# J. M. Coetzee's *Age of Iron*: The Odyssey of Returning back to One's Ethical Self by Loving the Other

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**Abstract:**
J. M. Coetzee's *Age of Iron* depicts the apocalyptic years of racial rage and violence in South Africa. In this paper, an attempt is made to delineate Elizabeth Curren's difficult 'journey' back to her ethical self by using Homi Bhabha's theory of the nation and Emanuel Levinas's ethical philosophy. First, it is discussed how the apartheid regime has pedagogically inculcated the white population of South Africa with the ideas of superiority and indifference over the black population. Then, Curren's arduous journey back to her ethical self is discussed showing how by acting in a performative manner her ethical self learns not to pass judgements on the other becoming once again capable of sympathizing and empathizing with as well as loving the other. Coetzee speaks about and refers to the apartheid obliquely and indirectly since having done otherwise would have strengthened the apartheid regime by 'reflecting' and 'supplementing' history. Alluding to several other literary works enables Coetzee not only to depict the hellish conditions of South Africa indirectly but also to offer the possibility of some kind of redemption for his protagonists. Coetzee presents love and understanding for the other as the only solution for post-apartheid South African people.

**Keywords:** nation, pedagogical, performative, ethical, apartheid

> At the heart of the unfreedom of the hereditary masters of South Africa is a failure to love. To be blunt: their love is not enough today and has not been enough since they arrived on the continent.
> (J. M. Coetzee, *Jerusalem Prize Acceptance Speech*)

The oppressive nature of colonialism and the ethical dangers which arise when one group of people becomes dominant over another are the central concerns of Coetzee's fiction (Greenblatt: 2839). J. M. Coetzee's *Age of Iron* was published in 1990. The novel is set during the worst years of the State of Emergency (1986-1989), the apocalyptic years of racial rage and violence in South Africa. The title of the novel is an

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allusion to Hesiod's Myth of the Five Ages in which the "Iron Age" is the last and cruelest of the five ages and is characterized by moral degeneration and brutality (March, 62). Using the theories of Homi Bhabha with regard to the concept of the nation, it is attempted in this paper to delineate Elizabeth Curren's difficult 'journey' back to her ethical self.

Bhabha challenges the idea of the nation as a stable concept which can be fixed by historicist definitions. Instead of a historicist account he presents a temporal one for the concept of the nation. In other words, he sees the idea of the nation as a changing process rather than a fixed stable entity.

> The people are not simply historical events or parts of a patriotic body politic. They are also a complex rhetorical strategy of social reference: their claim to be representative provokes a crisis within the process of signification and discursive address. We then have a contested conceptual territory where the nation's people must be thought in double-time; the people are the historical 'objects' of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin in the past; the people are also the 'subjects' of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principles of the people as contemporaneity: as the sign of the present through which national life is redeemed and iterated as a reproductive process (Bhabha, *Location*: 145-146).

It can be seen that by means of the pedagogical process, people come to know themselves: as the term pedagogy suggests they are 'taught' to have a certain conception of themselves as belonging to a certain 'nation'. More often than not this pedagogical aspect inspires an idealistic, patriotic, ahistorical image of the nation, stretching from, in Benedict Anderson's words, 'an immemorial past' to a 'limitless future' (Anderson: 11-12). In other words, through the pedagogical process, people become objects and are defined by their nationality. However, people are not merely objects to be defined and also have 'their claim to be representative'. That is, they are also subjects who define themselves and their nationality not based on a pre-given historical origin in the past but based on a living, reproductive, flowing principle of contemporaneity. Bhabha calls this latter aspect of the nation the 'performative'. Through the interaction of these two aspects, a split emerges in the production of the nation as narration so that the narration of the nation can never be a unified, stable, and whole concept.

*Age of Iron* begins with the long-feared and long-awaited news of Mrs. Curren's terminal cancer. It is only with the arrival of this news coinciding with the appearance of a tramp (Vercueil) sleeping in her driveway that she decides to write an extended letter to her daughter as a message of love or as she sometimes refers to it as a 'confession'. She

sees the tramp's appearance as a sign: the arrival of the unexpected visitor. She never gives up the idea that the derelict is in fact her guardian angel who has come to help her in a time of crisis.

