



Research Paper

Tyranny To Truth In Waiting For The Barbarians By Coetzee

P.KANIMOZHI, DR.E.SUGANTHA EZHIL MARY

¹(Research Scholar, Department of English, Vels University VISTAS, Pallavaram, Chennai)

²(Associate Professor, Department of English, Vels University VISTAS, Pallavaram, Chennai)

Corresponding Author: P.KANIMOZHI

ABSTRACT: *Waiting for the Barbarians* has been perceived as a deliberate observation by several analysts. This interpretation is frequently based on the absence of clear time and location implications in the original, as well as the distinctiveness of J. M. Coetzee's authentic situatedness as a white South African under politically sanctioned racial segregation. Although this critique does not deny the value and relevance of metaphorical readings of Coetzee's novel, it focuses on Coetzee's ethical task from a different perspective. The savage's tyranny of their character is demonstrated in this analysis. It entails a close examination of textbased elements that depict the ethical journey of the individual protagonist (the Magistrate), from the uninvolved execution of his duty to a perplexing feeling of affection for the scoundrels to the development of an ethical consciousness of unfairness and the perplexing ways in which one participates in it.

KEYWORDS: Trust, Fear, Tyranny, Brutality, Torture, Violence, and Betrayal.

Received 10 Apr, 2022; Revised 25 Apr, 2022; Accepted 27 Apr, 2022 © The author(s) 2022.

Published with open access at www.questjournals.org

I. INTRODUCTION

J.M. Coetzee was born in Cape Town in 1940, and his novel is dissent against dominance. Coetzee criticizes his novel's fictitious nameless Empire, thus establishing a colonialist framework in the process.

"A few of Coetzee's books are noted for their expressive dissent against political and social circumstances in South Africa, especially the experiencing brought about by dominion, politically sanctioned racial segregation, and post politically sanctioned racial segregation brutality, as well concerning their specialized virtuosity," (The New York Times, 2022)

while a few of Coetzee's books are noted for their expressive dissent against political and social oriented. *Waiting for the Barbarians* is a novel about "the influence of the torture chamber on the life of a man of conscience," according to Coetzee [1]. The main protagonist of the tale is an aged Magistrate who lives in a border town that is cut off from the rest of the Empire, in other words, an unidentified Empire. He is accountable for keeping the station in the Empire's administration, yet when the Empire sent a power to shield the settlement from the savages, he loses his power.

The protagonist challenges the Empire's inequitable treatment of the so-called "barbarians," despite the Empire's perception of them as a hostile group planning to attack the outpost and fight the Empire. He is accused of treason and imprisoned alongside the barbarians after he returns a captive barbarian woman and sympathizes with and cares for her people. Cruelty, humiliation, and pain become his lot in life. The book's criticisms will be examined by understanding the characters as victims of the Empire.

The barbarian girl will be the first victim, and her "otherness" as an alien and an adversary of the Empire will be studied. The second victim, the Magistrate, will have his self-journey reviewed concerning his appraisal to become the other [2]. The portion about women's silence and powerlessness in society is called *Woman as the Third Victim of the Empire*. The fear of the innocents, barbarian tyranny, and the powerful truth will be highlighted in the following part.

FEAR OF THE INNOCENTS

The Empire is an abstract figurehead for imperial authority in general in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. It is never expressly identified, and thus never associated with any real-world nation, though we can conclude that the Empire is related in some respects to Coetzee's homeland, South Africa. As a result, nomadic peoples (sometimes known as "barbarians") represent victims of colonialism and apartheid, particularly the black population in apartheid-era South Africa. The inhabitants of the Empire's frontier settlement (over which the magistrate presides) have an irrational fear and hatred of the barbarians who live in the desert around them, a fear-based on superstition, ignorance, and military dogma rather than any knowledge of or direct experience with the nomads themselves [3]. The story depicts how the Empire's army's soldiers and higherups (such as Colonel Joll) blindly follow their military commands because they are convinced that the barbarians, as a monolithic group, are inherently terrible, debased people who oppose the Empire. The barbarians have become so reviled in the eyes of the troops that they appear to deserve to be tortured and executed on their own. The magistrate's settlement's citizens share the troops' loathing of the barbarians: while they will occasionally trade with peaceful nomads, they see them as sluggish, foolish, and dirty drunkards who, in comparison to the Empire's "civility," occupy a subhuman level of existence.

