

I. J. M. Coetzee's Novel *Age of Iron* as a Rewriting of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*

The present research deals with how Coetzee has parodied Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* in his work *Age of Iron*. In order to prove the novel as a Parody of Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*, the researcher has brought Dante Alighieri's poetry like: *Inferno (Hell)*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* as a reference. Then it employs Linda Hutcheon's *Politics of Postmodernism*, *Poetics of Postmodernism* and *A Theory of Parody* as theoretical tool for textual analysis.

Widely regarded as one of the distinguished Twentieth century novelists of South Africa J.M. Coetzee has rewritten the historical work of Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* in his novel *Age of Iron* to reveal how present representation come from past one and what ideological consequences derive from continuity and difference. *Age of Iron* is the novel where characters, situations and events are imitated or misrepresented in a humorous way. By rewriting the Early Fourteenth Century poetry *The Divine Comedy* Coetzee has parodied the contemporary democratic period of South Africa where there is no equality, justice and Apartheid system is still haunting the black people in every walk of life.

This novel is the mimicry of Fourteenth Century poetry of Dante Alighieri where the narrator Dante is living a suffocated life in Hell. He directly experiences the suffering of Hell which is very difficult to bear. Coetzee presents his disapproval of the current situation in South Africa where African government uses an iron hand to dominate black people; and it creates hell on earth. The protagonist realizes it only in the last months of her life. She directly witnesses the misuse of power by African government authorities to dominate and discriminate the Negroes of South Africa and experiences worst realities of the contemporary

society.

In the beginning of novel Elizabeth Curren's doctor tells her that she is going to die of cancer. The day after she receives the bad news, she notices Mr. Vercueil in her garage. She starts to wonder whether he was sent by God to guide her through her last month. Mrs. Curren invites him into her house to take food. She offers him some suggestions and works which he denies. Their relationship seems very closer when she gets an attack of pain and he helps her back into the house. They start spending more time together. She asks him a pretty big papers to her daughter in America after she dies. Finally he agrees to put the letter in the mail. While she keeps Vercueil in her house the villagers question about him. But she saves him saying that he is her helper. Then he helps her each and every difficult condition during her lifetime.

Vercueil's name seems to be a reference to Virgil from Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*. Coetzee imitates historical figures like Virgil in Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* as his character: Vercueil, who coordinates the narrator and protagonist Elizabeth Curren from the very beginning to the end of the novel.

"Similar to Virgil giving a guided tour through hell namely South Africa. The idea that Vercueil may represent an angel of death to Mrs. Curren introduces an allegorical dimension to the novel" (Head 129). Vercueil is the angel of death who drives the car when he and Mrs. Curren go to the township where there is violent and they find Florence's son, Bheki dead.

Age of Iron is unique adaptation of historical narrative genre where Coetzee presents the life pattern of black and white people in powerful and impressive ways where the wretched condition of black people by apartheid system in South Africa is presented that has resulted the untimely murder of two black boys. The murder of the boys gives the picture of late Twentieth century South Africa when the Apartheid

system was at the highest point. Apartheid system was the system of racial segregation where Negroes were behaved as low class people and they had been killed only because they protested against the government.

The novel published in 1990 features protagonist and narrator Elizabeth Curren, a white middle class South African woman with English root. The novel is in the form of a letter to her daughter. She was exiled many years ago who has two children of her own. When the protagonist hears that she has been diagnosed with terminal cancer she starts writing a letter to her daughter who lives in America. Living a lonely life in South Africa in Apartheid period she comes to know how the blacks are discriminated in terms of colour and race. The African government's attitude and actions are like iron, they seem unbreakable and unbendable. According to the novel, South Africa and especially its government, is living in a state of denial and refuses to acknowledge its problems as seen from the description of the functioning of the media. The media is under the control of government which seem the speaker of government. The protagonist is staging a silent protest against the regime of the African government, which uses the media propaganda as Mrs. Curren asserts:

I was watching television. One of the tribe of ministers and onderministers was making an announcement to the nation. I was standing, as I always do when they speak, as a way of keeping what I can of my self- respect (who would choose to face a firing squad sitting down?) *ons buig nie voor dreigemente nie* he was saying: we do not bow to threats one of the speeches. (9)

Mrs. Curren keeps standing as a way of protesting against the government. She compares them with a firing squad who eliminates people who are in their way.

Mrs. Curren comments on the misuse of the media by the Afrikaner government: Governmental control of media was another essential part of the ideological struggle, registered clearly in Mrs. Curren's reactions to television and newspaper coverage of politics. She protests against the misuse of media.

In Coetzee's *Age of Iron*, the white female narrator is a retired teacher of classics with modernity liberal political views. Although she hates the repressive African Nationalist government, she has herself participated in that government's education system and thus cannot avoid both the charge and the awareness of her own complicity and Apartheid. Terminal illness and the journey bringing high awareness of black underclass people cause her to re-examine both her political view and the vast knowledge of classical literature and history. This re-examination brings a light to her driving force of disagreement within her character: the tendency to retreat into familiar texts and ideological structures and the drive to confront and confess her responsibility for the suffering of others. Both are figured in Coetzee's use of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, which serves at once as an example of European high culture to be resisted and as a model of self-examination and confession to be followed.

Parody in traditional term is the way of imitating and ridiculing to somebody or something. Parody is a composition that imitates or misrepresents somebody's style, usually in humorous way. But in contemporary society it is not only the way of ridiculing of imitating something or somebody but also the way of investigating and revisiting the history to find out the strengths and weaknesses of the history. According to the dictionary definition parody is a piece of writing that imitates the style of another so as to be amusing. It imitates the writing of predecessor. It doesn't only imitate the predecessor's writing but aims at finding out something special about the period. Parody both installs and subverts which it parodies. It is

mocking imitation of the style of a literary work which ridicules the stylistic habit of an author by exaggeration. It can be used as a self reflexive technique that reflects art as art. It is a way of investigating the history and historical truth. Most of the feminist artists often use postmodern parody technique to deconstruct the history and historical powers of those cultural representations. So it challenges the traditional and authoritative power practice. Parody which can be interchangeably used with mimicry, is one of the most delightful, natural satisfying and often the most effective form of satire. In contemporary time a parody is a writing that imitates another work in order to ridicule, ironically comment on, or poke fun at the work itself, the subject of the work, the author and fictional voice of parody. Hucheeon argues that a postmodern version of parody does exist and it is a value problematizing denaturalizing form of acknowledging the history of representations. In fact, parody is a lively and engaging introduction to the crucial concept in contemporary literary and cultural studies, making even the most complex debates accessible to readers of all levels. According to Simon Dentith, "Parody is everywhere in contemporary modern culture. It runs through literature, theatre and television, architecture, film and even everyday speech. It is also at the heart of contemporary literature and cultural theory"(154). Parody is mainly used in the poems in ancient Greek literature, the word *parodia* or parody refers a narrative poem imitating the style and prosody of epics. Parody in literature is a comic or satirical imitation of a piece of writing exaggerating its style and content, and playing especially on any weakness in structure or meaning of the original. It is related to postmodernism. In a broader sense, it is a part of postmodernism. The fundamental confrontation of postmodernism, according to Linda Hutcheon, is that of documentary historical actuality with "formalist self-reflexivity and parody" (7). The very choice of text to be parodied, of course, implies

a critical act of evaluation on the part of the parodist. The judgement is in no way restricted to the negative. Parody is necessary tool in contemporary literary works in order to modify the original texts and create a new one. Hutcheon adds about the necessity of parody as :

Parody is of necessity a sophisticated literary form. The author –and then the reader-effects a superimposition of texts, an incorporation of old into new. The parody itself then becomes in a bilingual synthesis. In this it would differ from pastiche or even adaptation, both essentially monolingual forms which bring about synthesis and reveal no respect for the borrowed text . (202)

Parody, on the view of Hutcheon, is a necessary thing to make a sophisticated literary form because another form like pastiche cannot bring synthesis. It is only parody that brings synthesis so it can be studied in a sense of bilingual synthesis. Parody is particularly apt representation strategy for postmodernism. It is " a strategy once described as the use of parallel script rather than original inscription"(Hutcheon 113). Out of installing and ironizing, it signals how present representations come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from both continuity and difference. From the aforementioned ideas, it is clear that parody is the literary device which is a value problematizing, de-naturalizing form of acknowledging the history (and through irony, the politics) of representation. It is not ahistorical or de-historicizing.