In *Age of Iron*, the pedagogical aspect of the nation can be observed in Mrs. Curren's (a retired classics professor) liberal humanist education, values, and beliefs. For her the ultimate autonomy, agency, and self-sufficiency of the subject as well as the freedom of individuals are proved facts and she considers education a privilege:

> Last year, when the troubles in the schools began, I spoke my mind to Florence. 'In my day we considered education a privilege', I said. 'Parents would scrimp and save to keep their children in school. We would have thought it madness to burn a school down. 'It is different today'. replied Florence. 'Do you approve of children burning down their schools?' 'I cannot tell these children what to do', said Florence. 'It is all changed today. There are no more mothers and fathers'. 'That is nonsense', I said. 'There are always mothers and fathers'. On that note our exchange ended (Coetzee: 34).

As can be observed in this excerpt, Mrs. Curren is very firm in her belief in the value and privilege of education and the importance of parents for everybody. Florence, Mrs. Curren's live-in servant has a different opinion and believes that parents can no longer tell their children what to do. 'These are good children, they are like iron, we are proud of them'. … 'Children of iron, I thought. Florence herself, too, not unlike iron. The age of iron. A Spartan matron, iron-hearted, bearing warrior-sons for the nation. 'We are proud of them'. We. Come home either with your shield or on your shield' (46).

Later in the novel it turns out that Curren's view toward Florence and the iron children of South Africa is due to her privileged place in the apartheid South Africa because of her white skin color. Curren's liberal humanist values are also manifest in her interactions with the tramp who has come to live in her driveway. She is not very willing to care for the tramp freely and giving him a mug of coffee she offers him a job:

> 'Do you want a job of work?' I said. 'There are plenty of jobs I can give you'. He said nothing, but drank the coffee, holding the mug in both hands. 'You are wasting your life', I said. 'You are not a child any more. How can you live like this? How can you lie around and do nothing all day? I don't understand it'. ... Something in me revolts at the lassitude, the letting go, the welcoming of dissolution (10).

The tramp shocks her out of her sensibilities by spitting the coffee beside her foot, throwing the mug, and walking away. By throwing her 'charity' coffee away, the tramp shows her that she is not in a position to judge him and tell him what the good way of living is and that it is exactly the hierarchical and oppressive stance of whites (like Mrs.

Curren) to blacks (like Vercueil) that has led to the plight of blacks in South Africa in the first place.

Considering *The Book of Exodus* as a subtext of *Age of Iron* (*Acts*: 132), Maria Lopez believes that here Coetzee draws a parallel line between Mrs. Curren and the biblical Pharaoh who considers the Israelites "idle" (139). She observes a resemblance between Curren's disease and Egyptians becoming hosts to parasites as a similar reversal in power relations is taking place in South Africa: the whites are experiencing fear as they begin to feel threatened by those who were previously subordinated to them like what the Egyptians felt toward the Israelites (135).

It also turns out that Curren's charity, in contrast to the Christian spirit of charity, is conditional: she desires to see the gratitude of the receiver of her charity and she is angered when she sees otherwise:

> 'Eat!' I said, pushing the dish at them [her cats]. The big one lifted a finicky paw to avoid being touched. At which I lost control. 'Go to hell, then!' I screamed, and flung the fork wildly in their direction -'I am sick to death of feeding you!'... Enough of being nice to people, enough of being nice to cats! 'Go to hell' I screamed again, at the top of my voice. Their claws scrabbled on the linoleum as they fled (Coetzee, *Age*: 11).

What is manifest in all these instances is that Mrs. Curren cannot yet empathize with the people she interacts with. For instance, she even does not know the real names of her live-in servant and her children. Though she knows very little about them, she considers herself in a position to pass judgements on them easily. Later when a police car intentionally causes Bheki and John's bicycle to crash into a van, John becomes concussed with a lot of blood spilling from his forehead. Mrs. Curren does her best to stop him bleed to death but is angered that Florence made her care for John whom she considers a nonentity: 'Why did you leave me alone to look after him? Why didn't you stay and help?' I sounded querulous, certainly, but for once was I not in the right? … You leave me alone to take care of your son's friend. Why must I be the one to take care of him?' He is nothing to me' (60).

