

Torture and the Appropriation of Genre in J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians***Hind Fouad Shahin Hindi, PhD**

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ABSTARCT: In the beginning, there was the romance, then came colonialist literature and transformed the genre into a racial literary form in complicity with imperialism by adapting it to the Manichean ideology which dictates a clear and uncompromising divide between the civilised, good European world and the uncivilised, inherently evil non-European Other, thus creating a new form designated by Abdul R. JanMohamed as the “kidnapped romance”. In an act of appropriation, J. M. Coetzee, in *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), rewrites the colonial literary form of the "kidnapped romance", he too creates a narrative that depends heavily on the economy of the Manichean allegory but whose objective is to strike back at imperialism and its ideologies of othering and dehumanization. Coetzee manipulates the racial romance: he inverts its motifs, conventions, reductive categories and simplistic representations to expose the discursive nature of the ideologies it promotes and to reinstate these ideologies as historical constructs rather than the natural and objective signified they pretend to be. Indeed, the pertinence of *Waiting for the Barbarians* is to be found in its subversion of ideologies of Manicheanism, othering and dehumanization which continue to inform neo-colonial forms of expansion and dominance, especially evident in the use of torture against the Other in the era of the war on terror.

Keywords: *Waiting for the Barbarians*, allegory, racial romance, torture, Manicheanism.

J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) is renowned for its allegorical mode of expression which, by virtue of allegory's specific nature, engages in a dialogue on the political significance and complicity of the racial romance with imperialism. An allegory is essentially a narrative which reacts to an antecedent text. *Waiting for the Barbarians*, however, is an allegory which reacts to a subgenre of colonialist literature, namely, the racial romance, or the “kidnapped romance” as labelled by Abdul R. JanMohamed (1985, p. 72). In addition to its aesthetic and literary significance, this dialogue on genre constitutes an act of anticolonial resistance inasmuch as *Waiting for the Barbarians* appropriates the racial romance to write back to the Empire. The racial romance of colonialist literature draws upon the Manichean ideology which, borrowed from theology, perceives the world of colonizer and colonized in a binary opposition of civilised and uncivilised, of good and evil. Thus the racial romance achieves much of its effect: it evokes the economy of Manichean representations which reduce the different Others to stereotypes and archetypes, which in turn serve to justify their colonization under the pretext of the civilizing mission in which the white civilized male finds himself burdened with the moral responsibility of civilizing his foil, the inferior Other.

It is precisely the genre nature of *Waiting for the Barbarians* and the genre dialogue in which it is engaged that make it postcolonial *par excellence*; the novel rewrites a characteristic subgenre of colonialist literature to subvert the ideologies of dehumanization and Manicheanism

upon which it is based. Coetzee capitalises on the conventions of the subgenre to expose the discursive nature of its racial stereotypes and archetypes and to bring to the limelight the crucial role such ideologies play in making the use of torture against the Other both endurable and enduring.

In his article “The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism”, Craig Owens (1980) celebrates the assertive return of allegory as a medium of expression to the scene of contemporary/postmodern culture. He argues that the device which once was perceived as obsolete and extravagant has successfully re-emerged as a powerful critical tool in postmodern culture, particularly in works of art and architecture (pp. 68-69). Similarly, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, often regarded as Coetzee’s best allegorical work, is a powerful example of allegory as a tool of criticism and a medium of political engagement and anticolonial resistance in the domain of literary studies.

The reinvented critical role of allegory in contemporary postmodern culture draws on its traditional function, for allegory is essentially a work which reacts to a previous one. It is, Owens maintains (1980), a work “involved in rewriting a primary text in terms of its figural meaning” (p. 69). This literary response to an earlier work constitutes an act of commentary and criticism as the allegorical work appropriates aspects of the original text in order to offer commentary or level a critical blow. This act of appropriation is far from benevolent: when the artist “appropriates” an image, Owens observes,

He does not restore an original meaning that may have been lost or obscured; allegory is not hermeneutics. Rather, he adds another meaning to the image. If he adds, however, he does so only to replace: the allegorical meaning supplants an antecedent one; it is a supplement. This is why allegory is condemned, but it is also the source of its theoretical significance. (ibid)

Owens locates the significance of allegory as a tool of criticism in its act of appropriation and replacement. In the allegorical mode of expression, the original meaning is not restored but, rather, contested, replaced and negated. Thus, the critical function of allegory in postmodern culture is to deconstruct and undermine the original text.