"I journeyed back into the past once more, striving to conjure up a mental image of her as she used to be. I admit that I saw her the day she was rounded up by troops with the other severe captives. When I'm among others, I'm aware that my vision has gone over her (...). My stare went unnoticed by her, but I have no recollection of what happened after that. She was still plain on that day, but I'd like to believe it was because she was once a child (...). Despite my efforts, my unique vision of the stooping poor person young lady waits." (Coetzee, 26)

As a result, the Empire 'others' the barbarians. The Empire identifies barbarians with a slew of dehumanizing characteristics, causing them and their culture to be viewed as essentially strange, exotic, and incomprehensibly different [4]. The barbarians are portrayed as an Other or a force that shares no common humanity or identity with the Empire's subjects, and they are viewed as a scourge that must be removed from the Empire's expansion and existence.

When South Africa's apartheid, black people were forcibly relocated from the country's main, white-dominated territory to outlying provinces. As a result, Coetzee's portrayal of barbarians as perpetual strangers to the Empire might be viewed as an ironic criticism of the South African government's treatment of the black population it expelled treating them as though they never belonged. The true "Empire," Dutch (and British) domination, installed white settlers in Africa [5], and South Africa's ultimate apartheid enforcing government usurped people of color, those with indigenous African roots from their ancestral region to specifically black outer territories.

As a result, the novel attempts to depict how the relationship between the Empire's foreign imperial power (the Empire) and the indigenous community (the barbarians) plays out from the perspective of someone within the Empire's world the magistrate, whose perspective is unique in that he opposes his nation's military policies and sympathizes with the nomads.

Because the Empire's inhabitants have such ingrained, inbred hate of the barbarians, the magistrate's sensibility and reason are no match for the Empire's drive for imperial conquest the impulse to capture the barbarians' territory and eliminate or enslave them [6]. As a result, the story depicts how fear of the Other may flourish in the minds of a nation's population, fueling their government's entire military conquest while blinding them to the atrocities involved. People in the Empire believe they have a right to the violence they perpetrate and the territory they try to claim as a result of it (even if that area is just the "protection" of the Empire's current borders).

The novel explores a situation similar to the actual historical case of apartheid, in which white enforcers felt superior to the black populace and thus entitled to politically and economically regulate, dominate, and ultimately deteriorate the growth and welfare of the territories to which black citizens were expelled, by examining the dynamic between barbarians and the Empire.

BARBARIAN TYRANNY

Colonel Joll's actions of torture are emblematic of the supposedly "civilized" Empire's inhumanity and incivility. In this way, the torture that takes place at the magistrate's settlement exposes the Empire's claim to politeness and advanced culture in comparison to the "barbarians." Coetzee's novel appears to be heavily invested in illustrating the hypocrisy that, beneath the ostensibly clean and moral facade of civilization [7], an obscenely brutal and violent set of activities may exist that profoundly contradict the mere image of civilized culture.

Torture is utilized in the novel to acquire whatever information Colonel Joll desires from the tortured people. Joll believes that his interrogation approach usually involves torture and that he constantly pushes his

prisoners to the point of breaking, where the truth is supposed to emerge. The drive to achieve these goals demonstrates not only Joll's inhumanity, but also how the victim of such torture is considered a subhuman (or inhuman) object to whom no amount of anguish is too excessive, or too immoral from the start.

In a terrible and apparent way, the piece depicts the cruelty and inhumanity of torture. Joll's uncompromising ease and apparent satisfaction in performing his torture sessions astound the magistrate, who wonders if there's a buried reservoir of pain and anguish in his psyche [8]. The magistrate is bewildered as to how he and Mandel (who tortures the magistrate after Joll leaves on his campaign) can commit horrible acts of torture on the same day and yet return to "eat bread with other men." The magistrate wonders if they have a cleaning or purifying ritual that they perform to cleanse the taint of their violent crimes from their consciences, allowing them to resume normal human activities without guilt pangs. It would indicate that Joll and Mandel were genuinely nasty, unrepentant animals if they did not feel the need to perform such a rite.