As can be observed in these lines, Curren (who as a *classics* professor is really not 'curren[t]' with the real situation of South Africa) is not yet in a position to care for the other whom she considers 'nothing'. What sets her aside from the other whites in the novel, however, is her having become aware of this flaw and her willingness to compensate for it. She knows that this flaw is the result of living under the apartheid regime. In fact, her cancer metaphorically stands for the diseased state of South Africa and the dead end it has reached: 'The slow, truculent Afrikaans rhythms with their deadening closes, like a

hammer beating a post into the ground. Together, blow after blow, we listened. The disgrace of the life one lives under them: to open a newspaper, to switch on the television … 'Your days are numbered', I used to whisper once upon a time, to them who will now outlast me (9).

It is this knowledge of her complicity with the regime in addition to the news of her imminent death that convince Curren to write her confession in the form of an extended letter to her daughter who has fled South Africa and with whom she thinks she still has a strong bond:

> I spoke: 'I told you about my daughter in America. My daughter is everything to me… all that keeps me sane is the thought of her. I say to myself: I have brought a child into the world, I have seen her to womanhood, I have seen her safely to a new life: that I have done, that can never be taken from me. That thought is the pillar I cling to when the storms hit me' (66).

However, Curren's motherly feelings have no reciprocation from her daughter who has vowed never to return to South Africa unless the regime has fallen and who does not very much care about her mother. "she is like iron", Curren discloses to Vercueil (68) who replies, "You are like iron too" (68). To depict the terrible conditions of South Africa, Coetzee has illustrated this iron-like relationship between a typical South African mother and daughter.

In an early part of the novel, Curren describes the "walled" and "soul-stunted" (6) experience of the white youth in South Africa which as a young girl she most probably went through herself:

> [The white youth] spinning themselves tighter and tighter into their sleepy cocoons. Swimming lessons, riding lessons, ballet lessons; cricket on the lawn; lives passed within walled gardens guarded by bulldogs; children of paradise, blond, innocent, shining with angelic light, soft as putti. Their residence the limbo of the unborn, their innocence the innocence of bee-grubs, plump and white, drenched in honey, absorbing sweetness through their soft skins. Slumberous their souls, bliss filled, abstracted (6-7).

As can be observed in these lines, Mrs. Curren's tone is quite disapproving of the limited view of South African white youth who have been separated from nonwhites by physical and spiritual barriers. However, Curren's indifference to the 'othered' black people undergoes a dramatic change after she visits Guguletu (which Sheila Roberts likens to Dante's *Inferno* (34)) at the request of Florence who has been summoned there by her relatives' emergency call regarding her son Bheki. In Guguletu, Curren sees first-hand the cruelty of the white regime and the plight of the black people near Cape Town unreported in the media which censor the terrible real events taking place. Being tired, cold, and having pain, Curren asks to return home to which Mr. Thabane, Florence's cousin, replies, "but what of the people who live here? When

they want to go home this is where they must go" (Coetzee, *Age*: 90). The climactic turning point in Mrs. Curren's perceptions occurs when she sees the lifeless body of Florence's teenage son Bheki and some of his friends (killed by the white regime) ironically laid out in an abandoned "hall or school" (92). Curren later writes about seeing Bheki's dead body with its open eyes: "now my eyes are open and I can never close them again" (95). She also feels that she will "never be warm again" (100). Sam Durrant argues that the events of Guguletu result in Mrs. Curren's becoming "receptive to the call of the other" and becoming unable to be insulated from the world of the other (Durrant: 125).

The second incident which precipitates the transformation of Curren's attitude toward the plight of the other happens with Bheki's friend John who has come to Curren's house to hide from the police. The fact that John is killed in Curren's house ensures her of her complicity with the white regime even if she is philosophically against it. Still valuing her liberal humanist attitudes and her independent individuality, Curren thinks at first that she can save John from the police. However, when the police take her away like a little child to do their "work" (Coetzee, *Age*: 140) and shoot John, she realizes how powerless she and her liberal humanist values are in the face of the oppressive patriarchal white regime. She shows her worth and agency, nevertheless, by abandoning her house despite the police officers' insistence that she not leave: "'You must come home now!' she ordered. 'It's not my home any more', I replied in a fury, and kept walking" (143). It is exactly at this point and before John is shot dead that a profound reversal in Curren's view of the other takes place: "He was lost, I had no power to save him. Yet something went out from me to him. I ached to embrace him, to protect him" (139). Going from a person to whom John is "nothing" to one who "aches to embrace and protect him" is a great change from indifference to motherly love. She has already realized that the plight that has fallen on her and on South Africa is the result of the "cancer of the heart" (142), the inability to love the other as she 'confesses' before the police come:

> My heart does not accept him [John] as mine: it is as simple as that. In my heart I want him to go away and leave me alone. That is my first word, my first confession. I do not want to die in the state I am in, in a state of ugliness. I want to be saved. How shall I be saved? By doing what I do not want to do. That is the first step: that I know. I must love, first of all, the unlovable. I must love, for instance, this child. Not bright little Bheki, but this one. He is here for a reason. He is part of my salvation. I must love him. But I do not love him. Nor do I want to love him enough to love him despite myself (124-125).