In Coetzee’s novel, allegory appropriates and replaces the traditional figural significance of a subgenre rather than the figural significance of a specific text. The novel rewrites the racial version of romance which JanMohamed (1985) locates in the domain of colonialist literature. Colonialist literature, he argues, denotes the body of texts which deals with the colonized Other, and is, therefore, a literary record of the “exploration and representation” of the racial difference that exists beyond the familiar physical, historical, and ideological boundaries of Western civilization. Set in the context of colonial power relations, colonialist literature is a literature of encounter and confrontation; it is a space where historical and racial factors, both material and imagined, engage in a complex play (p. 64).

Having adapted to a Manichean lens, the colonialist text transforms into an imaginative rendering of colonial relations despite a pretence to realism. Instead of realistic characters, it presents allegorical reductions—in which the non-European Other is fitted into normalized categories, such as savages, cannibals, barbarians and noble savages—such representations

establish a European moral and cultural superiority against the inherently inferior nature of the non-European peoples. In his article "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature", JanMohamed (1985) observes that "While masquerading under the guise of realist fiction, the colonialist text is in fact antagonistic to some of the prevailing tendencies of realism". Contrary to the conventions of the realist novel, the colonialist text dehistoricizes and desocializes the colonized world (p. 68). By dismissing history and complex social structures, values and processes, the colonialist text reduces the peoples of the colonized world to simplistic stereotypes, and it fails to capture the complex human collective whose unique individuals interact within the framework of elaborate historical influences. By depicting characters as mere archetypes, extracted from the intricate play of history and socioeconomic factors, the colonialist, self-proclaimed realist text converts into a romance.

Like its classic prototype, the racial version of romance is characterized by love and adventure. Yet, it differs in that it introduces the characteristic element of the exotic and wondrous which perhaps replaces the supernatural element in the classic romance. In the racial romance, the protagonist, always a European white male, embarks on an adventure in an exotic and wild landscape of Others. Typically, the heroic adventure of the colonial protagonist culminates in the subjugation of a native female. In what appears to be a colonialist wish-fulfilment, the wild beauty having fallen in love with her superior and heroic white male willingly surrenders to him. Her submission is suggested as testimony to the moral and cultural superiority of the white/European colonizer over the natives. It also serves as a symbolic reference to the submission of her people and their wild landscape to the dictates of Western civilization. The characterization, the setting and the adventure plot of the colonial romance emphasize a binary opposition whereby the civilized European stands in sharp contrast with the savage native.

Romance is a literary form fit to adapt to the Manichean allegory because of the genre's specific nature of characterization. In the fourth essay of *Anatomy of Criticism*, "Rhetorical Criticism: Theory of Genres", Northrop Frye (2000) establishes that,

The essential difference between novel and romance lies in the conception of characterization. The romancer does not attempt to create "real people" so much as stylized figures which expand into psychological archetypes. It is in the romance that we find Jung's libido, anima, and shadow reflected in the hero, heroine, and villain respectively. That is why the romance so often radiates a glow of subjective intensity that the novel lacks, and why a suggestion of allegory is constantly creeping in around its fringes. (p. 304)

Likewise, JanMohamed (1985) argues that "In the racial, colonialist version of this genre, the villains are always black, evil natives (and, occasionally, whites who sympathise or consort with the natives) who are used simultaneously as stereotypes and archetypes" (p. 72).