In the novel *Age of Iron* Black people are getting suffocated life in South Africa. They are dominated as well as discriminated and being suffered by African Nationalist government. The suffering black get from the government is very similar to the penalty that every sinner gets in hell in Dante Alighieri's poetry *The Divine Comedy*. Coetzee parodies Dante Alighieri to present South Africa as the Hell where

every sinner gets punishment according to his/her sin. By getting the penalty in the Hell the sinners pave the way to go to Purgatory and at last Paradise which is the source of happy and joys.

Like Dante, Coetzee believes that confession is the only way to get the salvation. It is a Christian dogma . So in his novel *Age of Iron* Coetzee presents his protagonist and narrator Elizabeth Curren confessed in every moment. Individual suffering of Mrs. Curren is one of the way of confessing. It not only teaches her how to cleansing the sin but also brings the power to face the problem of Apartheid in South Africa. It also brings many more changes in her political attitude. She gets a chance to evaluate knowledge about classical history and literature. In one hand her individual suffering of terminal illness shows the way how to bear the pain on the other the behavior of government authorities opens her eyes which are never going to be closed. Her direct experience to look at the killing of the black boys teaches that her level of knowledge in politics and history of South Africa is zero although she was called a retired professor of classics who is supposed to have the vast knowledge of literature and history of South Africa.

Coetzee wants to show how this world is corrupted like Hell. He rewrites Dante Alighieri to dramatize the rustiness of contemporary South Africa where every parent is left alone by their children who has been brought up supposing he/she would take care his/her parents in old age. Similarly she gets children not respecting the elders. Government authorities kill their own citizens. About the problems of students in school the media says nothing. Mass media is controlled by the government. Many homeless people have been suffering a lot in the contemporary South African society. There is vast discrimination between white and black people. The African government's attitude and actions are like iron, they seem unbreakable

and unbendable. According to the novel, South Africa, and especially its government, is living in a state of denial, and refuses to acknowledge its problems, as seen from the description of the functioning of the media. The protagonist is staging a silent protest against the regime of the Afrikaner government, which uses the media for propaganda. Mrs. Curren keeps standing as a way of protesting against the government. She compares government authorities with a firing squad who eliminate people who are in their way. By standing up she is saying that if they take her down she will go proudly.

In his novel *Age of Iron* Coetzee presents Elizabeth Curren as the narrator and protagonist who is directly and indirectly against the brutality of South African government authorities and Apartheid system of South Africa. By presenting her as an opponent person of government authorities Coetzee tries to equate black with white. Through the narrator Coetzee seems to show his disapproval of the current the situation in South Africa. The determination of government to rule South Africa with an iron hand creates a hell on earth.

For Coetzee, use of Dante is an appropriate choice for several reasons. *The Divine Comedy* is in one level a poem about reading Virgil, but since it is also a Christian poem Virgil's model must be transformed. Dante therefore exemplifies Hutcheon's description of the paradoxical mixture of repetition and difference inherent in all parody. In the same way *The Divine Comedy* is a work in which personal and political crisis are intertwined. Autobiographical details given in the poem show that Dante's spiritual journey takes place during Holy week of the year 1300. In Florence in May of that year street fighting between Black and white broke out. Many people were affected by the clash. The fighting caused the destruction of many houses. It was the fighting in terms of race and colour. This period when Black-

white struggle was at the highest point was also the period when Dante, a moderate white man was elected one of the magistrates of the city, and it was this and other political activity that made him a target of reprisals. Once the Blacks took control of Florence in 1301 Dante was convicted in absentia of corruption in office and sentenced to death in the similar way Mrs. Curren is convicted and sentenced to death sort of cancer. Dante was literally journeying across Italy as a political exile, then he was writing the poem about his journey, through hell, purgatory and paradise. This journey is in part to discover causes and solutions for the civil war in Florence. This journey of Dante sketches parallel between Dante's Florence and Coetzee's South Africa. In the late 1980s South Africa too was divided by the renowned struggle between whites and blacks when Mrs. Curren's spiritual journey begins in autumn 1986, death sentence is passed upon Mrs. Curren by the doctor's announcement of terminal cancer. This journey shows the real pictures of Black people in South Africa. This journey is to discover the causes and solutions of Apartheid system of South Africa. To Mrs. Curren " life in this country is so much like life aboard a sinking ship" an image of recalling Dante's declaration that Italy is a " Ship unpiloted in the storm's rage" (Purgatorio VI -80). Like Dante's journey, Mrs. Curren's journey is a search for personal salvation and for a way out of the national political crisis.

Coetzee makes the journey to Goguletu as a reworking of Dante by several means. Coetzee accepts Dante's view of the importance of direct experience in the process of self-examination and confession. He locates his main character's journey of discovery in a black township in order to question the imperial vision that informs Dante's views on factionalism and civil war. The housekeeper's son, Bheki has along with many black youths of the period boycotted the white run schools in his township and become involved in the struggle for liberation. Coetzee's "City of

Woe" is Goguletu, one of the many black townships where the condition of dwellers is very poor. There is always fear of murder. Ironically it is supposed to be the city of justice only if one is fully immersed in Apartheid ideology. If one is not immersed in Apartheid it is city of woe, where there is sorrow and distress. It would be the Mrs. Curren is not witnessing some generic or invented township struggle but specific incident in Cape Town history, the destruction of squatter camps at Crossroads in May and June of 1986. *Age of Iron* brilliantly illustrates the tension between citizens and the authorities that existed during this time.

Age of Iron is specially a postmodern parody in its inter-textual relation to the traditions and conventions of genres involved. Postmodern art and aesthetics of postmodernism have claimed parody as a central strategy to describe many different artifacts. Parodied text is essentially reflexive in the sense that it represents another representation of the past. Postmodernism's main interest might seem to be on the process of its own production and reception as well as in its parodic relation to the art of the past. According to Linda Hutcheon :

Postmodernism is a fundamentally contradictory enterprise in its art forms (and its theory) use and abuse install and then subvert convention in parodic ways, self-consciously pointing both to their own inherent paradoxes and provisionality and of course to their critical or ironic re-reading of the art of the past. (12)

Age of Iron is a historical novel, representing approximately the year of 1986 in which period the Apartheid system in Africa was in the climax. For Coetzee the Apartheid era was age of iron which was very hard so it is very difficult to live in the hard era. Despite of its hardness Mrs. Curren is living in the period. Its hardness represents hate and disharmonious relation. A softer age should be set there in South

Africa to bring back the love and harmony. As Mrs. Curren in this context asserts :

'These are good children, they are like iron, we are proud of them.' On the board she spread the first of the pillowslips. I waited for her to say more. But there was no more. She was not interested in debating with me. Children of iron, I thought Florence herself too, not unlike iron. The age of iron after which comes the age of bronze. How long, how long before the softer ages return in their cycle, the age of clay, the age of earth? (46)

In the above passage the contradiction between Mrs. Curren and Florence is revealed. Florence is proud of children she opines that children should be free to do everything. Mrs. Curren is insisting that there should be some kind of control to the children otherwise there would be rude. She further says that there is a need of cycle that leads the age to the softer age like age of bronze, age of clay, age of earth.

