophy and on the other it is also a philosophy which looks at the world ‘as it is there.’ It is there in relation to the subject—the experiential ability of the being to perceive the world, because “all my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless” (Merleau-Ponty viii). The experience of the self cannot be removed from its perceptual sense of the world. Perception is not a mere tool through which the self experiences the world there, but the world lies in its manifestation of her/his consciousness, and “it is alone consciousness of the world because it reveals that world as strange and paradoxical” (Merleau-Ponty xiii). For Merleau-Ponty, “Perception is not a science of the world, it is not even an act, a deliberate taking up of a position; it is the background from which all acts stand out, and is presupposed by them. The world is not an object such that I have in my possession the law of its making; it is the natural setting of, and field for, all my thoughts and all my explicit perceptions” (Merleau-Ponty xi).
experiences of the individual in a particular condition. Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s unnamed narrator in the *Notes from Underground* (1864) represents the agony and inertia of existential pain:

I am a sick man. ... I am a spiteful man. I am an unattractive man. I believe my liver is diseased. However, I know nothing at all about my disease, and do not know for certain what ails me. I don't consult a doctor for it, and never have, though I have a respect for medicine and doctors. Besides, I am extremely superstitious, sufficiently so to respect medicine, anyway (I am well-educated enough not to be superstitious, but I am superstitious). No, I refuse to consult a doctor from spite. That you probably will not understand. Well, I understand it, though. Of course, I can't explain who it is precisely that I am mortifying in this case by my spite: I am perfectly well aware that I cannot "pay out" the doctors by not consulting them; I know better than anyone that by all this I am only injuring myself and no one else. But still, if I don't consult a doctor it is from spite. My liver is bad, well--let it get worse! (Dostoyevsky 1)

Dostoyevsky does not mention the reason behind such distaste of the unnamed narrator. He feels happy in his liver pain and toothache. We see a similar kind of behavior in Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* (1866). The underground man becomes a metaphor for the pain of all those who suffer from the cruelty and injustice of the society. His pain travels between meaning and meaninglessness. Metaphors that describe various forms of pain “offer an antidote to the elusiveness and blankness of experience like pain” (Biro 124). Representation of pain in the humanities opens up the possibility of an analytical approach to the study of pain. It expresses the unexpressed expressions because

We depend upon the sufferer of pain for all information about its amount and its quality. A subtle essence has to be translated into words: the words themselves are used in different
senses by different people: nor can we set up a standard by which the use of those words shall be governed . . . . The enquirer himself may be unintelligent, or impatient, or perverse, and so bars may be interposed on his side to the discovery and reception of the truth. (Spender 5)

Beckett’s *Endgame* (1957) represents puzzling metaphors for pain, and pain itself becomes a metaphor for helplessness. Before the beginning of the play, describing the characters, Beckett suggests the helplessness:

Hamm – unable to stand and blind

Clov – Hamm's servant; unable to sit. Taken in by Hamm as a child.

Nagg – Hamm's father; has no legs and lives in a dustbin.

Nell – Hamm's mother; has no legs and lives in a dustbin next to Nagg. (Beckett I)

Like pain, *Endgame* is set in the most puzzling way. We do not know the reason for Hamm’s and Clov’s pain, but both are sure of their pain. Clove’s access to the window signifies that pain is only known through expression. Pain becomes an epistemological metaphor in *Endgame*:

HAMM: Is it not time for my pain-killer?

CLOVE: No. (96)

HAMM: Is it not time for my pain-killer?

CLOVE: No! (99)

HAMM: Give my pain-killer.

CLOVE: It’s too soon (116)

HAMM: Is it not time for my pain-killer?

CLOVE: Yes.

HAMM: Ah! At last! Give it to me! Quick!

[Pause]
CLOVE: There’s no more painkiller.

HAMM: But the little round box. It was full!

CLOVE: Yes. But now it’s empty.

HAMM: [soft] What’ll I do?