As a subgenre of colonialist literature, the racial romance captures a constant tension of confrontation which capitalizes on the "evil" difference of the Other, hence the recurrence of the theme of encounter in Coetzee's work as ideologies of othering and dehumanization find articulation in incidents of confrontation. In such incidents, Coetzee seizes the chance to subvert

Manicheanism while at its peak by inverting its assumptions against the colonizer. Among the many instances of encounter in *Waiting for the Barbarians* is the frontier as setting, which itself is indicative of the constant presence of a little-known, mostly dreaded and terribly exoticised Other. There is also the violent encounter between the imperial officials and the natives who were taken as captives by imperial agents. The magistrate's encounter with the barbarians having crossed the desert to reunite the barbarian girl who was maimed by imperial agents with her people is yet another encounter which ironically exposes the imperialist self: instead of a barbaric Other the magistrate comes face to face with a barbaric colonialist self as he discovers that the racial stereotypes are, in fact, true of the colonizer, not the colonised. Coetzee makes this self-realization even more meaningful when another encounter takes place, namely, the magistrate's personal encounter with the colonial apparatus of torture and humiliation.

Instances of encounter which in colonialist literature traditionally validate a colonial gaze serve an anticolonial purpose in *Waiting for the Barbarians* as they turn the gaze inward, that is, into the colonialist self. The imperial gaze in colonial discourse objectifies the colonized subject. It treats the land, its people and the myriad of cultural expressions as passive objects which lend themselves naturally and submissively to the imperial eye to dissect, observe and judge. Therefore, native men and women in colonial representations usually exhibit a lack of agency and acquire, instead, an exhibitionist quality which reduces their entire being to mere spectacles. The vantage point of the colonizer defines the colonized, their land and their culture, and the account which ensues becomes the dominant and authoritative representation of the colonized. Consequently, the colonial gaze functions as a hegemonic tool, one which interpellates colonial subjects and forges their imagined and desired identity.

Coetzee's allegory challenges the colonial gaze and replaces it with one turned inward, one turned forcibly into the self. Torture, which constitutes a key element in the novel's act of resistance, forces such self-exploration. While the magistrate is held in the cell in which captives from the native population were previously held and tortured, he agonizingly attempts to retrieve the memory of the place and reconstruct through memory and imagination the details of the pain and degradation that were inflicted upon the prisoners by his own civilization: "I stare all day at the empty walls, unable to believe that the imprint of all the pain and degradation they have enclosed will not materialize under an intent enough gaze" (Coetzee, 1999, p. 108). Through imagined memories of pain, Coetzee not only gives voice to those who were denied it—the objectified victims of the Empire—but he also exposes the horrors of the colonial endeavour and registers the moral degradation it inflicts on the colonialist self:

Somewhere, always, a child is being beaten. I think of one who despite her age was still a child; who was brought in here and hurt before her father's eyes; who watched him being humiliated before her, and saw that he knew what she saw.

Or perhaps by that time she could not see, and had to know by other means: the tone his voice took on when he pleaded with them to stop, for instance.

Always I find in myself this moment of shrinking from the details of what went on in here. (ibid, pp. 108-9)

Through such detailed accounts, Coetzee brings to the limelight the brutal and inhuman aspect of the imperial self and the humanly vulnerable aspect of the Other, thus subverting the Manichean allegory which condemns the Other for his inherent evilness, his irremediable otherness, for it is the civilized colonizers of the Empire, the ones just arriving from the metropolitan centre, who inflict brutality and humiliation on other humans. Furthermore, the journey which the magistrate embarks on to reunite the barbarian girl with her people allows for more questioning of the colonialist self. In her article "Border Crossings: The Self and the Text", Sue Kossew (2009) points out that the significance of the journey truly lies in crossing the borders "from self to other" (p. 62), for only then does the self-questioning and self-exploration culminate in the colonizer's confronting his own brutality, his own barbarism, as he realizes that "the enemy (if there is such a category) is shown to be within the fortress, not outside it" (ibid, p. 63).

The Manichean allegory is an extreme form of dualistic perception that deeply influences imperial ideologies. The form is considered extreme because it suggests a complete separation between the two parties involved, hence the impossibility of syncretism or synergy, that is, the possibility of creating a new cultural product that is the result of diverse, and often conflicting, influences (Ashcroft, 1998, p. 210). The Manichean categories of this binary opposition ultimately amount to good against evil; not only is the Other represented as savage and uncivilised but also as evil. The Other serves as foil to the white, Christian male, which brings to mind Edward Said's observation on the colonial system of relations and representations; "the Orient", argues Said (2003), "has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (pp. 1-2). The Manichean allegory in colonialist fiction is also in complicity with imperialism because it suggests that there is little need "to expend any energy in understanding the worthless alterity of the colonized" and to confine understanding and human interaction to the belief that syncretism is impossible on the assumption that the difference of the Other is inherently evil; therefore, the European "would have little incentive to adopt the viewpoint of that alterity" (JanMohamed, 1985, p. 65).

