



A Teleological Argument: J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*

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Abstract

This paper argues the lack of historical specificity, to the remoteness, precisely, of *Waiting for the Barbarians*. J.M. Coetzee handles a traditional allegorical approach in his one of the novels, *Waiting for the Barbarians* in which the imperial teleology used by author. The Magistrate struggles with an imperialism's fierce, having the evidence of isolation from the capital, aimed at achieving such consonance. Instead of the historical data, it tested for their truth-value. It functions as a "concord fiction." The novel acts the sense of consonance between past, present, and future. The novel took two-way process: in history, both a distancing into an unspecified empire at an unspecified moment. A homecoming into the violence of apartheid in the period from the time of P.W. Botha got an authority in the Ministry of Defence of its climatic self-destruction. It was concerned as a paranoia in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. It symbolically displays involving a tortured body, cultural difference in other terms, an atrocity which is how to represent the cruelty and how to establish one's own authority.

Key words: Imperial teleology; *Waiting for the Barbarians*; Concord fiction; Paranoia; history; The Magistrate; Culture.

Introduction:

The Nobel Laureate John Maxwell Coetzee is a South African novelist, essayist, linguist, critic, and translator. His writings discourse from the South African literary traditions. His novels *Disgrace*, and *In the Heart of the Country* were filmed that film rights to many of J.M. Coetzee's works have been sold. He named best all-time author; (posthumously awarded); numerous awards for work with blood drives. Behind the narrative subject of the novel, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, behind the Magistrate, lies an implied narrator who acts against the play of forces in South African culture. In 1980, this novel was published in which he interpreters the culture of South African country and shaping of the emotion between history and text. He introduced the characters an unnamed Magistrate, unnamed Empire, having their comfortable, and lethargic existence suddenly disturbed by the character, Colonel Joll. The character of Magistrate is addressed in general terms, his inability to achieve an image of continuity from the archaeology in Foucault's introduction to *The Archeology of Knowledge*, in his efforts to produce a historical discourse. It is a pivotal work in the development of Coetzee's writing carrier. Therefore, *Waiting for*

the Barbarians is a kind of “interregnum” novel. In the year of 1980’s, it shares with Nadine Gordimer’s famous work, *July’s People*. Coetzee presents his critique in terms of the basic elements of narrative technique. The semiotic thrust of *Waiting for the Barbarians* is explained through the displacement of milieu and both narrative and thematic.

Material and Methods

Coetzee’s third novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* begins with the arrival of Colonel Joll from Third Bureau, which has announced war against the natives indigenous people to the land. They were called “barbarians”. The Magistrate administrates a town on the frontier of an unnamed Empire. The novel, *Waiting for the Barbarians*’ title was taken from one of the C.P. Cavafy’s poems, display its hierarchies, reconstitute its displacement, refurbish its as a complete semiotic and political system. Coetzee suspends the teleological system of the colonial state. He drops the “Empire” as a definite article, thus covering the universalizing forms of his representation underlying imperialist endeavors, on which is at issue, how Empire employs the barbarians. In this way, the novel continuously counterposes the Empire’s certainties, indeterminacy, and arbitrariness. The novel, by contrast, teleology becomes objectified as History to transform the terms of discourse. The barbarians feel, “ ‘None of us could speak their language, sir.’ Of course not! These river people are aboriginal, older even than the nomads” (19).

Symbolically, it can be opposed to the corrosive effects of apartheid; such experience is found within the practice of writing. Since the eighteenth century, Coetzee’s Empire represents a hypothesis of colonial thinking, but specific features are very close to the South Africa of his period when the novel was being written. His three linguistic essays produced shortly or at the time of after *Waiting for the Barbarians*, eighteenth-century prose notable Newton, Defoe, Swift, and Gibbon are used to make as extensive reference. Coetzee was interested in the passive constructions, which are the rhetorical effects of characteristic of eighteenth-century English prose. Equally, it is possible, eighteenth-century historiography put the essential distinction between barbarism and civilization used by Coetzee – for another context and in different purposes. The Historiography also called history of history. It gives an important for all historians, they are addressing the context as revealing as the actual events. The Historian of French Revolution, Francois Furet enlightened historiography, using classical sources, and classified “savage-barbarian-civilized”(145).