[Pause. In a scream]

What’ll I do? (Beckett 143-44)

This represents sheer helplessness and existential crises: “the box was full,” but “now it’s empty.” Pain has no definite structure, but with metaphors of pain, the story helps to connect the relationship of pain with another emotional state by supplying meaning. It becomes difficult to distinguish the mental agony and physical suffering in a certain state of mind, like in a poem by Faiz Ahamed Faiz:

The pain was such that that night my wild heart
Wanted to wrestle with every vein of life,
Wanted to drip away through every hair’s root;
At somewhere far off (it was) as if in your garden courtyard
Every leaf, washed in my miserable blood,
Began to look weary of the moon’s beauty;
As if in the desert of my body
The tent-ropes of all my aching nerves had loosened
And begun one after the other to give notice
Of preparation for the departure of the caravan of zest-of-living;
And when in memory’s expiring candles came in view somewhere
For one instant that final moment of your loving-kindness,
The pain was such that one wanted to pass by even it—

I indeed wished, but my heart did not wish, to stay. (Faiz 273)

The volatile nature of pain has maddened the spirit of Faiz. He does not mention the reason, but the poem elucidates the extremity of his pain. It fights with the fibre like a wrestler. The strongly extended metaphors elaborate the moment of extremity in pain. Faiz’s degree of pain seems the end of his life, where there is nothing in his hand because his heart does not want to stay.

Literary media allow for accessing the different reasons for pain apart from the physical pain. John Donne has connected the physical sensation with an emotion in most of his poems. Pain is central in his *Holy Sonnets* (1633). In “The Triple Foole,” he portrays a strong example and fusion of psychical and physical pain:

I thought, if I could draw my pains

Through rhyme's vexation, I should them allay.

But when I have done so,

Some man, his art and voice to show,

Doth set and sing my pain;

And, by delighting many, frees again

Grief, which verse did restrain.

To love and grief tribute of verse belongs,

But not of such as pleases when 'tis read.

....................................................... (Donne 4-13)

The poem expresses both the anguish and the representation of pain. It also emphasizes that love and grief belong to poetry, but when it is read, it’s no more a pleasure to the poet. A century later, Freud has exactly mentioned the pleasure in reading tragedy and other’s pain. Here Donne
is unhappy because others will come to know about his pain and will get pleasure in reading about it. Whereas for Emily Dickinson “There is a pain—so utter,” it is a violent pain:

There is a pain—so utter—
It swallows substance up—
Then covers the Abyss with Trance—
So Memory can step
Around—across—upon it—
As one within a Swoon—
Goes safely—where an open eye—
Would drop Him—Bone by Bone. (Dickinson #599)

Pain might swallow substance like appropriate expression, but even then, some elements are left in the memory to express, though it entirely devastates the subject. Consciousness after pain is weak, but memory recaptures the swallowed substance, though the whole being is dropped “bone by bone.” Even in excruciating pain, one travels, moves as memory recollects it. Both Dickinson and Donne capture the paradox of pain in lyrical form. According to E. M. Cioran “To be lyrical means you cannot stay closed up inside yourself . . . . The deepest subjective experiences are also the most universal, because through them one reaches the original source of life . . . . Almost all illness have lyrical virtues . . . . There is no authentic lyricism without a grain of interior madness” (Ciroan 45).

**The degree of pain** is a variable state, a relative matter that moves at a different level (less or more), depending not only on the emotional state but also on the physical state of the individual. There is a definite reason for ‘less’ pain or ‘more’ pain though it is sometimes
unknown. Faiz’s representation of pain is definitely a physical one, but the pain that van Gogh and the unnamed narrator of Dostoyevsky’s *Notes* define the contours of emotional and psychological pain. The emotional pain of Dostoyevsky’s character represents the crisis of his existence where he laughs at his own physical pain. Therefore, it suggests that the various degrees of pain are regulated through the psychological state of the mind depending upon various agencies: the socioeconomic, religious, and political environment of the subject. Researchers have stated that the nature and degree of pain differs in different centuries, societies, and cultures. Time and space play a role in the measurement of pain; even the climate decides the degree in both the chronic and acute pain.\(^{14}\) The degree of pain also decides the quality of endurance, dignity, and fragility, and other emotional aspects of vulnerability, disgust, and shame. Each society and culture regulates the degree of pain through different modes of religious rites and socio-cultural practices. The different forms of treatment in modern medicine, psychiatry, and other local methods are aimed at demoting the pain. Medical diagnosis of pain tries to evaluate pain through the method of pain-scale which is called the “Wong-Baker Faces Pain Rating Scale” developed by Donna Wong and Connie Baker (see fig 1.6).