Rewriting the racial romance begins early in the novel: in what appears to be an instance of intertextuality, Coetzee imitates the colonialist literature of encounter in its discourse of othering. The opening paragraphs echo some of the lengthy descriptive passages of Columbus which exoticise the new world. In Coetzee's novel, Colonel Joll and the magistrate talk about hunting on the frontier. Their discourse depicts the frontier as unusual, abundant and wondrous:

He [Colonel Joll] tells me about the last great drive he rode in, when thousands of deer, pigs, bears were slain, so many that a mountain of carcasses had to be left to rot ("which was a pity"). I tell him about the great flocks of geese and ducks that descend on the lake every year in their migrations and about native ways of trapping them.... He tells me about a visit he paid elsewhere on the frontier where people eat certain snakes as a delicacy, and about a huge antelope he shot. (Coetzee, 1999, pp. 4-5)

From the very beginning, the text invokes the colonial gaze that objectifies the landscape. It also creates a binary opposition between the colonizers and the natives. The detailed description of the abundant landscape and the representation of the natives as exotic in their difference are distinct features of the colonial discourse of encounter. Portraying the native inhabitants in such terms aims to emphasize their otherness and alienation, that is, their difference and inferiority, which aims to interpellate the colonial subject.

The setting of the novel, the frontier, is itself exemplary of the Manichean allegory. The outpost town of the magistrate is situated on the borders of the Empire, and it marks the end of civilization. Beyond the borders lies a wild, treacherous and unattainable landscape which is home to the barbarians. This particular setting invokes the economy of the Manichean allegory, for it establishes a sharp contrast between the civilized town of the colonizers and the wild mountains of the barbarians. To emphasize the contrast further a desolate and whimsical desert separates the two settings, thus offering a natural barrier that emphasizes the impossibility of syncretism. In his journey across the desert to return the barbarian girl who was permanently maimed by the functionaries of the Empire, the magistrate is struck by the bareness of the place:

The terrain is more desolate than anything we have seen yet. Nothing grows on this salty lake-floor, which in places buckles and pushes up jagged crystalline hexagons a foot wide.... We have not left the lake behind, we now realize: it stretches beneath us here, sometimes under a cover many feet deep, sometimes under a mere parchment of brittle salt. How long since the sun last shone on these dead waters? (ibid, pp. 82-83)

The novel's stance on syncretism agrees with the colonialist stance evident in the Manichean allegory: both suggest that it is impossible for the two opposing ends to accommodate to the alterity of the other. The magistrate's affair with the barbarian girl is testimony to the hopelessness of syncretism in the colonial experience; their relationship is deprived of true feelings and real intimacy, even during physical contact each is isolated and absorbed in a world separate from the other. The magistrate captures the failure to connect in his depiction of one of their intimate encounters:

I continue to rub her body till I too relax, and I am overtaken with sleep.

I experience no excitement during this the most collaborative act we have yet undertaken. It brings me no closer to her and seems to affect her as little. I search her face the next morning: it is blank. She dresses and stumbles down to her day in the kitchen. (ibid, p. 60)

The magistrate knows that the girl shares his bed solely for shelter and food. He also knows that had she not been harmed to such disabling extent, she would have left the town with her people. In addition, he is unable to comprehend his desire towards her: on the one hand, the young beautiful barbarian, maimed and blind, stirs faint feelings of love in the aged Magistrate, while on the other hand, a deep feeling of guilt which she arouses torments him, a feeling whose roots lie in his passive complicity, for he was there when she and her father were tortured along with the other native captives, and he did nothing to stop her torturers. Consequently, he provides her with food and shelter. He also tries to compensate her for the loss of her father, who was humiliated and then killed in front of her. Yet, the traumatized girl is completely detached from him; all his attempts to approach her fail. Discouragingly, and despite the petty attempts, syncretism is unattainable in Coetzee's romance:

But with this woman it is as if there is no interior, only a surface across which I hunt back and forth seeking entry. Is this how her torturers felt hunting their secret, whatever they thought it was? For the first time I feel a dry pity for them: how natural a mistake to

believe that you can burn or tear or hack your way into the secret body of the other! (ibid, p. 59)

The failure to adapt to the alterity of the Other, which *Waiting for the Barbarians* dramatises, bears not only on the love motif, but also on the adventure one. It casts its shadow on the magistrate's journey to the wilderness and the figurative meaning it signifies. In this anti-colonial romance, the protagonist's heroic adventure in the wild and treacherous landscape of the natives fails to culminate in his winning of the native girl's heart, as is conventional in the racial version of romance. By contrast, the native girl unceremoniously rejects the unheroic European protagonist as soon as she is reunited with her people. Thus, Coetzee shatters the reductive love motif of the racial romance and subverts the narcissistic assumption which informs it. Yet, there is an added meaning in Coetzee's version of the Manichean allegory, and it is a meaning that replaces the traditional one. The Manichean allegory of colonialist discourse preaches the impossibility of syncretism on the basis of the evil and treacherous alterity of the Other: since the European colonizers are civilised and inherently good, they must not contaminate themselves with the evil and irremediable alterity of the natives. Conversely, in Coetzee's version, syncretism is impossible because the European colonizer hides an inherently evil nature which surfaces when he encounters the Other. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the Manichean allegory is turned against the colonizer, for it is he who occupies the evil end of this constructed binary structure; consequently, it is the barbarians who must fear contamination and ought to protect themselves against the evil alterity of their colonizers.

The affair between the male colonizer and the female colonized which constitutes a key component of the racial romance is appropriated to serve a postcolonial end. JanMohamed (1985) draws attention to the significance of the Manichean allegory in racial romances, he notes that establishing a European cultural and moral superiority over the natives justifies and "idealizes its acts of protection and responsibility" (p. 72), and the only model of colonial moral and social responsibility in *Waiting for the Barbarians* appears in the magistrate's affair with the girl. Yet, his attempts to help her are not motivated by her evil alterity in need of remedy, as is the case in the racial romance, but by the permanent damaging effects of colonialism inflicted upon her. The magistrate holds himself morally accountable not because of his racial superiority but because of his passive complicity with the brutal colonial apparatus. He tries to help the girl in a desperate attempt to redeem himself. Yet, he fails as his attempts are marred by selfish desires: like her torturers he too feeds on her body, he too attempts to break the surface that is the manifestation of her alterity which he fails to comprehend. The novel, one might argue, denies colonialism any hope of redemption; the damage, not the Other's alterity, is simply irrevocable.

At a certain level, *Waiting for the Barbarians* is clearly a novel about torture, which makes it the more relevant in this age of neo-colonial expansion, an age that has thus far seen a tremendous rise in the use of torture and violence against the Other. The novel registers the traumatic effect torture has on its victims as well as the moral debasement and moral numbness it brings to a civilization which legitimizes violence and torture in its attempt to expand the scope of its influence and profit. The unheroic magistrate brings the issue of moral numbness to focus on the day he was released after having been tortured and humiliated by the functionaries of the Empire; he apologetically addresses captain Mandel, his torturer:

Forgive me if the question seems impudent, but I would like to ask: How do you find it possible to eat afterwards, after you have been ... working with people? ... Do you find it easy to take food afterwards? I have imagined that one would want to wash one's hands. But no ordinary washing would be enough, one would require priestly intervention, a ceremonial of cleansing, don't you think? Some kind of purging of one's soul too—that is how I have imagined it. (Coetzee, 1999, p. 168)

In his article "J. M. Coetzee and Colonial Violence", Robert Spencer (2008) commends *Waiting for the Barbarians* for its active treatment of the theme of colonial violence. Spencer celebrates the novel as an example of "explicit advocacy of aesthetic and political engagement" as it challenges durable neocolonial practices and ideologies (p. 173). Clearly, ideologies that once supported European colonial expansion in the modern era continue to thrive in today's world. Power relations in the twenty-first century exhibit a strong inclination towards violence and torture, they also propagate relevant ideologies like othering and dehumanization whose role has dramatically increased or perhaps has simply surfaced due to wider and more advanced media coverage in more recent wars, such as the war in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as the United States' self-proclaimed war on terror.