Stefan Helgesson, a Swedish author who both in fiction and reality, deals with problems of politics and history in his writing discusses a problem that often occurs to analyze fictive historical works of literature:

History and writing are both extremely porous terms that call for elaboration As Michael Green has shown, 'history' has been taken to mean a number of things by South African writers, in much the same way as the academic understanding of the term has shifted.

(Helgesson 18)

The purpose of analyzing history in *Age of Iron* is however not to offer any truth, but to elaborate what happened in South-Africa during the downfall of Apartheid and the events in the novel and the relation between them .

Many critics have analyzed *Age of Iron* from different perspective. Among

them Derek Attridge in his article reviews

Coetzee's representation of township violence in *Age of Iron* is untypical of his work in depicting directly and vividly the horrors of life under Apartheid, and the accuracy of his account can be verified by examining other documents referring to the events in Goguletu and neighbouring townships in 1986, when state-armed Vigilantes destroyed the homes of supporters of ANC: However, the literary dimension of his description is paramount, and the events are viewed through the perspective of Mrs. Curren, who as a former teacher of classics, can't help interpreting her experience through the works she has read, and who urges her daughter not to trust her account. There are a numbers of echoes of Virgil, especially the episode of the Aeneid in which echoes not only contribute, but associate the violence being observed to a history of violence and of literary representations of violence. (Attridge 8)

In the above mentioned passage Derek Attridge depicts Goguletu as a town of horrors where life is in danger in every walk. There is fear of state armed Vigilantes. They destroy the home homes of supporters of African National Congress. He finds Vercueil as the echo of Virgil in Dante's *The Divine Comedy*.

Stephen Watson in his brief review of Susan Van Zenten's *A story of South Africa: J.M. Coetzee's fiction in context*, asserts "There is something altogether contrived, even hackneyed, in the obvious connection implied in Coetzee's latest novel *Age of Iron*, between the corruption eroding South Africa's Humanity and the incurable cancer" ravaging Elizabeth Curren's body " (Watson 116).

Interestingly, in his dismissal of Coetzee's "obvious" metaphor, Watson

neglects to consider the fact that cancer is merely the most immediately recognizable aspect of a larger metonymic use of Mrs. Curren's body to represent not only South Africa's humanity but a multifaceted amalgam of largely Boer-oriented National Party politics, liberal humanism and black radicalism.

In one of the novels most frequently discussed passages, Elizabeth Curren describes the love she feels her daughter in the same strangely self-centered language discussed earlier:

We bear children in order to be mothered by them. Home truths, a mother's truth: from now to the end that is all you will hear from me. So: how I longed for you! How I longed to be able to go upstairs to you, to sit on your bed, run my fingers through your hair, whisper in your ear as I did on school mornings, " Time to get up!" And then when you turned over, your body blood warm , your breath milky, to take you in my arms in what we called" giving mommy a big hug" the secret meaning of which , the meaning never spoken, was that mommy should not be sad, for she wouldn't die but live on you. To live you are my life, I love you as I love life itself. (5)

In this passage Mrs. Curren has some kind of nostalgia of her daughter who is far away from her. That moment can't be found. It's possible only in memory. Again as before, Elizabeth equates her daughter's life with her own, but with the added implication that the love she directs towards her daughter is in fact at least partially self-love . The fact that the letter she ostensibly addresses to her daughter is in fact written to herself suggests Mrs. Curren uses her daughter as a projection of herself so that she may confront death externally.

Derek Attridge concludes Mrs. Curren's perceptual issue. He asserts

What is enacted in this novel is the acute ethno-political trauma of the post-colonial world, where no general rule applies, where a conflict of values is endemic and where every code of moral conduct has to be tested and justified afresh in terms of the specific context in which it is being invoked. But this is not a lesson to be learned, a conclusion to be reached. Mrs. Curren's new understanding is not something she has achieved : it exists in and cannot be separated from, the negations and questionings she has experienced (Attridge 110)

Attridge suggests that Mrs. Curren could not have gained her knowledge and insight if she had not examined herself and that which is the very core of the letter, her values and own beliefs. Forced to experience situations where her ethics are put to the test, not only empty words, but respect and equality expressed through actions, indeed lead her to revelation. Whether she is willing to accept and learn how to embrace this new found existence is however much more indefinite.

David E. Hoeberg in his 1998 article focuses in direct experience of the narrator in J.M. Coetzee's *Age of Iron* as Dante's experience in *The Divine Comedy*.

He argues :

Coetzee accepts Dante's view of important of direct experiences in the process of self-examination and confession but locates his main character's journey of discovering in black township in order to question the imperial vision that informs Dante's view on factionalism and civil war. (Hoeberg 3)

Hoeberg in his article focuses on the importance of direct experience through the journey which causes the discovery of hidden things in black townships that helps to question the imperial vision that informs Dante's view on factionalism and civil war.

In the view of Coetzee Factionalism and Civil war are very bad for the nation that destroy the existence of country.

Sheila Roberts in her 1996 article compares Dante's virgil with Coetzee's Vercueil in terms of their similar role to cooperate with the protagonist. She asserts "Vercueil is a modified version of Dante's Virgil and that Coetzee uses Dante parallel to expose the political irrelevance of white liberation" (Roberts 11). Roberts here compares Vercueil of Age of Iron to the Virgil of *The Divine Comedy* who is always eager to co-operate and serve the protagonist.

Michael Marais discusses this restriction on Media representation in terms of the cave to which Coetzee alludes in one of the Atwell's interviews. In his article, "Who Clipped the Hollyhocks?" Michael Marais uses Coetzee's allusion to Plato's cave in an interview to analyse the politics of representation in South Africa as it is represented in Age of Iron. Marais observes:

... white South Africans' understanding of their social and political "reality" is almost entirely dependent on the form in which it is communicated. Like the prisoners in Plato's cave, they are presented with phenomena, that is, mere shadows of the ontologically real world... Since the State-controlled media's representations of the country in which they live are all that they ever see, - they (mis) take these representations for reality. (3)

In the above review Atwell compares South African people as the prisoners who are living in illusion and suppose the representations by state as the reality. They are habituated to suppose illusion as the reality.

In this way, the novel *Age of Iron* has been analyzed from different perspectives. Some critics take the novel as an anti-apartheid text, some others take the novel as a postcolonial text in the same way other critics take the novel as a

confession of narrator. And some others take it as a Parody of Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*. In this research work, the researcher has studied this novel *Age of Iron* as a Parody of Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* by comparing its characters, events and situations. So this research has studied the book from the perspective of mimicry or misrepresentation of *The Divine Comedy*. As only few critics have analyzed the book from the perspective of parody of *The Divine Comedy*, this research will be important to dig out the hidden motives of writing and to give now life to the text. So this research has studied the book from the perspective of mimicry or misrepresentation of *The Divine Comedy*.

This research work has been divided into three chapters. The first chapter includes the introduction of the text, problem that lies in the text, researcher's hypothesis, view on the text by other critics, researcher's point of departure, methodological tool, which the researcher uses in the research. Second chapter is all about textual analysis. In this chapter, the researcher mainly focuses on the issues embedded in these chapters specially insisting upon parody. The researcher attempts to find out how the characters situations and events of *Age of Iron* are very similar to the characters, situations and events of *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri. At last this research attempts to dig out the reasons behind Coetzee's propose of rewriting Dante. And in the third chapter the researcher derives the conclusion of the thesis.

II. *Age of Iron* as a Parody of *The Divine Comedy*

This research focuses upon how J.M. Coetzee parodies Dante Alighieri's poetry *The Divine Comedy* in his novel *Age of Iron*. The novel takes its characters events and the setting from the Italian writer Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* in order to present the historical truth. Vercueil, a major character in *Age of Iron* is appointed in service of the narrator Elizabeth Curren, An African middle class white woman is very similar character like Virgil in Dante's poetry *The Divine Comedy* who leads the narrator Dante from Hell and Purgatory. Most of the parts in the novel are covered by the protagonist and narrator Elizabeth Curren and character Vercueil, who makes his role as the most important character in the novel. The Character Vercueil establishes himself in the place of Virgil in *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri.