Curren is so traumatized by the police's murder of John in her house that she leaves it saying "it's not my home anymore" and "God forgive us" (143). In utter disappointment, she finds shelter under a flyover with

only a quilt around her. Here she is treated with as much indifference as she herself did versus the other: "No one spared me a glance. With my wild hair and pink quilt I might be a spectacle on Schoonder Street; here, amid the rubble and filth, I was just part of the urban shadowland" (143). Curren's only visitors here are three homeless children who search her for valuables and when they find none they force a stick into her mouth to check if she has gold teeth to take away. Here, by bringing three homeless orphan children to visit Mrs. Curren, Coetzee questions her previous liberal humanist values especially her conviction that "there are always mothers and fathers" (36) for everybody. She tries to ask for their mercy (145) but then tells herself, "what nonsense. Why should there be mercy in the world" (145). By taking away her privileged position as a former classics professor in the South African society and turning her into a tramp, Coetzee makes Curren completely and directly feel the plight of the other.

It is exactly at this point when she has learnt her 'lesson' that her 'angel' in the form of Vercueil comes to her rescue and takes her away: "When would the time come when the jacket fell away and great wings sprouted from his shoulders?" (146). Vercueil takes Curren to a wooded space for rest where "through the branches" (146) Curren glimpses "the stars" (146) which are symbolically associated with the heaven. In fact, Coetzee metaphorically compares Curren's profound change in her viewpoint toward the other with emerging from hell and going to heaven. Hence, similar to the mariner in Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* whose curse is lifted after he appreciates the beauty of the sea creatures swimming in the water despite his cursing them as "slimy things" earlier in the poem, Curren's guilt is partially expiated after she directly experiences the plight of the other and sympathizes with them. Curren's changed perception toward the other is particularly marked when she talks with and about Vercueil: 'I am so happy to see you', I said, the words coming from my heart, heartfelt … The thought came: Whom, of all beings on earth, do I know best at this hour? Him. Every hair of his beard, every crease of his forehead known to me. Him, not you. Because he is here, beside me, now (147).

As can be observed in these lines, Curren's viewpoint toward Vercueil and her daughter has undergone a complete reversal as her sympathy has gone from her 'self' (and everything associated with it including her daughter) to the 'other'. By emphasizing the fact that she knows Vercueil better than her own daughter long gone to America, Curren is stressing the importance of the people immediately around us even if we have no blood relation with them. Similar to the mariner who as penance for his guilt of shooting the albatross has to wander the earth, tell his story, and teach a lesson of love, Curren's long 'confession' has

the function of warning others of the mistake of indifference to the plight of the other. In fact, the epistolary format of the confession which directly addresses the intended reader as 'you' makes the reader of the novel the addressee as well. In this way, Coetzee implies that this confession is not intended for Curren's daughter only and all the readers of the novel need a warning. This implication is validated when we consider the fact that Vercueil whom Curren entrusts with posting the confession to her daughter in America after her death is an unreliable drunkard. Therefore, the confession which is a message of love may never reach Curren's 'intended' reader. Yet there is evidence in the novel (157) that this message of love *does* get read if not by her daughter by those who are in the most urgent need of loving the other, that is, the police officers who break into Curren's house in search of John.