For most political theorists, violence is the most obvious and shocking display of power (Arendt, 1970, p. 35). This, however, is only meaningful, argues Hannah Arendt in *On Violence*, when one perceives the governing body as an oppressive apparatus whose authority stems from coercion and not from consent. Rule by coercion, Arendt argues, is never the aspiration of people, nor should it be the aspiration of the body politic. Because Arendt chooses not to believe "that the body politic and its laws and institutions are merely coercive superstructures, secondary manifestations of some underlying forces" (ibid, p. 36), she differentiates between the concept of power and the concept of violence in the political realm and argues that "power" and "violence" are in fact opposites: "where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power's disappearance" (ibid, p. 56). Arendt in her discussion indicates by "power" that form of authority that is attained by consent and maintained by the support of the people. It follows that violence becomes necessary only when the consent and support of the people are lost; hence, "loss of power becomes a temptation to substitute violence for power" (ibid, p. 54).

Evidently, absence of authentic and consensual power is characteristic of colonial expansion. Colonial endeavours usually aim to force the will of the invaders on other unwilling men and women; therefore, violence often proves necessary. Arendt's analysis of the distinction between violence and power holds true in the context of neo-colonial forms of expansion; the show of military power in contemporary wars and the display of torture, as in the infamous case of Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, do not constitute the ultimate manifestation of power but are, in fact, the very indication that legitimate power is absent.

In her book, Arendt insists that violence is rarely an independent phenomenon in power dynamics; from the standpoint of political thought, and in terms of the means-end approach, violence is predominantly a means. It is, she argues, "instrumental; like all means, it always stands in need of guidance and justification through the end it pursues" (ibid, p. 51). Nations waging wars against other nations and resorting to violence as a means of coercion have indeed appealed to the end for justification, whether to liberate from despotic rule, bring democracy or

protect human rights. Torture, on the other hand, finds justification in both the end and the ideology. *Waiting for the Barbarians* resists by emphasizing a connection between torture and an ideology of dehumanization which makes torture both enduring and endurable. The novel renders the abstract connection in dramatic means in the infamous humiliation episode of the novel in which imperial soldiers force barbarian captives to walk naked into an arena while tied to one another with a wire that runs through their flesh. The soldiers then brutally beat the helpless captives before a crowd of curious spectators.

There are shocking similarities between that particular episode and the infamous images of torture from Abu Ghraib prison. The captive Other in both instances transforms under duress into a spectacle—an object of the colonial gaze which excites and entertains. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the magistrate realizes a sense of detachment in the audience watching the beating and humiliation: he captures a sense of curiosity and excitement in the spectators as if they were unable to recognize the humanity of the victims. Conversely, he sees not a spectacle but men reduced to a mere spectacle, and he sees the viewers distancing themselves further from the reality of their enemy's humanness as the scene unfolds, hence the imploring cry to Joll, the scene's orchestrator, "You are depraving these people!" (Coetzee, 1999, p. 143) warning against the collective moral depravation such an experience is bound to cause. The magistrate probably feared and anticipated the same moral degradation that Seymour Hersh (2004) documents in "Torture at Abu Ghraib". In this piece of investigative journalism which examines the complicity of the American Army and the Military Intelligence in systemic acts of torture against civilian Iraqis at Abu Ghraib prison, Hersh emphasizes a sense of mundaneness in the soldiers' behavior towards their captives: "The 372nd's abuse of prisoners seemed almost routine—a fact of Army life that the soldiers felt no need to hide".