Parody contests our humanist assumptions about artistic originality and uniqueness and our capitalist notions of ownership and property. Through the process of reproduction, it works to foreground and the politics of representation. It is both deconstructively critical and constructively creative, paradoxically making us aware of both the limits and the powers of representation in any medium as Hutcheon argues "While such an act of parody is one of incorporation, its function is one of separation, of contrast." Coetzee parodies the traditional notion of African white people which separates blacks with white in terms of race and colour. This novel is parody of the traditional view of the African white people who generally suppose that blacks are inferior and whites are superior. By writing the novel Coetzee contests our

humanist assumption of artistic originality and our capitalist notions of ownership and property. Coetzee reproduces the Fourteenth Century poetry of Dante in the form of a novel in the period of the Twentieth Century which foregrounds the contemporary politics of representation. The novel incorporates a fiction in the novel form and it attempts to separate the gap between poetry and fiction.

In the contemporary usage Parody is a work created to mock, comment on, or poke fun at an original work, its subject, author style, or some other target by means of humorous, satirical or in ironic imitation. According to Hutcheon, "Parody- often called ironic quotation, pastiche, appropriation, or intertextuality- is usually considered central to Postmodernism, both by its detractors and defenders" (89). This novel mocks and pokes fun upon the Dante's *The Divine Comedy* which being a follower of the Christian belief supposes confession as the only way to get the spiritual redemption. This novel also reveals the theme of confession. Elizabeth Curren, the narrator confesses in every moment. She cleanses her heart and gets new and refreshed life bearing every difficult moment. Her bone cancer is also the medium to confess in her life. By taking over every hard work in her life she leads her life to the best condition. She feels that she has travelled through Hell and Purgatory, which is full of difficulties and it is the time to go to the Paradise, which is the ultimate place to experience happy and joyful moments.

Parody can be used as a self-reflexive technique that reflects art as art. We can take parody as a way of investigating the history and historical truths: it becomes a way of ironically revisiting the past-of both art and history. Most often feminist artists used postmodern parodic techniques to deconstruct the history and historical powers of those cultural representations. So, it challenges the conventional and the authoritative power practices. This novel has been the way of investigating the history and historical truths: it becomes a way of ironically revisiting the

past-of both art and history. It investigates the history of Fourteenth Century when the struggle between blacks and whites was in the climax. Like Dante in historical past living the exiled life, Mr. Curren also lives in so called democratic South Africa which is for her like Dante's wandering in the hell where there is no system, no rule and no mercy, only the punishment is ultimate way to control the sinners.

Coetzee assimilates Dante's vision through revisiting that man is made to travel different stages of suffering after death to get the salvation. It seems in the allegorical level the same assimilation is extended that Hell is the place to get suffering and then that must be the primary source of salvation. In essence it is the suffering of Mrs. Curren that overtakes the suffering of that every sinner gets in Hell. Coetzee parodies the fall of Dante from one of the magistrates of his city. Coetzee leaves the reader with the understanding that sin lies entirely with Mrs. Curren and white middle class woman of that time. Coetzee tells the reader that Mrs. Curren and Vercueil are betrayed into their cooperative relations by inner God given forces. It is also said that the discrimination between whites and blacks imposed by government must be blurred by the middle class people of the country. Coetzee finds many ways, here of making us aware that he is particularly answering Dante's self-confident concerning his spiritual journey. He is paving the way for a parody of meaning illuminated by Dante in the crucial event of the fall of himself from one of the magistrates of his city due to the black protest against white. Mrs. Curren and Mr. Vercueil are playing similar role of Dante and Virgil for Coetzee purposes of thematic comparison and contrast. In terms of thematic difference, Dante's larger context prepares us for understanding that the fault lies entirely on Dante and Virgil but Coetzee prepares us for understanding that Mrs. Curren and Virgil are victimized by their spiritual journey which is given by the circumstances of the then African society but beyond their understanding and

control. They are represented as being betrayed and overwhelmed by their circumstances that they face in their life.

This project places parody in the modern day closer to political sarcasm. According to Camus "The Politics of Parody is what has made the modern men's life absurd." There are largely affected in the cross wars of political leaders within the nation and outside as well. Politics makes man lowly and superior. Although politics tries to flatter everyman to the height, but only for temporary period and the selfishness of politics is over, a common man remains as where s/he is was. Camus' works expresses the central idea that human existence is absurd, due to the parody of politics. But when he makes choices lead to repetition and the repetition leads to the sense of absurdity. Dante was convicted in absentia of corruption in office and sentenced to death (Najemy 80-82). Dante was literally journeying across Italy as a political exile, then while he was writing the poem about his journey through hell, purgatory and Paradise experienced different stages of suffering. In the life of Dante Politics of Parody made Dante's life absurd. Although Politics led Dante's life to the highest point. But it was only for temporary period. But when selfishness of politics is over Dante came to the real ground where he was previous. But condition is very difficult and complex for assimilating the environment. This history was rewritten by J. M. Coetzee in his novel *Age of Iron* where in the period of 1980s South Africa too was divided by renowned and heightened struggle between whites and blacks, though there the term indicate racial classifications as well as political loyalties. Mrs. Curren's spiritual journey begins in autumn of 1986 when a death sentence of sort is passed upon her by her doctor's announcement of terminal cancer. Though both Dante and Mrs. Curren's journey is for the salvation it is absurd. They are journeying through different places visiting various persons only in vain. In every journey there is hindrance by government or the authority. The way to get the

salvation is to bear the suffering they are getting. Both Dante and Mrs. Curren's life is like the myth of Sisyphus. They are both spending time getting nothing. Here politics have made Dante and Elizabeth Curren's life leading to the climax only for temporary period and the selfishness of politics over a common man remains where s/he was. The very similar case happened in the life of Mr. Curren too. Politics made her life superior than the blacks. She was very happy when she had a daughter with her. Her home was like a heaven for here. But when the selfishness of politics ended her daughter is exiled from the country and she is left alone and comes to know that she has terminal illness of bone cancer. She is affected by the devil power and her journey has started.

Parody is a kind of seriously ironic element of literature that often enables this contradictory doubleness, the intertexts of history and fiction take on parallel status in the parodic networking of the textual past of both world and literature. *Age of Iron* carries out the contradictory doubleness. On the one hand the protagonist, Elizabeth Curren hates repressive African government and on the other hand she has herself participated in that government's education system. So she cannot avoid charge and awareness of her own complicity with apartheid. This novel is the evident of black-white struggle in late Thirteenth century when Dante was one of the magistrates of the city. Taking the evident of history this novel is written in the form of fiction. There is a inter-textual relation between history and literature that take on parallel status of the textual past of both world and literature. History of world is conserved by the novelist Coetzee in his novel *Age of Iron*.

J.M. Coetzee in his novel *Age of Iron* playfully parodies the notion of equality and justice. He addresses the several societal problems in turn-of twentieth century in his novel. Rather than imaginatively providing a historical event *The Age of Iron* deals with actual

historical events with historical characters in fictional situation. *Age of Iron* establishes some tentative truths, and thus may be seen as another work of metafiction. As a postmodern novel, it represents another representation. The novel is short, sometimes humorous, and highly accessible prose that might be called "mock historical" writing which mimics the prose of history texts. Linda Hutcheon in *A Theory of Parody* argues:

Parody is in another formulation repetition with critical distance which marks different rather than similarity. In this it goes beyond mere allusive variation such as in the honkandori technique in Japanese court poetry, which echoes past works in order to borrow a context and to evoke an atmosphere (6)

In the above passage Hutcheon, taking Browser and Miner's argument focuses on repetition with critical distance. The historical events are repeated in parodied text where there is a critical or long distance between the history and parodied text. So some events may be different or modified. Parodied text may be very similar to honkandori technique in Japanese court poetry, which echoes past works in order to borrow a context to evoke an atmosphere.