Curren's becoming aware of her unwilling complicity with the white regime, her absolute lack of power to effect change (even when she considers committing suicide by burning herself in front of the parliament to show her rage and protest), and her learning to put aside the priority of her individual 'I' and all the liberal humanist values associated with it in favor of the 'other' can also be read in the light of Emanuel Levinas's transcendental ethics. Levinas believes that the ethical experience occurs in the encounter of the self and the other where the other transcends the image that we see of him or her (Maplas: 219). In Levinas's philosophy, the other inverts the process of intentionality and becomes prioritized over the self. Therefore, the encounter with the other, Levinas claims, is the transcendental condition for morality and justice (Malpas: 219). Nevertheless, as Coetzee demonstrates in *Age of Iron*, this encounter is not always straightforward and recognizable by the self or the other. Hence, though Curren claims to be on the side of the other and not on the side of the police: "Ek staan nie aan jou kant nie,' I said. 'Ek staan aan die teenkant." (Coetzee, *Age*: 140), she is not truly on the side of the other as she can easily go back to her own house away from the territory of the 'other' which is full of violence, bloodshed, and injustice: "there was nothing I longed for more than to get into my car, slam the door behind me, close out this looming world of rage and violence" (88-89). When Mr. Thabane asks her to speak about the terrible sites and events taking place in Guguletu Curren replies:

> 'These are terrible sights', I repeated, faltering. 'They are to be condemned. But I cannot denounce them in other people's words. I must find my own words, from myself. Otherwise it is not the truth. That is all I can say now'. … 'But what do you expect?' I went on. 'To speak of this' I waved a hand over the bush, the smoke, the filth littering the path – 'you would need the tongue of a god' (91).

Here, Curren fails to do the mission of the intellectual in condemning the apartheid in words at least. What becomes clear in this excerpt is the desire and also the difficulty of speaking the truth. In this part of the novel, Coetzee answers those critics who attacked him for failing to speak about the apartheid in realist terms which according to Coetzee would have strengthened the apartheid regime by 'reflecting' and 'supplementing' history (Head: 24). In order to avoid supplementing history and strengthening the apartheid regime by speaking about its crimes in realist terms, Coetzee takes his own path: he speaks about and refers to the apartheid obliquely and indirectly by alluding to a lot of other literary works. By using this strategy, Coetzee achieves two things: he shows the aloofness and irrelevance of a professor's ideas and knowledge of classics with regard to the 'reality' of the apartheid and he demonstrates the impossibility of representing the pain and hardships that the black population went through by a white author with a privileged place in the society. Nevertheless, the author has no other way but to try to oppose the injustice and cruelty that he/she witnesses by "taking up the pen, weapon of last resort" (Coetzee, *Age*: 48).

Allusions to other literary works abound in *Age of Iron*. This may in part be due to Coetzee's being influenced by T. S. Eliot who underscored the importance of tradition and advised authors to avoid personality (1095). A poet must embody "the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer", while, simultaneously, expressing his/her contemporary environment (1093). Eliot challenges the common perception that a poet's greatness and individuality are in his departure from his predecessors and argues that "the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously" (1093). This idea is in accord with Coetzee's own belief that direct representation of historical events in a literary work only helps reinforce the oppressive state by supplementing history and leads to no positive change in the society. Hence, though Coetzee does not avoid referring to deaths of countless young black people in late apartheid South Africa, he does not pretend to give a voice to their suffering. What he does instead is to represent the 'impacts' of these sufferings on the white narrator who belongs to the same privileged social class as himself.

In *Age of Iron*, Coetzee takes Eliot's advice by alluding to other literary works to depict the hellish conditions of South Africa indirectly. Coetzee's choice in alluding to other literary works is significant in that though almost all of them present a hellish situation, they still offer the possibility of some kind of redemption for their protagonists. Hence, similar to the mariner in Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* who kills the albatross out of indifference, Mrs. Curren is having a