\(^{14}\) In case of Rheumatoid Arthritis (R-A), the person’s pain increases or decreases according to the change of weather. There are many anecdotal examples where a RA person can predict the condition of the weather, whether it will rain or not. RA patients feel more pain in cold and rainy weather. Researchers have proved that there is a definite connection between RA and weather, which they have termed arthritis-weather. Some researchers have also pointed out the connection between RA pain and barometric pressure even. (American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons: https://www.aaos.org; 27 June 2017).
The evaluation of pain through the pain-scale certainly fails to provide the physical, or psychological condition of the patient. It might also disguise the nature of pain, and the person in pain might feel humiliated, especially if she/he is asked to rate her or his pain, particularly in the cases of chronic pain like cancer. Ronald Melzack and Patrick D. Wall have suggested (see fig 7), the use of tropes (Greek “tropos” means ‘turn’ ‘direction’ or ‘way’) like allegory and metaphor in literary narratives helps not only in understanding the degree of pain, but alludes to the inexpressible experience of the ‘felt pain’ and its relation to other emotional features.¹⁵

¹⁵ This is not only in the case of Coetzee, literary writers from James Joyce to David Foster Wallace have used metaphors to emphasize the unfamiliar realm of our experience. This has been emphasized by thinkers from Aristotle to Paul Ricoeur. In Listening to Pain, David Biro points out that “the ubiquitous use of metaphor in the context of pain calls into question the very distinction between literal and metaphorical language. The language of pain is and is not metaphorical. On the one hand, it is indirect and patiently false: it speaks of one subject in terms of another. On the other hand, everyone, from Joyce to the man in the street, seems to rely on it. There is no more literal or direct way to convey pain” (Biro 71; emphases as in the original).
LITERARY NARRATIVE infers a new outlook—reflecting and representing the experience through different forms—on pain, exploring both the subtleties of physical and psychological pain, and providing meaning, context, and perspective. Narrative simply refers to storytelling. The art of storytelling traces back its origin from the early ages of existence. There are different forms of narratives to communicate different emotions. The representation of a work of fiction manifests itself through narrativity (French “narrativite”). Narrativity is an act of narration essential in conveying any form of a message that connects us with each other in our everyday life, so we are constituted by different narratives (Fludernik 1). Long before the term ‘narratology’ was introduced, the German critics had inferred the various modes of narrative in classical narrative theory. These theories compare the presentation of reality in drama with the mediation that takes place in it. The recent theories of narrative have pointed out the distinctive nature of presentation as mediation (Huhn 24). This presentation aims at the perspective of the narrator or mediator. Franz Stanzel, for example, has emphasized immediacy as the defining characteristic of the narrative text. The second concept was developed by the structuralist study of narrative, where Tezvetan Todorov has coined the term Narratology (1969). In case of the classical concept of narrative, is restricted to verbal communication, whereas according to

16 Texts like The Sun also Rises, Catcher in the Rye, The Crying of Lot 49, and Sula are intensely engaged with disability and pain.

17 The word ‘narrative’ originates from the Latin word narrare or narrativus, “telling a story,” which is close to Latin gnarus, ‘knowing being acquainted with, expert in.” Both are derivative from the Indo-European root.

18 Narrativity is not the story, but the process of making or telling a story. Gerard Genette in his book Narrative Discourse Revisited points out the various facets of narrativity such as “Time,” “Mood,” “Voice,” “Speed,” “Level,” “Focalizations.” These facets of narrative the structure of the story.

19 According to Gerard Genette, ‘perspective’ aims to set the mood, voice, focalization, and narration. The perspective can also be observed through standard ideas as “narrative with an omniscient narrator” or “vision from behind” (Genette 65).

20 See Franz Stanzel’s Theory of Narrative (122).
structuralism the narrative is not a feature of discourse or communication but a feature of what is narrated.