The novel *Age of Iron* is repetition of Dante's poetry *The Divine Comedy* but it is written in two different time periods. So context may be different but events seem merely imitative through critical distance. In the novel historical events are repeated through critical distance. It has become one of the easy ways of investigating the historical truth through the gap of time period. It is a novel which is the medium to parody upon the traditional concept of South African notion of black white discrimination.

Coetzee clearly presents Twentieth century history of Africa which is claimed to be progressive, democratic, peaceful and just. But there are crimes, turmoil, injustices and

discriminations. Female are sometimes dominated and become the way of humour. Government authorities abuse their power. Black young boys are killed without any serious mistake. Old parents are left alone by their children. This condition of South Africa parodies the so called democratic period of Fourteenth century period when blacks and whites were fully utilizing democratic exercises. It both supports and detracts the merits of democratic period. The democratic period was nothing other than exploitations injustices and inequalities. Coetzee playfully shows the horrible condition of Black boys. The situation of Negroes and of the time involves social and racial discrimination; there is often violence, abuse of authority, selfishness of white people, police brutality etc. The narrator describes their horrible situation :

The inside of the hall was mess of rubble and charred beams. Against the far wall, shielded from the worst of the rain, were five bodies neatly laid out. The body in the middle was that of Florence's Bheki. He still wore the grey Flannel trouser, white short and maroon pullover of his school, but his feet were bare. His eyes were open and starring, his mouth was open too. The rain had been beating on him, for hours, on him and his comrades, not only here but wherever they had been when they met their death: their clothes, their very hair, had a flattened dead look. In the corners of his eyes there were grains of sand. There was sand in his mouth. (94)

Coetzee in this paragraph presents the pitiful and helpless characters in an ironic ways. There is the miserable condition of Negroes who are killed in vain. The inside hall here is the very similar hall in the hell where many dead bodies are lying in Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. It has become one of the most useful way to present the Hell in the contemporary South Africa which's City Goguletu where Mrs. Curren suffer a lot because of the government authority who use their

powers against weak people whether they may be whites or blacks. Black characters like Bheki, Mrs. Florence's son and his friend John leave the school and come to Mrs. Curren's house because of the fear of killing in school. About the school the media don't concern. They simply suppose that students are freely studying in a good environment thus Curren parodically argues :

Of trouble in the schools, the radio says nothing, the television says nothing, and the newspapers say nothing. In the world they project all the children of the land are sitting happily at their desks learning about the square on the hypotenuse and the parrots of Amazonian jungle. What I know about events in Goguletu depends solely on what Florence tells me and on what I can learn by standing on the balcony and peering north. cast: namely that Goguletu is not burning today, or if it is burning is burning with a low flame. (36)

This passage above describes about the power politics of media. It presents the control of African Nationalist government in media very effectively. The school area is not safe for school boys and government is killing its own citizens without any fault. This idea is taken from Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* where dead people were misbehaved by the authority of hell. There was also the fear of getting punishment any time in any special reason. Like in school of South Africa people were not safe in hell. Everywhere there was the role of power politics in any moment.

In *Age of Iron* Coetzee uses postmodern parody to comment on the Apartheid era of South Africa. The blend of historical and fictional characters along with the experimental prose allows Coetzee to make a detached, but nonetheless powerful critique of African society and the possibility of true progress in an era of rapid and apparent advances. Coetzee's adaptation of Post

modern parody in *Age of Iron* radically disrupts the surface elements of history, chronology and believability, but it does so while clearly suggesting that there are definite, observable incidents of injustice. As Linda Hutcheon argues :

Postmodern parody is contesting revision of the past and both confronts and subverts the powers of representation of history. That is why parody is paradoxical conviction of the remoteness of the past and the need to deal it in the present. Many novels today similarly challenge the unacknowledged politics and evasions of aesthetic representation by using parody as a means to connect the present to the past without positing the transparency of representation, verbal or visual. (94)

The novel *Age of Iron* is one of the most effective examples for contesting revision of the past and both confirms and subverts the power of representation. In late Thirteenth Century Whites were at power and Blacks were struggling against them when Dante was in power but the struggle changed many things at that time. When Black's struggle became powerful the role of Dante became minor and he is sentenced to death. In late Twentieth century also the discrimination between Whites and Blacks was at the climax which led the African at the Apartheid era that led the Black people as a second class people. That is the subversion of power representation. Thus this novel *Age of Iron* is a paradoxical conviction of the remoteness of the past Fourteenth century that need to deal it in present South African society. The novel *Age of Iron* challenges the acknowledged politics and evasions of aesthetic representation by using parody as a means to connect the present to the past without positing the transparency of representation.

Parody is known as a method of criticism by mocking and poking fun at the cultural icons heredity and so called centers it has been the way of those writers like Dante Alighieri who associates to the divine characters and situations in the ancient time. It also focuses the relationship between mother and daughter who has left her for a long time. It becomes problematic when protagonist's disease becomes an untreatable and her life is declared to be remaining for the short time. After knowing the fact that she is going to survive no longer Elizabeth Curren tries to forget her daughter and makes an attachment to the homeless man Vercueil for posting her letter to her daughter who is far away from her. In the same way it attempts to discover the inner motifs of the African the then government to discriminate the South African blacks and white middle class people.

Parody, as a literary term is a composition that ridicules another composition by imitating and exaggerating of its content, structure and style accomplishing in words that the caricature achieves in drawing. Drawing is description of character and exaggerates traits of appearance of personality for comic effect. According to Concise Dictionary of literary terms Parody is a mocking imitation of the style of a literary work of arts, ridiculing the stylistic habits of an author or school by exaggerated mimicry (185). Parody is related to burlesque, an incongruous imitation: it is a variety of high burlesque that deflates the original by applying the imitation to a lowly or comically inappropriate subject. Parody is related to burlesque in its application of serious styles to ridiculous subjects, to satire in its punishment of eccentricities, and even to criticism in its analysis of style.

African writer J.M. Coetzee parodies the style of characters, situations and events of Italian writer Dante Alighieiri. Coetzee imitates and exaggerates its content, structure and style. In Dante Alighieri's poetry *The Divine Comedy* the journey of Dante, Virgil and others is the

very imitation of journey of Elizabeth Curren, Vercueil and others to Goguletu. As Dante describes in his poetry inferno

I am the way into the city of woe.

I am the way to a forsaken people.

I am the way into eternal sorrow.

Sacred Justice moved my architect

I was raised here by divine omnipotence,

Primordial love and ultimate intellect.....

Abandon all hope ye who enter here (Inferno III: 1-9)

This passage prepares the reader for Dante's departure to the city. It is not just a city that Dante will go to, it is city of woe. Like Florence, the city of woe in *The Divine Comedy* there is the city of Goguletu which is the source of horrendous poverty and where there is a fear every time for black schoolboys. They are killed without any cause. Coetzee's City of Woe is one of the many townships that were sites of horrendous poverty and vigorous unrest in this period. Dante's sigh also claims however, that sacred justice motivated the "architect" of the city of woe, and here the ironies of Coetzee's rewriting begin to emerge, for the black townships appear to be the product of justice only if one is fully immersed in apartheid ideology. As J. M. Coetzee in *Age of Iron* describes Goguletu as the city of woe where there is full of sorrow and distress :

We were at the rear of crowd hundreds strong looking down upon a scene of devastation: shanties burnt and smouldering, shanties still burning, pouring forth black smoke. Jumbles of furniture, bedding household objects stood in the pouring rain. Gangs of men were at work trying to rescue the contents of the burning shacks, going from one to another, putting out the fires; or so I thought till with a shock it came to me that these were no rescuers but incendiaries, that the battle

I saw them waging was not with the flames but with the rain. It was from the people gathered on the rim of this amphitheatre in the dunes that the sighing came. Like mourners at a funeral they stood in the downpour, men, women and children, sodden, hardly bothering to protect themselves, watching the destruction. (87,88)

The above passage prepares the reader for Curren's allegorical departure to the city. It is not just any city that Curren will go to. It is the city of woe, the city of Dante's Inferno. Coetzee establishes Elizabeth Curren as a twentieth century Dante. In a framework of Fourteenth century allegory Coetzee sends his Dante -figure into the world of reality to encounter and challenge the evil works of the then African Nationalist Government of South Africa.