In the South African context, historiographical irony was suggestive, who are the real barbarians, anyway?. The Magistrate feels himself to rebel against public torture by saying that the future should be at least “one man who in his heart was not a barbarian” (104). Thus, he is himself antiquarian who spends much time to struggle with the idea of writing a history of settlement and he attempts to write a history of settlement:

‘No one who paid a visit to this oasis,’ I write, ‘failed to be struck by the charm of life here. We lived in the time of the seasons, of the harvests, of the migrations of the water birds. We lived with nothing between us and the stars. We would have made any concession, had

we only known what, to go on living here. This was paradise on earth.’ (154)

The semiotic displacement effected on the impaired teleology in the first three parts of the novel, *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Gibbon himself says “Furet preferred pre-Christian civilization in Rome to Christianized barbarism”(146). The forms of closure demanded by Colonel Joll and Empire are not only terroristic impositions and arbitrary; they are also destructive of coherent forms of life. In the second half of the novel several paths are vacant to the Magistrate in relation to narrative developments. While the Army under the command of the Third Bureau taking charge to undertake a new campaign, a prison is erected in the town, what Coetzee calls, with reference to Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, the “black flower of Civilization”(79). Indeed, the Magistrate has none of the options for lasting validity; in fact, it is more typical that events leave him feeling stupid and baffled.

The Magistrate does not provide a satisfying resolution, and therefore, he concludes the position with which the suspension in ignorance, of simply not suspension in ignorance, of simply not knowing what the future might deliver. The barbarians are treated very low category by Mandel and Colonel Joll, “The barbarians, who are pastoralists, nomads, tent-dwellers, make no reference in their legends to a permanent settlement near the lake” (16). Coetzee allows his narrative a symbolic gesture, indigenous toward the future. In the end of the novel, the Magistrate finds himself approaching a group of children playing in the yard of the barracks, building a snowman. He leaves the barracks without understanding, “like a man who lost his way long ago but presses on along a road that may lead nowhere”(155-56). Nevertheless, what the children produce is “not a bad snowman” (155).

Although many critics associate Coetzee’s work and name with the South African apartheid years of the 1970s and 1980s, his genius can be approached from using a stance in the different manner, and his novels have denied reductions readings. Hence, the novel, *Waiting for the Barbarians* presents readers with a challenge to history in deconstructing its own teleological premises, and makes us question a unitary valid reading. In this novel the Magistrate and Colonel Joll act as “interrogators” with relation to the barbarian girl.

The relationship between Colonel Joll and the Magistrate on the one hand and the barbarian girl on the other hand can be read as an interpretation and allegorical reading, which, in turn, draws attention to the novel’s artifice as a fictional work. Using the technique of teleology, Coetzee brings to the foreground the interplay of signification and establishes at once the relativity of truth. Although, the Magistrate feels himself as an archeologist, but failed attempts to analyze the world around him, in which from perspective, the failure commented on the failures of the apartheid regime in South Africa by Coetzee. The Magistrate, a self conscious narrator, fails to understand the secrets of the tortured body of the innocent barbarian girl. Although he finds the archaic script on the wooden slips, fails to decipher it. An account of the relevant criticism on the novel helps to understand how other criticizer have tackled the novel and fills a gap.

According to Richard Martin with Zamora refers the figure of the Magistrate employed as a first person narration by Coetzee and the use of the historic present to tell the story. Martin says:

The function of the present tense in this reading is to enable the speaker to come as close as possible to the events themselves, to distort them as little as possible, in a sort of dream analysis technique. The act of narrating is in this sense not an interpretation of events, but a mass of access to the events themselves in the hope that their significance will phenomenological reveal itself. (14)

The Magistrate attempts to deal with traumatic present and shattering experiences by his narrative technique. This narrative becomes a means of “working through” of the unfolding in a way to present in a Freudian sense by means of conflating the narrative time with narrated one. Other critic has hinted at deconstructive and post-structural aspects in Coetzee’s novel. The torturers are Colonel Joll and Mandel as a pivotal role. In the following lines express a crucial incident of the colonization in *Waiting for the Barbarians*:

The Colonel Joll steps forward . . . I read the words upside down: ENEMY . . . ENEMY . . . ENEMY . . . ENEMY. He steps back and folds his hands at distance of no more than twenty paces he and I contemplate each other. (115)

Sue Kossew in her book “*Pen and Power: A Post-colonial Reading of J.M. Coetzee and Andre Brink*” states that the novel depicts a postcolonial situation. It represents “the complexity of the moral issues involved in resistance and ambivalence and paradoxes involved in the colonizer/colonized relationship” (97).

Conclusion

This paper an attempt at *Waiting for the Barbarians* a simple teleological approach to one of J.M. Coetzee’s major novels by focusing more on the displacement of barbarians rather than its discursive representation of South African politics. Toward the conclusion of the novel, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the Magistrate conjures with images of imperialism’s fierce encounter with its end. The images are come from text book ones, triumph drawn from History’s stock-in-trade and images of cataclysm. He reproduces them, feels their power, toys with them, and thereby thinks his way into the symbolic resources of imperialism’s crisis.

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