Narrative is an essential aspect of everyday life; it helps to communicate our feeling in a linear and coherent manner, though it might not follow a coherent structure always, the narrative is formed from the structure of a particular language. It follows the rules of grammar of that particular language. With differences it posseses with a particular language, a narrative is a sequence of words that generates communication. The common understanding of narrative thus lies in the sequence of written or spoken words or images of a connected, coherent set of events. The various attempts from Aristotle to the Post-Modernists are simply an effort to understand the different stand-points related to the idea of narrative because of its complex nature, for the fact that it is articulated through various languages and through various mediums like oral, written or through images —“the vehicles of Narrative” (Barthes 237). The literary narrative has a certain kind of style to deliver a message, eventually, that takes up the form of a story.\(^2\)

The theory of narrative is a diverse field, and it might seem to choose one concept over the other. But the practical experience of reading a text makes clear that no one theory is complete and satisfactory. We can create different concepts on the basis of our understanding of the genealogy of narrative. We must note that the concept of narrative can be understood through two main divisions: the broader and the narrower. Thus, for example, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) is a narrative of intellectual and religio-philosophical manifestations of the young Stephen Dedalus. In the narrower sense, it narrates the craftsmanship of using mythology

\(^2\) Narrative fiction develops a narration of certain kinds of fictional events. It is a type of communication process in which a message is transmitted through “addresser” and “addressee.” As Shlomith has emphasized, “to transmit the message” from the verbal nature of the medium distinguishes the literary narratives from other narratives (Shlomith 05).
in everyday life. In a broader sense, one can realize the incorporation of properties pertaining to an agent or external states in the psychological state of Dedalus. This state is mediated by the narrator to express the larger issue in a particular frame of time.\textsuperscript{22} This links it to the inner life of the agent and to the elements of the external situation. The minimal or the narrower condition of narrativity is contrary to the broader context. The narrower context must be represented.

**The narrative of pain** helps to craft—through descriptive strategies incorporating every detail—the subtleties of pain which are absent in the medical descriptions. It encourages the reader to unmask the different myths and misconceptions about pain. Considering the physical and emotional nature of pain, the narrative of pain is explored through critical apparatus to see that: a) physical and emotional pain cannot be easily disentangled; and b) we can eschew the mind-body dualism—to see how pain is interrelated with other (psychological) emotions like grief, depression, shame, and disgust. It helps to think outside the clinical parameters to use the experience of pain in our thinking, as David B. Morris suggests, “thinking is somehow learned or borne or created out of pain” (Morris 289). He also suggests:

> We are more than bundles of neurons. We must recover a sense of the importance of minds and cultures in the construction of pain, and we must begin to proliferate the meanings of pain in order that we do not reduce human suffering to the dimensions of a mere physical problem for which, if we could only find the right pill, there is always a medical solution. (Morris 289)

Oliver Sacks, a Professor of Neurology and Psychiatry, feels that “to restore the human subject at the centre – the suffering, afflicted, fighting, human subject— we must deepen a case history to a narrative or tale: only then do we have a ‘who’ as well as ‘what’, a real person, a patient, in

\textsuperscript{22} This does not mean that a narrative has to follow the sequence of time and dates as real life is concerned but we deduce a story of forty-five years in 180 pages.
relation to disease—in relation to the physical” (Selzer x). The literary narrative of pain reflects on the different facets of pain which are otherwise difficult to express.  

Arthur Kleinman, psychiatrist at Harvard Medical School and professor of Anthropology at Harvard University, in his book *The Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing & the Human Condition* (1962) shares his twenty years of clinical experience through the mode of stories “to popularize a technical literature that would be of great practical value…” (Kleinman xiii).

The basic premise of this dissertation is to explore the meaning(s) of pain in Coetzee’s selected works to argue that both physical and mental pain can be uttered, but that utterance is always subjected to the ability and circumstance through which s/he expresses her/his pain. I investigate the various dimensions of pain as it gets represented through the texts. I also observe that knowledge of the anatomy of the body helps in understating the complexities of pain. I believe the narrative of pain allows us to see pain as a hermeneutic tool that helps in understanding what it is to be human in all its bewilderment and confusion. David Biro, in his book *Listening to Pain: Finding Words, Compassion, and Relief* (2011), argues that “the pain of cancer, arthritis, or depression has proven refractory to treatment, language can replace isolation with community; it can relieve our suffering when chemotherapy or psychotropics cannot” (Biro 15).