The novel *Age of Iron* mocks the Christian allegory like that of the suggestion of Dante which provides a key to construction and meaning of the novel. On her way back to her home from Goguletu, Mrs. Curren realizes that both her heart and mind are violent and doubts that might prevent her taking action. While going to Goguletu she had hope for finding the boys alive but when she returns home she is restless by seeing the condition of the black innocent boys who have nothing done wrong. She gets shock in her body. She thinks about Florence's son Bheki's open eyes. She thinks she has witnessed the worst thing in her life. As Mrs. Curren describes: "I was shaking: shivers ran up and down my body, my hands trembled. I thought of the boy's open eyes. I thought: What did he see as his last sight on earth? I thought: this is the worst thing I have witnessed in my life. And I thought: Now my eyes are open and I can never close them again."

(105) This quotation reveals about the awareness of white middle class woman, Mrs. Curren who gets trembling after seeing the dead body of the Bheki. She worries about the pathetic condition of Negro people in South Africa. She gets aware of the situation then her eyes get open and she can never close them again.

Parody, as a form of ironic representation is doubly coded in political terms: it both installs and subverts that which it parodies. Parody can be used as a self reflexive technique that reflects art as art. We can take parody as a way of investigating the history and historical truth: it becomes a way of ironically revisiting the past- of both art and history. Most often feminist artist used postmodern techniques of parody to deconstruct the history and historical powers of those cultural representations. So, it challenges the conventional and authoritative power practices. The structure of parody enables that past is to be admitted as inscribed and also subverted at the same time "it is the complicity of postmodern parody. It is inscribing as well as undermining of that which it parodies –that is central to its ability to be understood. *Age of Iron* is one of the way of investigating the history and historical truths of the ancient society of the world. It is a way of ironically revisiting the past of both art and history. Challenging the conventional and authoritative power practices it uses Mrs. Curren, a white woman of South Africa as a narrator who is marginalized in the history. It is used to question the past since in traditional literary writing a woman did not get to be a narrator. Being a white South African male writer Coetzee uses Elizabeth Curren as a narrator to blur the so called centre of the past. It both installs and subverts which it parodies. It has become the way of rewriting the past in the form of letter as well as autobiography. Coetzee structures Mrs. Curren's journey as a series of discoveries through which the layers of Crossroads politics are progressively revealed As we watch through Mrs. Curren's eyes, we see how the pressure of new experience exposes and undermines the assumptions she brings from her sheltered. Approaching the scene of devastation, for example, Mrs Curren registers a change in her perception of the sounds: "As we walked further the noise we had heard, which at first might have been taken for wind and rain began to break up into shouts, cries, calls, over a ground bass that I can only call a sigh: a deep sigh, repeated over and

over, as if the wide world itself were sighing." (94) What "at first" sounds like natural phenomena, "wind and rain" turns out upon closer examination to be caused by human actions and emotions. This passage alludes to one in which Dante, immediately after passing through the gate of Hell, hears the cries of the opportunists:

Voices hoarse and shrill
and sounds of blows, all intermingled, raised
tumult and pandemonium that still
whirls on the air forever dirty with it
as if a whirlwind sucked at sand. (Inferno III)

The common element is the comparison of the sounds of human suffering to wind, and for Dante it makes sense that the punishment of sin should appear "as if" it were something natural and inevitable, an expression of "Sacred Justice." Coetzee's revised version of Dante's simile, however, disjoins tenor and vehicle; the sounds are similar enough to be confused, but to confuse them is a mistake that is then corrected. From a distance, the sounds of black conflict and suffering are distinguishable from the natural sounds of the storm, as if in Mrs. Curren's initial perception black suffering were "natural" and not man-made. Proximity, however, allows her to distinguish the two types of sounds, as if a veil of naturalizing rhetoric were being drawn aside.

Coetzee parodies the vision of god as every Christian believes. According to the Christian belief god is the only one to protect in the difficult situation. But the god in the South Africa is absent while many people are in problem. While there is no god it is Coetzee who plays the role of god. In reality Coetzee is no god but being without the Divine person he saved Dante, he brings Dante's soul into the contemporary

society. Coetzee explains the importance of Dante's *Inferno* to Mrs. Curren's developing consciousness. As Mrs. Curren insists "Since life in this country is so much like life abroad a sinking ship, one of those old-time liners with a lugubrious, drunken captain and a surly crew and leaky lifeboats,"(20) In this quotation Mrs. Curren describes about the dangerous condition in the country which is like life abroad the sinking ship. It is about to sink the captain of the ship is drunk. Here sinking ship signifies South Africa and the captain signifies the government authority who are conducting the country but they are very corrupt. Everything may happen there in every time. This image is recalling Dante's declaration that Italy is a "Ship unpiloted in the storm's rage" (*Purgatorio* VI: 80)

Linda Hutcheon in *Politics of Postmodernism* argues:

What I mean by "parody" is here not the ridiculing imitation of the standard theories and definitions that are rooted in eighteenth-century theories of wit. The collective weight of parodic practice suggests a redefinition of parody as repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signaling of difference at the very heart of similarity. In historiographic metafiction, in film, in painting, in music, and in architecture, this parody paradoxically enacts both change and cultural continuity: the Greek prefix *Para* can mean both 'counter' or 'against' AND 'near' of 'beside'. Jameson argues that in postmodernism "parody finds itself without a vocation," replaced by pastiche, which he (bound by a definition of parody as ridiculing imitation)" sees as more neutral or blank parody. (185-186)

Here Hutcheon focuses on parody not as a ridiculing imitation of the standard theories and definitions rooted in eighteenth-century theory of wit. But in modern

times parody can be used as a repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signaling of difference at the very heart of similarity. In the various art forms it is related to both change and cultural continuity. It is the replaced form of pastiche because pastiche cannot bring the synthesis only parody can bring the synthesis. *Age of Iron* is not only the way of ridiculing or imitating the standard definitions or theories rooted in eighteenth century wit. It is the repetition of the past history with critical distance. It is history of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise that is represented in the form of novel *Age of Iron*. It is ironic signaling of difference at the very heart of similarity. In the historiographic metafiction this novel *Age of Iron* as a parody paradoxically enacts both the change and cultural continuity of *The Divine Comedy*. Coetzee's attitude towards the African Nationalist Government keeps changing. It is possible to suppose that Coetzee's ultimate purpose is to define his positive meanings in terms of opposites that that Coetzee wishes to present Elizabeth Curren confessing for which Elizabeth Curren is responsible. South Africa is changed form of Hell and in the same manner the ways sinners get abused is the cultural continuity of history from critical distance that allows ironic signaling of difference .

Postmodern parody according to Hutcheon is a kind of contesting revision or rereading of the past that both confirms and subverts the power of representation of history. Parody in the past of art is not nostalgic; it is always critical and ironic.

Parody, as she defines, is paradoxically making us aware of both the limits and the power of representation in any medium. *Age of Iron*, being a postmodern parody is rereading of *The Divine Comedy*, the past work of Fourteenth Century. It sometimes follows the power of representation of history and sometimes don't follow it or subvert it. It questions the historical past. This novel is written to criticize the power of representation in an ironic ways. This novel is making us aware of power

of representation.