"I want to scream something, a terrifying screech, but the rope is now so tight that I'm strangled and mute." (...) I'm letting my hair down and swinging freely. As it lifts my smock, the breeze dances with my naked body. I'm relaxed and floaty. I'm dressed as a woman." (Coetzee, 120)

Even though Joll utilizes torture to obtain information from and about the barbarians, it proves useless in the end. Joll creates his theories about what his victims know and can divulge. As a result, even if they are innocent, Joll's victims suffer because they lack the information Joll imagines. In the novel, Coetzee never describes any of the acts of torture as "successful" or as yielding crucial knowledge about the barbarians' activities. Indeed, the barbarian boy, whom Joll tortures with countless superficial stab wounds and who later serves as a guide for Joll's company as they search for the barbarians, is branded an unreliable guide by the magistrate because he will only provide any information, even if false, to avoid further torture.

The novel thus exposes the arbitrary character of tortured interrogations by emphasizing how the imagined information sought by Joll and crew, if not originally extracted, pushes the tortured victim to the point of desperate concession to anything the torturer desires [9]. Waiting for the Barbarians stages an eye-opening confrontation with the horrors of torture, radically criticizing it from both a moral and a "practical" standpoint.

POWERFUL TRUTH

In the novel, two of the magistrate's top concerns are to write the genuine history of his settlement and to have his personal history or recorded reputation, published accurately. He wants his actions as a defender of the barbarians against Colonel Joll's corruption to be remembered, not erased by a narrative that casts the magistrate as evil because he was participating in the corruption. Because the magistrate's reputation depends on which of these "truths" is communicated, his concept of truth is at odds with Joll and the company's in protecting his reputation. In this way, the story demonstrates how reliant "truth" is on people who have the authority to tell it.

While, in terms of the reality, the magistrate appears to be a real force for good in the Empire's history as compared to Joll, the magistrate's reputation is jeopardized by being deprived of formal power. What may become the "real" history of the settlement could be written with a sympathetic eye toward people like Joll and others who were complicit in the Empire's corruption during the magistrate's lifetime [10]. Eventually, during his captivity, the magistrate sees martyrdom as the only option to overcome the power that surrounds him; if he is willing to die for his convictions, he will be remembered as virtuous and eventually the genuine upholder of the good.

Joll's theory on interrogation is informed by the novel's concept of truth. Joll claims to be able to detect the "tone of truth" in his victims, and he believes that the truth is extracted when a victim reaches a breaking point due to unbearable anguish, and they have no choice but to reveal whatever secrets they may be hiding. However, this perception of "truth" is incorrect [11]. Joll assumes that such "truth" is always present in his victims and that they may be hiding some secret information about any invasion plans devised by barbarian leaders.

He reveals that he is more concerned with whether a victim's admissions match his notions about the truth than with discovering the true truth, which would include keeping his preconceptions open and not closing his hypotheses to contradictory data. Joll's belief in truth is what drives him to harm his victims. He feels entitled to mutilate his victims in the search of a reality that exists purely in his head, even though he lacks any empirical evidence for it. Joll's idea of truth provides him with a sense of authority, which he uses to justify his brutality.

"For Joll's point, as well as the Empire's contribution, to be supported, the savages should show up. Savages masked as Empire's state army have previously shown up for the Magistrate: he has been trusting that Empire's boorishness will show itself so he can start the most common way of isolating himself from what it would consider power and equity." (Coetzee, 74)

Joll's sense of entitlement to a "truth" among his victims, and his belief in his ability to perceive it in its purest form despite his own biases, gradually becomes a preoccupation of the magistrate's way of thinking. In attempting to reconcile his desire to unearth the secret history of the barbarian girl to reclaim a sense of existence that seemed to have been lost when she was subjected to Joll's questioning tactics, the magistrate becomes infected by Joll's ideology of truth [12]. In an attempt to look beyond the surface of the girl, the magistrate feels as if he's begun to read the items and people in his environment as if they were "tea leaves," as if they carried some hidden prophetic truth to which he was entitled. The magistrate demonstrates Joll's conviction in having pure access to absolute truth by beginning to regard things as having a hidden depth underneath their surface.

Unlike Joll, who seems concerned with twisting his victims' brains to his will so that he may only access a truth that he predicts and has postulated, the magistrate's fascination with old ruins and treasures demonstrates that he has a strong desire to learn about something other than himself [13]. Unlike the army men around him, who have a fundamental hatred for people they don't know (the barbarians), the magistrate is interested in learning about the history of something new. This isn't to suggest that such desires are always good; in fact, it was precisely this desire that tainted the magistrate's relationship with the barbarian girl, who turned out to be far less exotic and unusual than the magistrate had imagined.