However, Elaine Scarry’s *The Body in Pain* (1985) argues that language is indescribable and defies any representation of physical pain. It damages the potentiality to express, feel, or perceive anything outside the pain itself. Scarry’s work, lays the foundation for pain research in the Humanities. Her work mainly focuses on the physical pain, exploring the structure of torture, war, belief, and artifact. If Scarry’s argument represents the immediacy of the expression of the pain, then we can mark that there are many texts written by the patients while suffering from

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23 Richard Selzer in his essay “The Language of Pain” points out the various difficulties in the expression of pain.
pain like cancer and rheumatoid arthritis. There are also texts written while a person is suffering from emotional pain. The degree of pain decides the nature of expression in cases like schizophrenia. Here the condition of the mind and the body plays a crucial role in its expression. Reshma Valliappan in her memoir, *Fallen. Standing: My Life as a Schizophrenist* (2015), provides the emails that she has shared with her doctors in the initial stage of her schizophrenia. In one of the emails, she states, “Thus been in bed all week as my eyes look like I’m drunk . . . . When everything fails, madness is the only that remains . . . when everyone is asleep & the world is as it is, I continue hearing them…the voices . . . something the world cannot offer me even though it was the same world that led me to this madness” (Reshma 63). In between the text, she writes the word “alone” repeatedly, which occupies more than a half page in the book (Fig. 7.1).24 This suggests that “at times, in fact, psychological pain may surpass—even be *more painful than*—some of its physical counterparts” (Biro 18; emphasis as in the original). It becomes an “ontological divide” because “there is no way to verify the pain of another, no objective test even in our age of MRIs and PET scans, these radically different realities are unbridgeable” (Biro 32). In his memoir, American novelist William Styron, writing about his condition, says: “I was carefully monitoring each phase of my deteriorating condition . . . . I was close to a total ignoramus about depression, which can be as serious a medical affair as diabetes or cancer . . . . The most honest authorities face up square to the fact that serious depression is not readily treatable (Styron 6-7).

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24 For psychological pain resulting from depression, please see William Styron’s *Darkness Visible* (1990), Joan Didion’s *The Year of Magical thinking* (2006).
In *When Breath Becomes Airs* (2016), Paul Kalanithi narrates his own painful days of lung cancer. Kalanithi was diagnosed with stage IV lung cancer just before completing ten years’ training as a neurosurgeon. He wrote this book during his treatment, and before his death in 2015.\(^{25}\) In Kalanithi’s words: “Over the past few months, I’d had back spasms of varying ferocity, from simple ignorable pain, to pain that made me forsake speech to grind my teeth, to pain so severe I curled up on the floor, screaming. This pain was toward the more severe end of the spectrum” (Kalanithi 11). In a similar way, while suffering from neurosyphilis (known as tabes dorsalis), Alphonse Daudet\(^{26}\) wrote his diary. It was later published by his son as *In the Land of Pain* (2002). Daudet makes these entries:

What are you doing at the moment? I am in pain. (3)

A burning feeling in the eyes. The hideous pain from light reflected in a window. (6)

Very strange, the fear that pain inspires nowadays – or rather, this pain of mine. It’s bearable, and yet *I cannot bear it*. It’s sheer dread: and my resort to anesthetics is like a cry for help, the squeal of a woman before danger actually strikes. (13)

Since I became ill, I can no longer bear to see my wife or my children lean out of a window. (13)

How much I suffered last night, in my heel and in my ribs. Sheer torture… there are no words to express it, only howls of pain could do so. (15)

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\(^{25}\) The book came out posthumously.