Coetzee revisits Dante in his novel in his style of presenting Vercueil who is supposed to be the angel of god. Dante, in his *Inferno* praises Virgil. Dante, in 1300, was already a poet of considerable reputation for his love-lyrics and philosophic odes, though he had not yet composed any narrative verse directly modeled upon the Aeneid. When he says that he owes to Virgil the "bello stilo which has won him honour", he can scarcely be referring to the style of his own prose works whether in Latin or Italian, still less to that of the as yet imitate, in his poems written in the vernacular, the elegance, concise power, and melodious rhythms of the Virgilian line. In *Inferno* Dante asserts :

Oh honour and light of poets all and each,
Now let my great love stead me- the bent brow
And long hours pondering allthy book can teach!
Thou art, my master and my author thou,
From thee alone I learned the signing strain,
The noble style, that does me honour now.
See there the beast that turned me back again –
Save me from her great sage-I fear her so,
She shakes my blood through every pulse and vein. (Hell 73)

In the above lines of poem Dante after visiting Virgil and recognizing him owes to Virgil. He seems very happy after seeing him expecting that Virgil can save him from the great sage. In the same way Coetzee revisits Dante and Virgil through the characters: Elizabeth Curren and Vercueil. Elizabeth Curren evaluates Vercueil's role as the most influenced part of the life. She gets new life after she is saved by Vercueil. Coetzee presents Vercueil's role and asserts :

I was on my way out to the shops, in the act of opening the garage

door, when I had sudden attack. An attack it was just that the pain hurling itself upon me like a dog, sinking its teeth into my back. I cried out unable to stir. Then he this man appeared from somewhere and helped me into the house. (9)

In the above passage the role of Vercueil is revealed through his helping to Mrs. Curren in her difficult condition. Similar kind of incident have happened in the hell where Dante praises for Virgilian style of Poetry. Parody is repetition with critical distance which marks difference rather than similarity.

Linda Hutcheon in *A Theory of Parody* argues:

While the act and form of parody are those of incorporation, its function is one of the separation and contrast. Unlike imitation, quotation or even allusion parody requires that critical ironic distance. It is true that, if the decoder does not notice, or can't identify, an intended allusion or quotation he or she will merely naturalize it, adopting the more extended form of parody which we have been considering such naturalization would eliminate a significant part of both the form and content of the text. The structural identity of the text as a parody depends then the coincidence, at the level of strategy, of decoding and encoding. (34)

In the above passage Hutcheon focuses upon the act of parody as incorporation and function as separation and contrast. It is different from imitation quotation and allusion in the sense that it requires critical distance. If the reader doesn't notice that it is quotation or allusion he merely naturalizes it. *Age of Iron* is as a parody is the form of incorporation of history but at the same time it functions as separation and contrast of the historical events. Parody requires critical distance as *Age of Iron* and

The Divine Comedy are from the critical distance. *The Divine Comedy* deals with the events of fourteenth century and *Age of Iron* deals with the event of twentieth century. If we don't notice the intended illusion we merely naturalize it and we conclude it in different way.

Age of Iron uses postmodern parody, to comment on the discrimination between blacks and whites. The blend of historical and fictional characters along with the experimental prose allows Coetzee to make a detached but nonetheless powerful critique of African society and possibility of abolition of Apartheid system. Coetzee's adaptation of postmodern parody in *Age of Iron* radically disrupts the surface element of history, chronology and believability, but it do so while clearly suggesting that there are definite observable incidents of injustice. One of the Coetzee's *Age of Iron*'s most compelling figures, Elizabeth Curren wants to save the Bheki's friend John from the police in her house, but she gets failure, they ultimately abuse of power to kill the boy. He is destroyed by the African racism. Coetzee debunks the falsity of the belief that many upper class citizens have the correct sense of morality. Curren is surprised to discover Vercueil's certainty in his moral action and belief because Vercueil is homeless, identity-less, poor and uneducated black man. Coetzee severely ionizes the democracy of the contemporary era. Bheki and John, the black revolutionary, advocate equality and freedom. But they have been often stopped from speaking and putting their thought in front of the public. They have been killed for advocating freedom. They are killed by police authority for their involvement in the strike for the black's right and liberty. However they in fact have done nothing wrong because strike is the basic right of people in democratic country. Coetzee uses the police action to parody the tendency of authorities to unfairly accuse leaders. Ironically Curren epitomizes the white's authority in South

Africa. She further says :

I, a white. When I think of the whites what do I see? I see a herd of sheep (not a flock, a herd) milling around on a dusty plain under backing sun. I hear a drumming of novels, a confusion of sound which resolves itself, when the ear grows attuned into the same bleating call in a thousand different inflections: 'I!' 'I!' 'I!'. And crusing among them bumping them aside with their bristling flanks, lumbering, saw toothed red-eyed, the savage, unreconstructed old boars grunting 'Death! Death! Thought it does me no good, I flinch from the white touch as much he does; would even flinch from the old white woman who parts his hand if she were not I. (73)

In this passage Mrs. Curren feels guilty being a white woman in South Africa. She compares the white with herd of sheep milling around on a dusty plain under backing sun. South African white in the eyes of Mrs. Curren are like the sheep who flatter in the non-sense tradition. She compares South Africa with dusty plain under backing sun where there is always the confusion of sound which resolves itself.

Coetzee parodies the notion of social equality in the African Apartheid era. There has been a large gap between race and class i.e. in the novel the status of the narrator, Mrs. Curren as a white and the status of Curren's housemaid Florence. Curren has her own house, her own car but Florence has worked in Curren's house as housemaid. Curren's daughter has been living to America for ten years. She has two children of her own. Her economic status is really high. In the same manner Florence's status is very low. Their children have suffering a lot in the school because of the economic and racial status.

Age of Iron fictionalizes the history. It is the historical novel which echoes the

past texts and contexts. It is, in fact, a highly playful parodic book of Twentieth century which echoes the history of late Thirteenth and early Fourteenth century.

As a postmodern novel, it presents another representation. This novel is short, sometimes humorous and highly accessible prose that might be called "mock historical" writing which mimics the prose of history texts. Consider for example the following passage

'I am far away, certainly', I said, 'far away and tiny. Nevertheless, I fear I know comradeship all too well. The Germans had comradeship, and the Japanese, and the comradeship is nothing but mystique of death, of killing and dying, masquerading as what you call a bond (a bond of what? Love? I doubt it.) I have no sympathy with this comradeship. You are wrong, you and Florence and everyone else, to be taken in by it and worse, to encourage it in children. It is just another of those icy, exclusive, death driven male constructions. That is my opinion. (137)

The passage above shows clearly the history of some countries. German comradeship, Japanese Comradeship and Spartan Comradeship. But it is always mysterious and causes death. It is only pretention of bond to love. Every comradeship in history is causing tragedy.

Age of Iron is the spirit of Dante's *The Divine Comedy* in its valuing of direct experience and its laments over the problem of factualism and civil war. The purpose to write this novel is to parody upon the factualism and civil war. It is always against the factionalism and civil war that which causes the destruction of people in the minor problems. Coetzee's parody of Dante is ambivalent in the sense outlined by Linda Hutcheon since it is characterized by both repetition and

difference. This novel presents the relationship between individual and families and larger society and society's blindness to racial problem. Moreover, while the novel begins with the vision of white middle class Africa it quickly revises itself to status that there apparently were negroes and other many people from different classes. In a sense *Age of Iron* is a revisionist historical novel including the stories of women, blacks, middle class people and homeless people who excluded from the standard histories until very recently. Coetzee employs irony to express his disapproval of South African condition. It is enough to know the condition of blacks in the Apartheid era even though they strike against whites they will be arrested and killed by African policeman. Coetzee is successful in transferring himself into the person of anti-apartheid view by presenting Elizabeth Curren's realization that : "My eyes are open now and I can never close them again".(105) Elizabeth Curren a retired professor of classic, who educated thousands of people is only educated now. She realizes that the education she provided was only the blank education which couldn't bring any change. Only it helped to the status quo. Elizabeth Curren only knowing the reality of South Africa transfer herself from the status quo to the revolutionary character and situates herself to the ground level of reality in South Africa. This transferring through confession sometimes may be the way to get salvation which is the Christian dogma. Curren's self-made status is represented in a number of ways through her self- assured manner, and calm assessment of situation . Curren, being previously loyal to the Nationalist Government of South Africa becomes very critical and against the government after seeing the treacherous activities of police authority to the black and other common people. *Age of Iron* indeed represents racism in various guises: from the hatred of Curren's neighbor to Vercueil to the police brutality to the black boys. Curren responds the racism protecting the rebels

who strike against government that causes not only the violent but also the changes in the human psyche. Coetzee presents the warning for the government authorities through the novel that if races are not treated equally and fairly eventually there will be violence that will cause the destruction of white authorities. This novel prompts us to consider the relationship between fictional story and reality of racism in South Africa that make it plausible. The failures of African injustices are suggested by Mrs. Curren's story.