The discernible inclination to undermine the humanity of the Other in both incidents appears also in the diction used to refer to the captives. A soldier explains to the magistrate that the purpose of the wire that runs through the cheeks and hands of the captives is to "make them meek as lambs" (Coetzee, 1999, p.139), while a soldier at Abu Ghraib refers to the prisoners as "animals" (Hersh, 2004). The magistrate feels a pressing need to insist on the moral standing of the prisoners as "men" (Coetzee, 1999, p. 144), for he recognizes that the acts of humiliation and torture inflicted upon them aim to deprive them of their humanity: "What do I stand against except the new science of degradation that kills people on their knees, confused and disgraced in their own eye" (ibid, p. 145)? What both the fictional and historical episodes of torture lack is a sense of shared humanity and shared sensibility to pain, and its precisely that ideology of dehumanization that makes torture enduring.

Ideology ensures one of the strongest forms of bondage amongst its followers—which Hannah Arendt (1970) refers to as "the organized solidarity of the masters" (p. 50). The act of violence in both the fictional and historical encounters is a collective endeavor, hence the urgent question that Hersh raises in his story: "How far up does the responsibility go?" The underlying question is, however, how deep does the ideology that support that responsibility run? And to the latter question Spencer (2008) responds that all acts of torture against the Other are indicative of a widespread ideology that dehumanises the Other to legitimise humiliation and torture:

The torture at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere took place as Danner, Greenberg and Dratel, and Hersh all demonstrate, as the result of the complicity of a chain of command that

stretched all the way from senior officers to the Pentagon and the White House, but also, perhaps more ominously, of the general acceptance of the view that the west's "other" do not merit the moral and legal status of human beings. (p. 178)

Another technique of resistance is evident in the use of the first-person narrator to question colonial practices and ideologies. The racial romance, JanMohamed (1985) argues, is a narcissistic form of literary writing: "Instead of being an exploration of the racial Other, such literature merely affirms its ethnocentric assumptions; instead of actually depicting the outer limits of 'civilization' it simply codifies and preserves the structures of its own mentality" (p. 65). Therefore, the novel subverts imperial ideologies and practices by allowing a colonial agent, the magistrate, to embark on a moral journey in which he questions the moral grounds and exclusionary humanism that inform imperial practices. The self-questioning is made even more dramatic, maintains Spencer (2008), by the use of the confessional first-person narration (p. 181).

Questioning representations in *Waiting for the Barbarians* is a prevalent motif whereby the novel deconstructs the Manichean ideology. Although the barbarians are almost physically absent, their presence haunts the novel throughout. They function in the novel more as preconceived colonial stereotypes/archetypes and less as actual individuals. This strategy of the invisible, haunting presence in which the colonialists react to their imaginative construction of what a barbarian is rather than to the real person of a barbarian has the effect of questioning the authenticity of colonial representations of the Other. It suggests that these are racial generalizations formulated prior to any meaningful interaction. Thus, Coetzee imitates a convention of the Manichean allegory in which an imaginative representation replaces the real Other, and the text constantly draws attention to this colonial motif. In one instance, when a little girl from town is raped, her friends claim that her rapist was a barbarian; they were able to identify him because of his ugliness. The children, who apparently have never seen a barbarian before, define the Other by means of received racial generalizations. In another instance, Colonel Joll brings to inquisition a group of the fisher folk under the assumption that they are barbarians: he, the expert on barbarians, is unable to identify them in person and simplistically lumps together the different peoples of the land. His inability to perceive their difference suggests that the real person of the Other is replaced by a simplistic, oversweeping representation in the colonial mindset. By making his characters respond to their own construction of the Other rather than to real individuals, Coetzee exposes the discursive nature of the Manichean representations of the Other.

Since published, *Waiting for the Barbarians* has been an integral part and catalyst of a continued discussion on the many aspects of the postmodern/postcolonial allegorical mode of expression. It is one amongst the finest and most popular examples of the role of allegory as a tool of criticism and a means of political and anticolonial resistance. However, the novel has also attracted renewed attention for its treatment of the phenomenon of torture; it dramatizes the ideological foundations of torture which have survived into our world of neocolonialism. By rewriting a literary form associated with older forms of imperial expansion, the novel exposes in the process not only the discursive nature of former imperial ideologies but also their resilience and reproduction in more recent colonial forms of expansion.

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