\(^{26}\) Alphonse Daudet was a French novelist, playwright, journalist, about whom Charles Dickens said “my little brother in France,” and Henry James, who translated Daudet’s novel from French *Port-Tarascon* said, “a great little novelist.” Proust writes about Daudet’s illness: “I remembered to what extent bodily pain, so slight compared to his that no doubt he would have enjoyed it as a respite, had made me deaf and blind to other people, to life, to everything except my wretched body, towards which my mind was stubbornly bent, like a sick man lying in bed with his face turned to the wall” (Daudet 15.).
Are words actually any use to describe what pain (or passion for that matter) really feels like? Words only come when everythings have calmed down. They refer only to memory, and are either powerless or untruthful. (15)

No general theory about pain. Each patient discovers his own, and the nature varies, like a singer’s voice, according to the acoustics of the hall. (15)

Both Kalanithi and Daudet cite the variant of mood and voice, and points of view, which are an integral part of narrative too, suggesting that writers, physicians, caregivers, and patients are all members of society and each individual’s pain is important as an experience and becomes a part of the collective vocabulary. Narratives of pain like these become a manual for the possibility of exploring different dimensions of the sufferer’s pain and contributes to the medical literature, even if it does not deal with any medical specialization:

Pain cannot be understood outside a framework of understanding that integrates the sciences and the humanities . . . . The humanities of pain—its representations in the arts, its history, its philosophical analyses, and gathering these together, analyses of the experience of pain in cultural studies—has been lees pragmatically focused, yet the relief it affords us, though perhaps less easily measured than those of sciences, are also palpable and real. (Schleifer14)

In illness narrative (memoir, biography, and autobiography), the authors either share their own illness and suffering, or their observations about their patients, and open the window for various unknown facts about the particular illness. The fictionalized narrative on the other hand lends a voice to those who cannot express their pain, such as Coetzee’s Michael K in Life & Times of Michael K. There are living beings specifically—poor working class, especially in the third world countries, and non-human animals—who do not have the means (proper language, for instance) to express their pain and grief. Besides, there are individuals who prefer silence over
expression. The imitative and imaginative aspect of the author creates a correlation between the expressive and unexpressive aspects of pain. Fictional narrative certainly allows the writer to consider this state of inexpressibility and raises a voice of those unheard. In such cases “the inexpressibility of pain, then, isn’t necessarily due to an inadequacy or fault with language. We may even say it precedes language” (Biro 38). The Narrative of pain opens up accessibility to other’s pain.

**J. M. Coetzee’s Literary Engagement** is not very similar with many other literary writers or novelists—coming from a mixed cultural background (Africana and Dutch), his literary career had not started until he was thirty and decided to write prose, though he had published poetry here and there. Securing a B. A. degree in English Literature, Linguistics, and Mathematics, he developed an interest in computational programming. In 1969, he submitted his PhD thesis on Samuel Beckett: “The English Fiction of Samuel Beckett: An Essay in Stylistic Analysis.” After 10 years of preparation, he published his first novel *Dusklands* (1974), an important phase in his writing career. He wrote his MA dissertation on Ford Madox Ford. This is the period when he was shaping himself as a literary writer. Beckett’s language had always intrigued him, and plays a strong role in his writing because of the elusiveness of the language, and his preoccupation with narrative structure. He says: “The essays I wrote on Beckett’s style aren’t only academic exercises, in the colloquial sense of that word. They are also attempts to get closer to a secret, a secret of Beckett’s that I wanted to make my own. And discard, eventually, as it is with influences” (DP 25).

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27 He has published computer-generated poetry in the student journal of the University of Cape Town called “Computer Poem.” For a good description of Coetzee’s computer-generated poetry, see Clarkson.
His thesis on Beckett was a close analysis of Beckett’s linguistic choices—and it helped Coetzee to understand the materiality of writing. He realized the necessity of empirical linguistic choices and developed his own work within that form. Burnishing his own writing with different literary and philosophical writers, he has not only emphasized the story but the articulation of it. He himself points out: “What linguistic challenges did Kafka face? or Newton? or Descartes? How might these challenges best be understood, and how might I learn from these challenges in my own writing? What challenges of my own do I face?” (DP 06).