Coetzee is compared as Twentieth Century Jesus who goes to the city of Dante's inferno. Coetzee uses main character Mrs. Curren who is guided by Christian idealism. So all the time her ultimate goal is to avoid sin from her life. After she knows the government brutality upon citizens her attitude towards the government keeps changing. Whatever she was expecting in her life that was not be found in any means. It is possible to suppose that Coetzee's ultimate purpose is to define his positive meanings in terms of opposites (blacks since she is white) that Coetzee wishes to present Mrs. Curren as changing herself to have positive attitudes towards blacks and negative towards the government authorities who are initially whites.

Mrs. Curren, parodying the Christian allegory travels through the personal different stages of life bearing the physical and mental tortures that may be the good way of gaining personal salvation of life like Dante travelling through different stages after life like Hell, Purgatory and Paradise. While travelling through different stages both Dante and Curren not only get the salvation but also find the new adventures experience in the life and after life. Both are educated by journeying different stages. Both transfer themselves as Christian sinners transfer themselves as good persons getting different penalties in hell and crossing the hard way of

purgatory that pave the way of heaven. For Dante, everything depends on whether one dies in a state of sin or repents sincerely before death. Those who repent, guarantee themselves a place in purgatory, and eventually in heaven, though they may undergo additional punishment for making God wait. (Purgatory, Canto III)

Thus, in the novel Coetzee ambiguously handles the elements of Christian allegory. Mrs. Curren changes herself and protests against the Apartheid system of Africa. Vercueil co-operates her in every difficulties and hardships. Black boys like Bheki and John are killed by the police authorities only because the strike against the African Nationalist Government. One most notable element of the novel is confession, which Mrs. Curren exercises from the very beginning to the end of her life. Confession, is the parody upon Christian allegory which Dante has used in his *The Divine Comedy*. All the situations, characters and events in Coetzee's *Age of Iron* seems merely imitative and exaggerative form of Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* where suffering leads the people to the salvation. Every sins is the cause of suffering. Suffering is only way for clearing out the sin. Vercueil in *Age of Iron* seems to the angel of god to serve Mrs.Curren in her last years who is very imitative character of Virgil in *The Divine Comedy*. Goguletu, a city of South Africa is very parody of Florence city in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Curren's journey to Goguletu is very imitative to Dante's journey through hell where Dante discovers every reality of afterlife. City of woe is similar to city of Goguletu. Police authorities are very imitative authorities of Hell who punish the sinner according to their fault. Therefore as a whole South Africa is a Hell where the people have treated very badly.

In sum this novel is written to parody the injustice, inequality, racism and Apartheid system of South Africa. A question arises-Why does Coetzee parody

Dante? Coetzee parodies Dante to protest against the Apartheid system of South Africa similarly he wants to evaluate African Nationalist Government's brutality and treacherous behaviors against the Negroes of South Africa. Needless to say Coetzee parodies Dante to revisit the fourteenth Century world and find out the strengths and weaknesses of the period. By showing this Coetzee makes himself as an anti-apartheid activist of South Africa. Coetzee rewrites Dante's history in fiction form the critical distance exaggerating and ridiculing the events, situations and characters. By parodying Dante, Coetzee wants to challenge the traditional notion of intertextuality and authenticity of the text.

III. A Critique of Authenticity in *Age of Iron*

In his novel, *Age of Iron* J.M. Coetzee rewrites Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* in order to parody Apartheid system of South Africa, which projects racial discrimination injustice and excessive (mis)use of power. All the characters events and situations of *Age of Iron* are very similar and familiar to the persons who have already read Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, especially Vercueil in *Age of Iron* is very similar to Virgil in *The Divine Comedy*. Coetzee's focus of the text is on the people who cannot find peace, progress, equality and justice in the society and who are dominated and discriminated in terms of race and class. As a postmodern novel

Age of Iron foregrounds the tensions between what is known about history and what is narrated in the text. So *Age of Iron* problematizes history and historical truth through parody. *Age of Iron* both installs and contests our traditional guarantees of knowledge by revealing the gaps or circularities (Hutcheon). *Age of Iron* is highly parodic book because Coetzee first inscribes the Dantean period by the setting of the novel. Then he exposes the hopeless social condition and parodies the notion of peace progress, equality, justice and liberty that are inherently associated to the democratic countries of the world.

Coetzee playfully parodies the era of peace, progress, equality, justice and liberty by portraying domination, discrimination and exploitation. Coetzee uses the interconnectedness of characters, situations and events with the characters, situations and events of Dante's *The Divine Comedy* in order to convey the political and social atmosphere in the turn of late Twentieth century South Africa. He presents characters, situations and events as merely imitative and exaggerative in order to present history in the literature. Characters' role and nature of event are revision of Dante's Characters and events. Mrs. Curren's terminal illness of bone cancer is the very revision of Dante's absence of corruption and exile from his country. Dante's journey to Hell is rewritten by Coetzee presenting Mrs. Curren's journey to Goguletu where young negroes are killed only for the cause that they protest against government. Mrs. Curren's suffering and confession is the only way to get salvation which is Christian belief is the revision of Dante's suffering in his country. However, the use of Christian allegory is the most notable fact of the novel. The narrator intervenes actual historical persons with fictional characters events and situations.

This novel presents the pathetic conditions of the Negroes in order to parody injustice of democratic period of late Twentieth century. The excessive (mis)use of power by the government authorities is presented in order to mock or comment upon power politics of the African Nationalist Government. It is very similar to the brutality of authorities of Hell to the common people who are recently dead.

This novel is written in order to flash out how it is difficult to remain in African society in the Apartheid period. Living in African Society in Apartheid period is very similar to living in Hell where there is always danger in every action and time People have lost their humanity. There is no god to provide the humanity. The problem of injustice and discrimination is at the highest point. Educated people are humiliated. Education does not provide real picture of society. Education only addresses about rich and white people only. Educated people do not know the real suffocation of people living in the country until they experience the suffocation directly. South Africa has become the city of woe where Negro and poor are always suffering. Of the trouble in school, the media do not concern. The newspaper say nothing, The Television says nothing, The Radio says nothing. They only suppose that children are studying in the school without any fear and problem. In reality there is always fear terror and problem in every moment.

Coetzee uses the postmodern parody in his novel *Age of Iron* in order to parody the postmodern democratic period of late Twentieth century which is supposed to be full of peace and justice. South Africa is supposed to be the heaven of the world but the atmosphere of South Africa is like hell. This difference from imagination to the reality is what he parodies. In this way Coetzee finds out the similarities from the critical distance. *Age of Iron* is highly effective piece of parodic text. While it may appear to be all well in surface, it actually critiques the very

surface it represents. The novel gives a powerful, yet distanced representation of injustice and peace in Africa. This research undermines the total authenticity of a single text. It believes that single history and text are not authentic. So parody is used in order to question history and authenticity of the single text.

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