"death-in-life" (Coetzee, *Age*: 78) existence (at least in the beginning of the novel) due to her indifference to black people in South Africa. In fact, her extended letter (or as she calls it her "confession") acts as a kind of redemption for herself and for South Africa as does the Mariner's obligation to confess his sin and spread a message of love. *Book of Exodus* functions as a subtext of *Age of Iron* (Lopez, *Acts*: 132) to tell the story of a pharaonic tyranny (the white regime) and an oppressed people (the black population). As in Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*, *Age of Iron* ironically shows the folly of self-love as well as the folly of those who deem themselves 'wise' (Poyner: 63). Tolstoy's *Death of Ivan Ilyich* is alluded to in *Age of Iron* (Coetzee, *Age*: 13) to demonstrate Curren's similar plight in dying in loneliness without the aid of her family while the main theme of Tolstoy's short story What Men Live By (that people live not by care for themselves but by love and charity for the other) is referred to as an answer to Curren's question and plight of being unable to love (13). The allusion to *Don Quixote* is to show that the 'Golden Age' has passed and that like Quixote, Curren's beliefs and values have no hold: she is a fossil from the past, not 'curren(t)' at all with the 'Iron Age' (Lopez, Cervantes: 86). Allusion to Virgil's *Aeneid* which is a highly masculine nation-founding myth is to show that taking such a stance to modern South Africa is impossible. In fact, *Age of Iron* is a very feminine novel with not a single mention to Curren's husband whatsoever. The other male figures in the novel are either weak good-for-nothing personalities (such as Vercueil) or those in favor of violence as a solution to the apartheid situation (such as Mr. Thabane or the white police officers). Coetzee wants to demonstrate that the time for men's shows of masculinity and violence is up and now it is women's turn to care, to love, and to put things to rights. The *Inferno* section of Dante's *Divine Comedy* is alluded to in Coetzee's *Age of Iron* and represents South Africa's hellish conditions while the *Paradise* section of Dante's *Divine Comedy* shows the possibility of obtaining redemption by loving the other. Wordsworth's *Intimations of Immortality* is alluded in order to show the reverse direction (compared to Wordsworth's advice) that South African children have been forced by the apartheid regime to take: rather than idolizing their childhood, they despise everything which is associated with it: innocence, happiness, and rejoicing (Coetzee, *Age*: 46). In T. S. Eliot's "Hollow Men", the "hollow men", similar to Mrs. Curren, have the humility to acknowledge their guilt and their status as lost souls. Last but perhaps most importantly, Coetzee also alludes to Homer's *The Odyssey* (95). In the western tradition, the word 'Odyssey' can mean adventure, difficulty, long journey, and danger. In *Age of Iron*, Coetzee alludes to the Circe episode in *The Odyssey* where Circe transforms Odysseus's men into swine and only Odysseus is saved from

this fate by Athena's advice to eat a plant called 'moly'. In this way, Coetzee underscores the dehumanizing effects of the state's power relations on South African people. Coetzee presents love as the equivalent of moly in *Age of Iron* which has the power to bridge the gap between subject and object or between self and other as Curren understands near the end of the novel:

> I do not want to die in the state I am in, in a state of ugliness. I want to be saved. How shall I be saved? By doing what I do not want to do. That is the first step: that I know. I must love, first of all, the unlovable. I must love, for instance, this child. Not bright little Bheki, but this one. He is here for a reason. He is part of my salvation. I must love him (Coetzee, *Age*: 124-5).

It is at this point that Mrs. Curren becomes aware of the 'ugly' state the apartheid regime has put her by pedagogically inculcating feelings of indifference and superiority to her over the black people. Only by acting in a performative way, to use Bhabha's term, is Curren able to defeat her indifference to the other, begin to love him/her, and save herself from the ugliness of indifference to the other: 'Mr. Thabane shrugged impatiently. His look had grown uglier. No doubt I grow uglier too by the day. Metamorphosis, that thickens our speech, dulls our feelings, turns us into beasts. Where on these shores does the herb grow that will preserve us from it?' (95).

By emphasizing the importance of the other in the formation of subjectivity, Coetzee demonstrates the possibility of transcendence through love beyond subject/object or self/other binary oppositions and reaching an ethics based on intersubjectivity. Hence, Coetzee shows that the solution for the brutalizing effects of the apartheid on people in South Africa is love which acts the same as Odysseus's moly restoring the humanity of his metamorphosed men to them.

In conclusion, in this paper, Homi Bhabha's theory of the nation and Emanuel Levinas's theory of the other were used for the analysis of J. M. Coetzee's *Age of Iron*. It was discussed how the apartheid regime pedagogically inculcated the white population of South Africa with the ideas of superiority and indifference over the black population in order to justify their suppression. It was also shown how by experiencing the crimes and cruelties of the apartheid regime first hand, Mrs. Curren attempts in a 'performative' manner and with much difficulty to 'unlearn' the corrupt inculcated values of the regime and embrace the true values of empathy and sympathy for the other. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Coetzee emphasizes the impossibility of speaking for the other. Hence, unlike his contemporary South African novelists who openly attacked the regime, Coetzee takes an oblique path. Instead of judgement, he presents love to the other as the solution to the plight of the apartheid in South Africa since it has the power to restore the

humanity of all who have been brutalized by the apartheid regime. Similarly, Odysseus and his men were able to rescue themselves from being metamorphosed to animals by Circe's witchcraft with the use of the herb 'moly'.

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