Coetzee’s narrative is long and it flows like an unstoppable thought, and explores the inner side of the character without giving the full picture. His narrative presents paradoxical views without reaching a final standpoint. It is in its open ending that the plot becomes complex. As Anton Leist and Peter Singer say: “Coetzee’s typical style of literariness throws the unprepared reader into an uneasy feeling of having been given clues to important meanings but being unable to decipher them” (Leist and Singer 7).

Coetzee’s oeuvre represents diverse characters from different sections of society and their conditions in different political, social and existential conditions. It engages with reflectivity and truth-seeking in its social immediacy. Critics have argued that his representation fails to engage the immediacy of the situation of South Africa, and held him as a “philosophical idealist” (Attwell 1). However, this charge remains a matter of discussion. Teresa Dovey’s The Novels of J. M. Coetzee: Lacanian Allegories (1988) shows that these charges were partial and difficult to ignore because of his “novel’s discursive complexity, and self-consciousness” (Attwell 2). He would rather think of himself “as a writer of dark, ironic comedy, rather than, say, as a diagnostician of the postcolonial condition” (JMLW 10). The major aspects of Coetzee’s texts that critics have focused on, and have remained in most scholarly discussions are a) Post-
colonialism; b) Ethics and Morality; c) Man and Nature; d) The Self and the Other; e) Animal; f) Cruelty; g) Suffering; h) Pleasure; i) Love; j) Desire; k) Violence; l) Memory; m) Autobiography; and n) Politics. Derek Attridge has rightly summarized this:

The importance of Coetzee’s books, I believe, lies not only in the extraordinary ability to grip the reader in proceeding from sentence to sentence and from page to page, to move intensely with their depictions of cruelty, suffering, longing, and love, to give pleasure even when they dispirit and disturb, but also in the way they raise and illuminate questions of immense practical importance to all of us. These include the relation between ethical demands and political decisions, the human cost of artistic creation, the exactingness and uncertainty of confessional autobiography, and the difficulty of doing justice to others in a violent society. (J MCER 10)

Over a long period, Coetzee’s scholars have drawn attention to these important aspects of his writings. One aspect of his writing demands critical attention: the importance of the narrative of pain in his novels. Pain becomes a central focus in his work, a discontent that travels through all of his work. Pain comes as a relational entity in his work; it becomes an integral part of the narrative. The degree might vary, but essentially a pain is a pain. It is true that his writing is quite different "in opposition to the master narratives of South African historical experience" (Laura Wright 2). His narrative of pain is not just political or historical, but forms an interim relationship with the self and the other. His texts are like a “shimmering mirage”. He writes against the accepted norms. His descriptions are not of immediacy, but a series of emotional expositions of the self and the other. The other in his novel moves from one pole to another, reflecting on the difference of the originality of the self in a historical situation which is never

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28 Michael Foucault has used the term while indicating “the infinite task of extracting from the depths of oneself, in between the words, a truth which the very form of the confession holds out like a shimmering mirage” (Foucault, The Will to Knowledge 59).
fixed. His philosophical reflections engage the paradoxical nature of truth, which is never static, refuses to provide political truth, and engages in the structural problems hidden in the language. His narratives conceptualize Edward Said’s idea of “worldliness,” and different forms of pain (social, political, racial, and existential) capture the stark reality of an individual in her or his corporeal, social, and political embedment. His narratives step out from the center and reach out to the periphery of nature and its living being. They raise questions about the torture and the inhuman treatment of the voiceless—not only of nonhuman animals, but also of all those who suffer unfortunately at the hand of oppressors. It seeks a critical inquiry on the narrative of pain in his works. Each novel reflects on a particular dimension of an individual’s pain caught in a different cauldron of life, and asks, as Coetzee himself says: “Is there room for me, and my history, in this book? If not, what am I doing?” and “A story is like a road. What do we hope to find at the end of the road? Oneself. One’s death” (JMLW 2, 7). For him: “the creation of a work of art is a painful and unpleasant business; it is a sacrifice of the man to the work, it is kind of death” (JMLW 9).

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29 For a good discussion see Regina Janes “Writing Without Authority: J. M. Coetzee and His Fiction.”

30 See Edward Said’s *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (5).


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