The magistrate's appraisal of her as an Other motivates him to possess her in the same manner that Joll's sense of entitlement pushes him to possess her [14]. As a result, the story appears to confound traditional notions of "truth." It demonstrates that truth is mostly in the hands of the powerful, and that truth may be constructed by the powerful to excuse their crimes and horrible acts.

Furthermore, Coetzee demonstrates how the desire to discover the truth about other people is a violent process since the magistrate has already othered the barbarian girl in an alienating way, driving him to possess her. The magistrate maintains her status as an Other not to show empathy and respect for her differences, but to maintain the possibility that she is concealing a fundamentally stable, absolute truth that will explain his ambiguous attraction to her.

II. CONCLUSION

The themes addressed and tensions raised in *Waiting for the Barbarians* are not easily resolved. This paper attempted to focus on how South African innocents experienced fear, tyranny, and finally, the truth was revealed. The novel's subversive side is Coetzee's use of the torture chamber and his comprehensive explanations of violence, agony, and terror. The tortured body of the barbarian girl and the description of the Magistrate's allegiance state both reflect the consequences of fear and brutality, both psychically and cognitively. How the novel's narrator is tortured is how the reader witnesses the system's cruelty. At the end of the novel, Coetzee offers an ironic comment about imperialism by displaying the Empire's self-destruction. In this view, the paper might be concluded by mentioning Magistrate's statement to Colonel Joll at the end of the novel, which can be read as the novel's tagline. Similarly, except for Colonel Joll, none of the characters in the narrative have a name. Even the main character has no name. The Magistrate is his title. The lack of naming and describing the characters and the Empire allows the reader to more readily empathize with the story's culture and characters. Because of this ambiguity, the story appeals to a wide range of imaginations and is accessible to people from all walks of life.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Coetzee, J. M. (2004). *Waiting for the barbarians*. Vintage.
- [2]. Boletsi, M. (2007). Barbaric encounters: Rethinking barbarism in CP Cavafy's and JM Coetzee's *Waiting for the barbarians*. *Comparative Literature Studies*, 44(1/2), 6796.
- [3]. Coetzee, J. M. (2019). *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Text Publishing.
- [4]. Olsen, L. (1985). The Presence of Absence: Coetzee's "Waiting for the Barbarians". *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 16(2).
- [5]. ALSaidi, H., & Ahmed, A. (2014). Postcolonialism Literature the Concept of self and the other in Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*: An Analytical Approach. *Journal of Language Teaching & Research*, 5(1).
- [6]. Akongo, L. M. M. (2021). Coetzee's Writing Style in his *Waiting for the Barbarians*. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation*, 4(12), 5562.
- [7]. SCOTTO, A. (2021). The Empire and Resistance: un'analisi di *The Lying Days* di Nadine Gordimer e *Waiting for the Barbarians* di JM Coetzee.
- [8]. Sinha, N. (2021). "I see what I have been dreading": Witnessing Food and Violence in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *In the Heart of the Country*. *Digital Literature Review*, 8(1).
- [9]. REGAN, D. S. J. W. (2021) DEPICTION OF APARTHEID IN GORDIMER'S "MY SON'S STORY" AND COETZEE'S "WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS".
- [10]. Karaman, N. B., Kosma, M., Önal, P., Pangmeshi, A., Popy, S. A., & Tareq, N. H. *Overtone's Ege Journal of English Studies* Vol. 1 (2022).
- [11]. Emmett, C. (2022). Complicity and Responsibility in Contemporary African Writing. *Postcolonial Text*, 17(1).
- [12]. Dibavar, S. S., Abbasi, P., & Pirajmuddin, H. (2020). The Metaphorical Stage of JM Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*. *Research in African Literatures*, 50(4), 87107.

- [13]. Yadav, V. Existential and Identity Crisis in the Novel Waiting for the Barbarians by JM Coetzee. *Teaching and Learning Language and Literature in the Digital Era: Opportunities and Challenges*.
- [14]. The New York Times. (n.d.). *A STARK POLITICAL FABLE OF SOUTH AFRICA*. The New York Times. Retrieved April 20, 2022, from https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/97/11/02/home/coetzeebarbarians.html?_r=1&oref=slogin